

Editorial

The books of Henry Williamson have been published in many countries and several languages - particularly Italian and Japanese (for many years the acme of cheap paperback production and a large population thirsty for knowledge) - but it is mainly *Tarka* and *Salar* that are translated, although American publishers took most of the early books.

This reflects only a fraction of Henry's output and must give a distorted view of his worth as a writer. But whilst Henry Williamson is not included in such publications as the new edition of *The Pelican Guide to English Literature* or Walter Allen's *Tradition and Dream* (see 'Aldington and Williamson: a case of wilful neglect', Peter Wallis, *Lodestar*, No.3, Summer 1986) one cannot expect either foreign publishers or students of literature, abroad or in this country, to realise his stature within the annals of English literature.

The reason for such exclusion cannot be that Henry's work is not considered of a suitable standard to be included, that his total output is not worthy of inclusion. As winner of the Hawthornden Prize with a book that has never been out of print for sixty years and whose sales today still runs into thousands each year, he is surely guaranteed worthy of a mention; as the author of over fifty books, fifteen of which constitute a major historical oeuvre, he surely merits at least a paragraph or two?

The reason for such exclusion can therefore presumably be that the editors and authors of such tomes are totally prejudiced by the label of fascism that has tied itself so firmly around Henry Williamson's neck; tied itself so firmly but really with so little reason (see 'Tarka the fascist', Letters page).

Because if one looks *objectively* at the list of his printed works; if one examines *objectively* the content of those works; does one not then realise of what little importance that label actually is, seen in the total perspective?

Henry wrote about the world as he saw and experienced it. It is his unique view. He encompassed the whole of life, the natural world and all its creatures, including humans. His total output is a statement about our society spanning the first half of the twentieth century. What a picture of the rural life of this country has been painted for us by this man, or rather series of pictures. The scenes of peripheral London at the turn of the century, the horror and glory, dirt and slog of the First World War; untouched Devon and all its characters; farming in a remote Norfolk village; intermixed with vignettes of America, Ireland, London: portraits galore, a whole national gallery of his own, full of characters, human and animal; of which one was Hitler and another was Mosley, amongst the hundreds of the Ernies and the Jarvises, the Tarkas and the Chee-Kais of this world. How many characters? How many scenes?

Is it not like saying that we should not listen to the music of Richard Strauss because possibly he collaborated with the Nazis; or that Benjamin Britten should be ostracised because he was a conscientious objector? Henry fought in the First World War in the trenches; he farmed during the Second World War because he ardently believed that a sound agricultural policy was necessary for the background of our country's success. All his life he worked hard to make a living at his writing. For a while his one thought was to avoid a second war between England and Germany and in a grand Don Quixote gesture thought he could solve this great problem where all the statesmen had failed. Henry was a visionary; he was artistic, eccentric, emotional; he did

not have a trained academic mind, but he was a perfectionist, and if an idea caught his imagination, then it was right. Almost the simplicity and singlemindedness of a child; certainly, unarguable with. But we all make mistakes; we have all sinned; mostly we are forgiven.

In the ten years since his death about 80% of his work has been re-issued. I suggest that this is a quite remarkable achievement for any author.

Dare I further suggest that the academic historians of English literature should think very carefully before excluding this man and his writings from the official annals. Future generations may consider their objectivity and their judgement to be lacking; they may consider them guilty of intolerance, even perhaps of a form of dictatorship. Are these not characteristics of that very group that they are labelling Henry with?

Anne Williamson

There were four entries correctly stating that 'Over the hill at night shone the stars of heaven' is the opening line of the first chapter of *The Dark Lantern*.

The first name drawn out of the box by your President was that of Peggy Turney from Northants. Congratulations, Peggy - a photograph of a young Henry is on its way to you.

The other entries were from Nigel Nicholl, Don Donovan of New Zealand (who earlier won Tim Morley's Ox's Crossword) and from Brian Fullager, who works hard as our Distributions Manager, getting everything into the envelopes for each mailing. A 'thank you' to all four for their interest.

The quotation chosen by your President for this issue is:

'In the sky wild geese were passing, flying for the Great Barrier Sand where they rested by day, flying with slow flaps of wings one beside and above the other, crying their music of ice-pack and midnight-sun, of seas where the great whales blew, of summer upon the flowery coast of far Spltzbergen.'

Closing date for entries is MAY 1st, 1987