

## Book Reviews

*CREATIVE LANDSCAPES OF THE BRITISH ISLES - Writers, painters and composers and their inspirations.* by Bernard Price. Ebury Press, 1983. £12.95

Henry Williamson sustains two entries, one in the East Anglian section and the other, of course, for the West Country. Thus the locations for *The Phasian Bird*, *A Solitary War*, *Lucifer Before Sunrise*, are accurately pinpointed. There is a most praiseworthy effort to show which areas of the Devon Landscape are relevant to Henry's books - the reader is even directed to the Chains on Exmoor to find the inspiration for the 'ancient sunlight' theory that so inspired Henry. For the Williamson enthusiast the book is worth buying for this passage alone. There is a photograph of HW being sculpted by Anthony Gray, as well as one of Baggy Point. A road map of the Williamson country completes this entry for the traveller.

Bernard has inscribed in our copy

*To Richard and Anne. You will find family and old  
friends within these covers - including Richard  
Jefferies disguised as Richard Williamson.  
Love Bernard. Christmas 1983*

Many of you will know Bernard Price from his TV and radio programmes. He is our friend of many years - a friendship made when we first arrived in Chichester, when he came to interview Richard for a radio programme, and they discovered many interweavings of thought. He is godfather to our daughter Bryony, and met Henry on various occasions either at our home, or on forays to the West Country.

Bernard has published several books. This one encompasses the vast panorama of the whole of the artistic heritage of Britain. Those of you who know Henry, his work, his 'alma maters', his friends and acquaintances, will be able to add numerous marginal notes until much of the book could be woven into the Henry Tapestry. For instance, the entries on Edward Thomas, Andrew Young, and Delius. And on page 125 you will find the little curiosity Bernard refers to in his inscription - a photo of Richard taken by son Brent (who hid in the shrubbery to surprise father) outside the Jefferies Museum, looking uncannily like Jefferies himself; perhaps not so surprising, for he is, after all, another link in the chain.

*Creative Landscapes* is meticulously researched, and most beautifully illustrated. We thoroughly recommend this as an addition to your bookshelves.

ANNE AND RICHARD WILLIAMSON

*Overleaf appear two historic reviews of Henry's work. 'Turnstile', by Kenneth Allsop, is reprinted with the kind permission of the Spectator ©. We hope to present further such reviews in due course.*

# THE NEW BOOKS AT A GLANCE.



Mr. Henry Williamson.

establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind, by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that, whatsoever might be the future fate of my history, the life of the historian must be short and precarious." These words celebrate for all time the end of a much greater piece of work, but I need not beg Mr. Williamson's pardon for including them here.

"The Dream of Fair Women," though not the last book, yet the last to be published, completes the Maddison tetralogy. "The Beautiful Years" relates the childhood, "Dandelion Days" the schooldays, "The Dream of Fair Women" the young manhood or prolonged adolescence, and "The Pathway" the partial achievement and death of William Maddison. I have not "The Pathway" by me, but I believe the whole spiritual saga takes place in about twenty-five years. I doubt if any other work of fiction goes into such patient and minute detail about a man's life. Even so, the four years of war are left unrecorded. The patience, the quiet confidence, the travail of the thing deserve recognition, especially when it is realized that almost all of it has been done twice over. For the unconservative publication of the novels in their final form is due to Mr. Williamson's fervour of revision. It shows a tenacity of purpose and self-confidence unparalleled that, after writing and publishing these books some years ago, when

FAMOUS words from Gibbon's "Autobiography" came involuntarily to my mind as I finished reading Mr. Henry Williamson's "The Dream of Fair Women" (Faber, 7s. 6d.). I thought of them as though they were Mr. Williamson's and not Gibbon's words on the completion of his life's work. "I will not dissemble my first emotions of joy on recovery of my freedom, and, perhaps, the

they were not widely read, Mr. Williamson has had the courage to go over the ground again minutely, and with serious purpose, determined to make his ideas acceptable or at least inescapable.

It is not possible to attack an author of this sort, nor to presume to offer critical advice. Even though you don't like his novel and say so, the dumb security of the man almost turns the statement into an admission against yourself. There are long, interminably long and trivial reported conversations in the middle part of "The Dream of Fair Women." They seem to make the story stand idle, and to very little purpose. Mr. Williamson's powers of observation and memory of detail stand him in good stead in his accounts of wild nature, but actual recording of pass-the-time-of-day conversation, even when it is done with satirical purpose, if it is done at great length is bound to be even duller than the real thing. For there is not time to record the flashes and flushes of living intercourse. This is a serious difficulty in the reading, and I think if I had not already read "The Pathway," and therefore known what rewards Mr. Williamson had for the patient reader, I should have given up. But "The Dream of Fair Women" has moments of reward, too, and they come towards the end of the book. The writing rises and intensifies to tell of its climax—a tragedy—and Maddison's love affair ends where all worldly-wise people, recognizing the subtlety in the portrait of Eveline, must have foreseen it would end. Maddison remains the same maddening idealist. Pity fights for sympathy for him, but his youthful priggishness makes it impossible to like him. The whole tetralogy is called "The Flax of Dream." It has had to suffer the discomfort of being reviewed in parts and not even consecutive parts. But I think the untold labour that it must have cost Mr. Williamson will be paid by the world's thanks some day. It is a gigantic work; it has a theme (carefully placed, half-developed, in Maddison's mind and work) of religious intensity. It has portraits of men and women acutely observed and faithfully set down, and running all through like a rhythm that gives it life is the life of nature and the light of the stars. I congratulate Mr. Williamson on his achievement.

FRANK KENDON.

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# Turnstile

## KENNETH ALLSOP

*The Beautiful Years* Henry Williamson (Faber 7s 6d)

*The Beautiful Years* is the turnstile to the maze which Henry Williamson's eventual biographer will have to pick his way through and chart. This paperback edition gives the original publication date as 1919. In fact this, Williamson's first book, was written between June and November 1920, before his migration to North Devon, and appeared in October 1921.

In a 1941 annotation elsewhere he states that the novel grew out of a work called *The Policy of Reconstruction*, begun in 1918 during leave from the battlefield, which developed into the tetralogy *The Flax of Dream*. Now, *The Policy of Reconstruction* is also the title of the credo which the fictional Willie Maddison is writing in *The Dream of Fair Women*, third novel in *The Flax*. The manuscript of Maddison's *The Policy of Reconstruction* vanishes from a flat in Folkestone (as, can be inferred, did the actual draft). Maddison's second book, *The Star-born*, is burned—in September 1923 he vainly uses the pages as a flare before drowning in the Taw and Torridge estuary at the close of *The Pathway*, concluding novel of *The Flax*. Except for the publication in 1932 of *The Star-born* itself ('as different from the destroyed version as an eagle owl from a common or barnyard owl'), 'with an introduction' by Henry Williamson, that was the finish of the Maddison odyssey.

But *The Flax* omits the span of the First World War because Williamson then could not face re-creating in words the experiences of those four years, the crucible from which poured all his later writing. It was not until the 1940s that he felt able to endure the war

in abreaction. He conceived it symphonically, from the prelude in Victorian times to its Second World War coda, and he needed one man as theme. In his journal for 14 March 1921 he declared: 'Maddison's triumph shall be the formula for the new way of thought. . . . He refuses to die, to be drowned, to be crucified.' But he did drown Willie Maddison. So Williamson remustered Willie's cousin, Phillip, occasionally met in *The Flax*, whose adventures are told in the vast *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* sequence, which last year reached part thirteen and 1940.

Among the complexities of the above abbreviated pattern of Williamson's working life which the biographer will have to clarify are not only the overlapping similarities between the stories of Willie and Phillip but also the parallels in the author's own career, and starting with *The Beautiful Years*. This itself will have to be re-examined in its original form (£25 advance, 500 copies sold), for in 1929 it was revised and, Williamson has said, 'many untruths, exaggerations, incidents of false characterisation and false writing were either cut out altogether or replaced by new pages.'

As it stands, *The Beautiful Years* may seem a frail foundation stone for the massive structure since built upon it. Here is Willie's childhood, episodic, plotless really, a pastiche of influences from Richard Jefferies, Hardy, Arnold Bennett and Compton Mackenzie. Yet there is a magic upon it, a dew of artlessness and innocence, spontaneous as the spring bird-song that draws Willie from the bleakness of his widowed father's house. In the cast is Jefferies in the figure of Jim Holloman, the village mystic; and the biographer must study the mysterious reference to the visits of Colonel Tetley's young wife to the gamekeeper's cottage and their disappearance together. *Lady Chatterley's Lover* did not come until seven years later. Had Lawrence read *The Beautiful Years*?

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