

The Apprenticeship of a Novelist: the Early Unpublished Fiction of Henry Williamson — Part II

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Williamson's second early unpublished novel in the Archive at Exeter, which I shall call novel B, is, like novel A, untitled. It is found in two notebooks; the first having a soft mottled cover, the second a hard red cover. In both the entire text is in Williamson's own handwriting. The first notebook was begun, he writes, 'on Sunday 10 November 1918 — 12 hours before the Great War fizzled out like a damp firework!'; it was finished on '29.11. [19]18'. This suggests that Williamson began novel B almost immediately after abandoning novel A. The second notebook was begun on '30.11. [19]18', and finished I think early in 1919, although Williamson does not give the date. However it is likely that he had finished it before he began mentally to compose novel C 'during 1919 at Folkestone', actually writing it down from 14 November 1919 to some time in March 1920.⁹ Williamson's own comments on novel B, written at the beginning of the first notebook, are not flattering:

Second romance written during the GREAT WAR. Laziness characterized its development since BIRTH. However this "tale" (however silly or bad) is the child of the Author only.

Let us now describe and analyse it to decide if the author's own low estimate is justified.

Novel B, like novel A, has a prologue set in the future, rather oddly written in the second person, beginning: 'You were sitting in a chair smoking, reading from *Lorna Doone*'. It is a quiet and peaceful summer evening, and through the French windows, Peter Jackson, the narrator, sees a small boy climb over the wall into his garden. Peter runs out and catches him, to discover that it is Jack Tragle, a boy of twelve whom he knows. It turns out that Jack, who we learn has two pet jackdaws at home, has brought a birthday present for Peter's daughter Phyllis, who will be ten the next day. Being shy, he had intended to leave it on the doorstep and then run away. Phyllis and her mother are over at the tennis pavilion, so Peter takes the present to give to her. Settling down again indoors, Peter dozes off and dreams. As in novel A, the rest of the novel is a 'flashback', but in this case it is told by Peter in the first person. Novel B is complete, and consists of ten chapters divided into sections, usually three or four. There are four main characters: Peter Jackson, the narrator, who is the son of the rector of a village in north-west Kent; Marjorie Dalrymple, with whom he has an unhappy love-affair stretching from boyhood to young manhood, the daughter of neighbours Sir William and Lady Dalrymple; Rupert Bryers, a close childhood friend who is killed in the Great War, and Joan Barnwell, a girl whom Peter meets in Blackheath, whose love for him he disprizes. There are some obvious similarities to novel A, but it is notable that Peter, Marjorie and Rupert are upgraded socially from Willie, Elsie and Jack, and are moved to a rural environment. Readers will remember that a character called Rupert Bryers plays a minor part in *Dandelion Days* in the published *Flax of Dream*, and the name was borne by a real pupil at Colfe's School, killed during the war.¹⁰ However the role which he plays in novel B is more like that of Jack Temperley in the published *Flax*.

Let us now proceed to examine the development of novel B in some detail. Chapter 1 covers the period of Peter's life from the age of eleven or twelve up to seventeen and

a half. It concentrates upon four important 'moments' in his life, as well as giving some exposition necessary for an understanding of the story as it develops. Peter first notices Marjorie when he is eleven or twelve, and when he is busy carving her initials under his own on a post in the hedge outside the rectory, she approaches, on her way to get eggs from a farm nearby. She is a pretty girl of nine, with rosebud lips and blue eyes tinged with green. Significantly, and inauspiciously for Peter, she does not blush when she sees the initials. This is the first 'moment'. The reader then learns that Peter who has two brothers and four sisters, has enjoyed from the age of eight wandering in the woods, delighting in the bird-life there. He is also fascinated by the lake and its fish near the rectory. A fair-haired freckled boy, he is being educated at home by his father, who was at Trinity College Cambridge. However he will go to school at Hawkhurst ten miles away when he is thirteen.

The second 'moment' occurs during the Easter holidays when Peter is fourteen. On his way to a rookery in some tall elms on Farmer Wilson's lands he meets Marjorie, sitting on a stile, reading a book. He asks her to watch him climb one of the trees to get some birds' eggs. She hesitates, but agrees, and Peter succeeds in getting some eggs. Although Marjorie will not accept them, she is willing to walk for a while with Peter, who glances admiringly at her long plait of hair tied with green ribbon under her tam-o'-shanter. When they part, Peter is thrilled that she should turn and wave to him. He still has those eggs, he recounts as narrator, but has not looked at them for fourteen years.

The third 'moment' occurs in spring, a season he has always loved, when Peter is sixteen. Many of his nature expeditions are shared by a school friend, Rupert Bryers, who is two years younger than Peter.

... a small thin boy, with very delicate features, and large grey eyes that should have belonged to a girl. He had a poetical and idealistic mind, entirely free from the coarseness and vulgarity which is often the characteristic of the young male at school.

He too loves nature, but unlike Peter is not prone to deep regrets for the past. (Now alas, at the time when the story is recounted, he lies in Sanctuary Wood near Ypres; Peter was with him when he was killed by a fragment of a shell.)

One day in early spring, the boys wander through a wood owned by Sir William Dalrymple, Marjorie's father; Peter takes Rupert to a tree where a barn owl lives. As they approach, it flies forth. In a hollow tree they discover a squirrel's nest; from it Peter takes a young squirrel, which is then reared at home by Tibby the cat. As they eat lunch in the lee of a haystack Marjorie passes, and Peter reveals to Rupert that he wants her 'to be his sweetheart'. After further rambling in the woods the boys return at sunset to the rectory for supper where they joke with Peter's sister Dorothy, who is somewhat of a tomboy.

The fourth 'moment' occurs when Peter is seventeen and a half. His schooldays have just ended, and he does not know what to do in life. He is unsuited for the Church or the armed services, and he does not want to join his elder brother John in Australia. His father suggests that he might go to his uncle Ralph in London, who is a broker. Peter goes out into the woods to reflect on his future, lies down on the grass and dreams about Marjorie. This dream proves to be prophetic, as the conclusion of the novel will show. He dreams that he talks to Marjorie and kisses her. She leaves, but turns and holds out her arms to him. He does not respond, but when after a little while he relents and goes after her, he discovers that she has disappeared.

On his way home after awakening, he meets Marjorie and tells her that he is about to leave home, but does not want to go to Australia. She is unsympathetic to his mood

and asks why he is so miserable — *she* is not, having recently returned from a happy year at a convent school in Belgium. Peter escorts her home and is gratified when she asks him to see their orchard, even if she keeps the tone of the conversation very light. Her mother comes and invites Peter to tea; it is the first time that he has entered Highbeech, the Dalrymple's house. After tea, and a conversation about birds, Peter and Marjorie walk to the lodge gates where they part. The result of the episode is that Peter resolves to keep away from Marjorie, feeling her to be unsympathetic to him. His uncle Ralph writes to invite him to become a junior clerk in his firm and live in his house in Blackheath. Peter decides to accept this offer and on his last afternoon at home he goes round his favourite places to say farewell.

The tone and temper of this first chapter of novel B has more affinities with that of *The Beautiful Years* and *Dandelion Days* than with any parts of the *Chronicle*. I think that in novel B Williamson wanted to get away from many of the actual circumstances of his early life into a world of romance. He was trying to attain a measure of artistic detachment by changing the geographical and social background of the characters.

In chapter 2 of novel B, Peter is living at Blackheath with his uncle. He finds his duties at work less drab than he feared, but he rather despises his fellow clerks. He has made a successful conscious effort to forget Marjorie and he does not write to her, but nevertheless he continues to dream about her. He has little affinity of spirit with his uncle whom he characterizes as 'fat, contented, material'. He does not then realize that *he* could get like that after a lifetime of city routine. His aunt he likes, although he feels that he has little in common with her ugly but clever daughter. For diversion, he is in the habit of visiting a Picture Palace or the big Music Hall at Catford, although he is pleased when the spring after his arrival he discovers some woods and a lake some half-an-hour's bicycle ride from Blackheath. In the summer he meets a girl, Joan Barnwell, at a tennis party. He gets to know her well, but does not fall in love with her. One day, after he has saved a boy from drowning in one of the Fish Ponds at Keston he meets Joan, and her distress tells him that she loves him, even although he allows her to think that he had merely fallen into the water. That night he dreams again about Marjorie, and he is forced to recognize that she is his beloved. After this he keeps away from Joan for a time.

In October he goes home for a brief holiday, but feels sad; his old haunts seem to have changed. Marjorie is away at her convent school, so he resolves to try to enjoy his life in London. He calls upon Joan, who welcomes him, but when he is kissing and embracing her he sees a look of surrender in her eyes, which subconsciously he does not want, and so he disengages himself and backs off. However he promises to see her the next day.

(At this point the first notebook ends, with the words: 'This book finished 29.11.18'. It is not however the end of the chapter, which continues in the second notebook with the words: 'Begun 30.11.18'.)

Peter's feelings for Joan faded, and there is a transition of scene to a headland in Devon in the summer of 1914. Peter is on holiday with Rupert. They watch a peregrine falcon take a gull, which causes Rupert to say:

Death comes very quickly to the wild creatures, doesn't it Peter? A shadow, a crash, and it's over. And who worries about that gull? ... Death the reaper is very near always, isn't he?

Less than four months later Rupert himself is dead in Flanders. However the Devon holiday is a gloriously happy one for the boys. They bathe and romp on the beach, naked, running off hastily when they glimpse a woman sketching in the distance. Peter's comment as narrator is:

*That holiday in Devon is now one of the most sun-lit in my memory. We dwelt in Arcadia, and our faith was so very pure and simple.*¹¹

In this chapter the contrast between Peter's unsatisfactory life in London and the idyllic joy of the holiday is well rendered, the joy being made poignant by the imminence of war. Another contrast is the ironically balanced one that Peter loves Marjorie who does not return his love, while in turn Joan loves Peter who is indifferent to her. Yet although love is frustrated, friendship continues to bloom.

As in novel A, Williamson takes the reader with his protagonist to the war. Returning from the West Country two days after war has been declared, Peter and Rupert join the reserve battalion of an Infantry regiment, and are quickly sent out to France. Peter feels desperately unhappy about leaving home and weeps as the train pulls out. As it passes Highbeech he thinks that he sees Marjorie waving, but fears that it might be an illusion. Rupert and Peter's sister Dorothy have fallen in love, and Peter is carrying with him a letter and a crucifix to give Rupert on her behalf.

On the transport ship across the Channel from Southampton Peter feels afraid, but Rupert tries to cheer him up by expressing the opinion that the war will be over by Christmas. Both young soldiers feel some annoyance however at being over-charged for a cup of cocoa by the ship's cook. Like Willie and Jack in novel A and like Phillip in *How Dear is Life*, Peter and Rupert are billeted shortly after arrival in France in a deserted convent, and from an eminence nearby, see the flicker and hear the distant thunder of the guns near Ypres. Peter is not afraid now, rather he begins to feel the excitement of war. Two days later they march from Poperinghe to Ypres, then but little damaged. As they march up the Menin Road towards the line, salvos of 'Jack Johnson' and 'whizz-bangs' come over. Later, remarks Peter as narrator, when Kitchener's Army came out, one did not use such expressions, nor 'Black Marias' nor 'coal-boxes', but referred to 'heavy stuff', 'five-nines' and so on.¹²

The friends see some tired troops coming out of the line and a wounded man on a stretcher who has a ghastly appearance. After a week's front-line service they return to Ypres, now under enemy fire. A RFC pilot reports that the Germans are massing behind their lines for an attack. Peter, as he writes his account of these events, remembers a dialogue said to have taken place between Sir John French and General Foch. To French's statement: "'Well, there is only one thing left for us, to go forward and be killed'", Foch merely replied "'We must hold firm first. There is always plenty of time to be killed afterwards'". Peter and Rupert are among those pushed back from Sanctuary Wood, but they witness the charge by the Guards which restores the British line. At this point, however, Rupert is killed. In novel B the friends see more initial action than do Willie and Jack in novel A, although the narrative has little of the extraordinary detail and vividness of chapters 20-29 of *How Dear is Life*. Furthermore, in novel B the Christmas Truce is neither described nor even mentioned.

In chapter 5 of novel B the action moves away from the battlefield. Peter is back home in England on sick leave, having been wounded in the foot. It is now February 1915, and he and his mother are in his father's church waiting for the morning service to begin. Marjorie enters and Peter is gratified that she sees him, but feels cast down that he is only a Private - Highbeech is now a convalescent home for officers. As his father begins the service Peter reflects how wise he has been never to force religion upon his children. True, they were expected to go to church once on Sundays, but any other attendance was purely voluntary. This touches very briefly on what was to become one of Williamson's major themes; the importance of an easy relationship between sons and fathers. After the service Peter speaks to the Dalrymples and is delighted to be asked to tea the

next week, particularly as he believes that he detects eagerness and joy in Marjorie's glance.

That afternoon he walks to the rookery in the elms, and sees a rook courting a female. She is indifferent, but when another suitor appears she flies to a tree with him, whereupon the original suitor flies off to the other side of the meadow. It is not long however before the female rejoins the first suitor! Peter applies this episode to humanity and sees in it evidence of the behaviour of 'the eternal female'. That night in bed he reflects on his affair with Marjorie and visualizes her grief if he were to be killed.

After a brief return to duty, Peter returns home in mid-April 1915 as a second-lieutenant in the 'New Armies'. The spring has now arrived, and he delights in hearing the cuckoo. Other bird migrants return to the lake, but over everything lies the oppressive fact that it is wartime, and Peter feels impatient that his affair with Marjorie is progressing so slowly. He thinks that he will probably be killed before long and the sight and sound of birds in the wood bring back to him sad memories of Rupert. Although the contrast between the present peace of the wood and the remembrance of the turbulence of the battlefield is striking, he cannot any long take such simple pleasure as hitherto in nature; his obsession is to be with Marjorie. He feels unable to confide in his sisters, who might help him in his suit. When he returns to lunch he is pleased to find that Marjorie has called, and he is vivacious in her presence. After lunch he escorts her home and plucks up courage to ask her for a photograph of herself. She promises to let him have one if she gets one taken, but he is too shy to tell her that he wants to carry her photograph with him in battle. As a parting gift he presents her with one of his collar badges, which she accepts. However, he is somewhat chilled by the lack of warmth in her words at parting: ' "If you go back to France, I wish you jolly good luck!" ' Back in the mess he sends her a photograph of himself, but her reply makes him feel snubbed: 'Many thanks for the photo. My mother reciprocates your good wishes. Yours sincerely M.C. Dalrymple'. Peter returns to France and manages to forget his disappointment.

Chapter 6 opens during the bombardment the day before the beginning of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916. Peter recalls that the Battle of Loos has failed; there were not enough shells and the conduct of the battle was confused, but *now* he believes that things will be better. Nevertheless he remembers Raemaekers's drawing of dead German soldiers with autumn leaves falling upon them and the Kaiser's words underneath: 'When the leaves fall, you shall have peace'.¹³ He cannot help wondering if *he* will die in battle, and if so, how his parents will take it — and Marjorie, whom he has not seen for over a year. He sadly watches an attack on a British observation 'plane by a German fighter, which shoots it down. Evening falls, and yet the guns continue to fire.

In the morning Peter and his men go over the top and walk towards the enemy. They are surprised when the enemy machine-guns open up on them, as they did not know that the Germans had been sheltering in deep dug-outs waiting for the barrage to lift. They rush ahead and are astonished to come up against uncut wire. Peter runs back towards a shell-hole and is hit. The account of the battle in novel B is quite bald when placed beside the extraordinarily absorbing portrayal of the first day of the Somme in chapter 18 of *The Golden Virgin* ('The Cake Walk'). However Williamson's intention in novel B is not to render battle scenes, but rather to present as intensely as possible the private relationship between Peter and Marjorie. With this in mind he continues Peter's narrative in novel B with an account of a dream which he has after losing consciousness as he lies wounded. He dreams that he is in a ballroom where an orchestra is playing a waltz. A lady in a picture steps down from the frame and Peter dances with her joyously. They go into the garden where she gives him some roses. He kisses her and recognizes her to be Marjorie. She darts away and a dragon arrives from which he but slenderly

escapes. The scene then changes, as it can do in a dream, to a meadow sprinkled with daisies. In the distance are some mountains, and music is being played. Some young men appear and Peter joins them as they walk towards the mountains. With his immediate companion he reaches a bridge over a stream near the mountains. The companion crosses, but as Peter places his foot upon the bridge to follow, his companion shouts to him: 'Go back; it is not time for you to come with me yet!' He then recognizes his companion to be Rupert, who has been killed in 1914. The dream fades, and Peter awakes on the battlefield that night, to be carried away by a stretcher party. The chapter ends with Peter lying in hospital in the 'dangerous ward'. A man in a bed nearby is dying, his spine being shattered, but Peter, although he has a hole in a lung, has hope of life. He is to be sent back to 'Blighty'. As he lies in bed he reflects upon his affair with Marjorie. Is she perhaps not really as he thinks she is; has he idealized her? On the other hand he did not have the same feelings for Joan Barnwell as he has for Marjorie. Is there any future in their love? What in fact are his prospects after the war — before he joined up he was but a clerk in a broker's office. Tomorrow it will be August Bank Holiday in England where people can still enjoy themselves; what will it be like for those still fighting on the Somme? This brief interior monologue is simple in technique, but it has verisimilitude and it shows Williamson reaching out towards the analysis of a character's private thoughts.

In chapter 7 Peter is discharged from hospital just before Christmas (1916). Although he has been granted three months' leave, he feels depressed. He goes home for Christmas, and then to try to cheer himself up he visits London, going alone to theatres. There he is prone to weeping and self-pity. He visits his relatives at Blackheath and finds there a changed scene, with ASC hutments erected on the heath. Telling his aunt about Marjorie, he learns her opinion that it seems as if Marjorie likes him, but does not love him. Joan Barnwell, he hears, is now married to an elderly man, but was upset when she heard the previous summer that he had been badly wounded. This was, however, before her marriage. Peter now decides that he must return home to declare his love for Marjorie who has reached the age of twenty.

The scene now shifts to Peter's home in Kent; he is going to a dance at Highbeech and is singing with joy. His sisters are going to the dance also, as is his brother John, now a major in the Australian Light Horse, on leave from Palestine. John is concerned about Peter, and takes him into their father's study to give advice. He tells him that Marjorie is beyond his reach; she likes him, but 'as a pal only', and it will be best if he can forget her. However, if he *must*, then let him speak to her and get it over! Peter reflects that John is practical, but he is a dreamer; he loves pieces of music and passages in books. He remembers that when he read to John a favourite passage from Richard Jefferies' *Wild Life in a Southern Country*, John did not appreciate it.¹⁴ Alas however, recalls Peter as narrator, John, then an acting Lieutenant-Colonel with a DSO and bar, fell in the victorious drive of Allenby in Palestine, during the last phase of the war.

The dance begins; Marjorie is there, dressed in pink with a red rose at her waist. She is not destined to be his, Peter fears; she is too beautiful. Although she is surrounded by convalescent officers, Peter boldly asks her for every other dance. This she cannot grant him, but she promises him the fifth dance and the supper-dance. During the fifth dance Marjorie congratulates Peter on the MC which he has won and upon his promotion to acting-captain. However he cannot be at all sure what she really thinks of him. They sit out the supper dance and go to the picture gallery. There Marjorie drops her handkerchief and Peter silently puts it in his pocket. He notices a picture of Marjorie's paternal great-grandmother to whom she bears a striking resemblance. This reminds the reader of Peter's dream as he lay wounded on the battlefield. Peter asks Marjorie if he can have

the red rose which she is wearing, but she refuses to give it to him, as it is a gift from one of the convalescents, Captain the Honourable Wilfred Starlyte, DSO. As a result Peter is crestfallen, and on the way to supper Marjorie says in the sharp manner which the reader has come to expect: ' "You look like a wet week, instead of a brave warrior. Cheer up, for goodness sake! People will think ..." '

The dance ends at 11.30 p.m. and hot cocoa is served. Marjorie approaches Peter and asks: ' "Have you my mouchoir?" ' He admits that he has and is ready to give it up, but Marjorie melts somewhat and not only allows him to keep it, but also presents him with the red rose. After he has returned home, he places these in a box, feeling very happy.

He spends the succeeding summer (of 1917) at his reserve unit on the east coast of England, receiving news of Marjorie in letters from his sister Dorothy. He does not take part in the Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), being marked for permanent Home Service. Once again home for Christmas, Peter offers an expensive wrist-watch to Marjorie as a present, but she refuses it. As in the case of the brooch refused by Elsie in novel A, Peter, like Willie, gives the watch to his mother, who has understood the situation. She believes it to be hopeless, because Marjorie is the only daughter of wealthy parents, who are naturally ambitious for her; indeed as she reveals to Peter: ' "Lady Dalrymple told me the other day that she wanted her girl to do very well" '. His mother has not been unaware of her son's aspirations: ' "I've known for years, old chap, how you've felt. Do you think that such things could escape a mother's eye?" ' The result is that Peter once more decides to give up thoughts of marriage to Marjorie. For the moment he will walk alone, although perhaps he may marry later, tranquilly. Marjorie is bound to marry another, he reflects, so he will go away and start afresh. However, his disappointment causes him to get drunk on Christmas Day, and then in remorse, to vow that in future he will be an ascetic.

He returns to duty, and feels quite calm. The chaplain, George Blakemore, and Peter become friendly; to some extent they are kindred spirits, because, although the padre is not interested in birds, he is very enthusiastic about music. Blakemore is a widower; his wife, a childhood sweetheart, having died in childbirth. Peter feels able to tell him about Marjorie, and he suggests that Peter should send Marjorie a Valentine. Emboldened by this advice, Peter sends Marjorie a box of violets into which he has inserted a note, signed 'Stultissimus'. He is pleased to get a note of acknowledgement from Marjorie.

When summer comes (1918), the padre's sister, Sylvia, comes to stay with him. Peter joins them for tennis, and notices Sylvia's beauty. However he doubts if he loves her, wondering if possession of an artistic temperament like his is in fact a desirable thing for a man to have.

In chapter 8 Peter is again home on leave. It is June 1918, and he feels that he must at least settle his affair with Marjorie one way or another. Doubts however have now assailed him and he wonders if he *did* win Marjorie, would he be happy with her? He sits in the woods smoking and reflecting. Sight of a wounded jay leads him to recall an episode illustrating the total loyalty possible amongst the lower creatures. A farmer died and his dogs would not let anyone near the body. Three guarded the body and three the door. In the end they had to be poisoned. These sombre recollections are interrupted by the sight of Marjorie approaching with a companion. Marjorie introduces him. ' "Mr Jefferson, a friend of father's" '. "And father's daughter too, I hope" ', Jefferson adds gallantly, showing 'white and splendid teeth'. Peter takes an immediate dislike to him, feeling jealous, although Jefferson is in fact quite personable. He is about thirty years old, tall and has a face showing both resolution and humour. Marjorie celebrated her twenty-first birthday the previous day, and describes her presents: a two-seater motor-car from her father, a pearl necklace from her mother, and a wrist-watch from Mr Jefferson.

At this point Peter remarks, with a hint of bitterness: ' "How nice ... you wanted a wrist-watch didn't you?" ' They part at Peter's gate, and he ponders why Marjorie accepted the watch from Jefferson, having on a previous occasion refused one from him. Was it merely because Jefferson was 'a friend of father's'? However Peter joins in a game of tennis at Marjorie's house where the hospital is now closed. Lady Dalrymple tells Peter that Mr Jefferson, who is the son of Lord Whortleberry, is in the Foreign Service, and is extremely fond of Marjorie. To counter this, Peter declares that after the war he will go with his brother John to Australia, yet knowing in his heart that he probably will not do so. The situation is not made easier for him by the knowledge that Mr Jefferson is rich and owns a Rolls Royce motor-car. On the way home his sister Dorothy tells Peter that Marjorie is not at all like him in personality. She is practical, as is her mother, and Peter has no chance of marrying her. Dorothy herself has remained faithful to the dead Rupert and has accepted no subsequent suitor. (The chapter continues after a note by Williamson: 'Began this 4/1/19 at 4 p.m.'). In August 1918 Peter is passed as fit for general service overseas. Before he leaves England however, news comes of the death of his brother John in Palestine. Peter is the heir; he inherits £4,000 in a bank, a sheep station in Australia worth £16,000 and a half-share in the profits of a silver mine on John's ranch. To realize the value of these sums it is of course necessary for the reader to remember the large inflation since 1918. Now Peter can help his mother and sisters financially, and can marry if he chooses. In his current state of mind he doubts if in fact he will marry. He goes to France in October 1918, where he is soon overtaken by the Armistice, which he and his companions take very quietly. There is wild behaviour in London, but calm and a feeling of flatness at the front. Some British POWs arrive, released from captivity, and Peter is shocked at the poor state they are in.

Peter is granted Christmas leave, during which there will be a Fancy Dress Ball at the Dalrymples' on New Year's Eve. On his way home, at Boulogne he reads in *The Times* of the engagement of Jefferson and Marjorie. That night he dreams of Marjorie and feels a profound sadness. Back at home he tries to be indifferent about Marjorie's engagement, but nevertheless decides that it will be best if he does not attend her dance. When she sees him she stops her car to speak, but he salutes and passes on. Then in mid-January 1919, he is 'dispersed' at Shorncliffe and does not return to France.

Chapter 9 opens in spring 1919. Peter is staying at home and very early on a sunny morning he goes out with his fox terrier Bill. After warning the dog away from some leverets he bathes in the lake and then continues his walk with Bill romping by his side. He finds a button, and then sees a footprint. Thinking that it must be a boy bird-nesting, Peter decides to stalk him. Although he is now twenty-four, he is still in some ways quite boyish in outlook. It is not however a boy who has preceded him to the woods, it is Marjorie! Peter comes upon her and is pleasantly surprised to notice that she is not wearing an engagement ring. A nightingale is singing nearby and he recalls ironically the opening two lines of a lyric in Browning's *Jocoseria* (1883):

*Never the time and the place
And the loved one all together!*

Although she is there before him she still seems to be as unattainable as ever. He remembers also how he and Rupert visited this spot, and the strangeness of this encounter with Marjorie is borne in upon him — it is hardly 5 a.m. He congratulates her upon her engagement, and she tells him that although her mother wants the wedding to take place in September, she herself would prefer it to be later, as she feels only a girl and hardly ready yet for the responsibilities of marriage. Peter declares that he is going to Australia

to reconstruct his life, and apologizes for not attending Marjorie's dance, maintaining that he had a previous engagement that night. Hoping that perhaps after all he still has a chance, he asks her advice about what a friend can do who has long loved a girl, but has been too shy to declare his love, and now finds that she has become engaged to another. He is of course hinting at his own situation, and Marjorie's reply: ' "He should have spoken sooner" ', finally gives him confidence to tell her that he loves her, and to take her into his arms. They kiss, 'and' recalls Peter as narrator, 'all heaven opened and I murmured little broken sentences to her like the croon of the dove to her mate'. This comparison of human behaviour to that of birds recalls Williamson's use of similar comparisons earlier in the novel, but I do not think that the scene is credible. At this stage of his artistic development Williamson has not realized that a *volte face* of this sort without some hints of its possibility earlier in the narrative strains the reader's belief in the story to breaking point. It is more like wish-fulfilling fantasy than credible fiction. The cold, sharp Marjorie is now supposed to have loved Peter secretly and to have been only waiting for his declaration of love to yield herself to him. If Williamson had thought it worth while to revise this novel, I have no doubt that he would have dealt with this problem.

To return to the narrative — at 9 a.m. the lovers walk back to the village, Marjorie protesting that she never knew that Peter loved her. She invites him and Dorothy to tennis the following day, warning him that they will now have to be very careful, and she will have to tell Phillip gradually that she will not be marrying him. When he reaches home Peter tells his mother the happy news; she is glad for him, but realizes that Lady Dalrymple will be in a fury. (At this point Williamson adds the note: 'Ended here, midnight 4.1.19'.)

Chapter 9 opens with Peter relating that he now plays tennis regularly at Highbeech. The lovers keep up their deception, and consider the possibility of eloping. One morning Marjorie is late for her assignation with Peter; Phillip had emerged just as she was leaving her room. He writes poetry, and had been working on a poem in his room. To keep up appearances, Marjorie walks with him in the garden, then escapes by pretending that she has a headache. Peter kisses and embraces her when eventually they meet, and she calls him 'Darling Freckles'. He feels that the time has come for them to tell her parents and Phillip about their love, but Marjorie does not yet feel equal to it. Peter urges her to reconsider, pointing out that he has money now, and she has £15,000 from her grandmother, although indeed it is not immediately available, being invested. Finally they agree for the moment at least to let things go on as before, and play tennis again that day.

Chapter 10 brings the novel to an unhappy ending. It is not, I think, at all well handled, and taxes further the reader's credulity. June and July 1919 pass without any significant alteration in the situation, but in August George Blakemore and his sister who lives at Ashmore in Dorset come to stay with Peter's family. They bring Sylvia's young son with them. All the young people play tennis at Highbeech. Sylvia does not take to Marjorie and she and Peter talk happily about their life at Felixstowe the previous summer. This makes Marjorie jealous and she and Peter have a slight quarrel in the conservatory. The next morning Marjorie apologizes, but Peter under the influence of 'a devil of cruelty' foolishly states that he is not sure if he loves her. She takes this remark seriously and departs deeply upset. That afternoon she leaves for London to stay with an aunt in Upper Brook Street. Now thoroughly alarmed and remorseful Peter motors there the following day, only to be told that Miss Dalrymple has a headache and cannot see him.

A short time later Peter sees in *The Times* an announcement that Marjorie's wedding to Jefferson will take place at St Peter's, Hanover Square, on 12 September. Then, most

unexpectedly Peter receives a letter from Marjorie in which she declares that she is broken-hearted at the prospect of the marriage, and still wants him. She asks him to write to her, promising to go with him wherever he desires. He replies that he will meet her near the Gladstone Oak (in the woods near their village) on the following Sunday evening at 9 o'clock. In a state of high elation he rushes up to London to get a special licence.

Sunday evening arrives and Peter awaits Marjorie's arrival with increasing concern — at 9.20 she still has not arrived. His plan is that they should elope the next day, marry and go to Devon. His thoughts begin to take a more hopeful direction as he contemplates their future married life and the son they will have. Marjorie arrives at 9.30, but Peter is distressed to see Jefferson and her father in the distance. He urges her to go away with him the next day, a suggestion which alarms her exceedingly. As Jefferson and her father approach, he urges her to bluff it out now, but to elope at 5 a.m. the next day. With this plan in mind, Peter tells Sir William that he had asked Marjorie to meet him there; they had wondered if there were an owl in the tree. Sir William reacts angrily to this subterfuge, so Peter decides to tell all, and declares that he loves Marjorie. Jefferson behaves well, asking Marjorie if she wishes to terminate their engagement. Peter is astounded when she remains silent, and is forced to say that he has compromised her, apologize, and make off. He considers that now all he can do is leave the district; he feels betrayed and recalls the lines at the end of Act I of *Pagliacci*:

*Laugh Pulcinello for the love that is ended:
Laugh for the pain that is breaking thy heart!*

Feeling unable to go home, he sleeps in the wood, to awake to the sound of shooting — it is 1st September. He goes to the inn for a brandy to revive him, but begins to feel feverish and to realize that he must now go home. He starts to leave, but collapses and falls into delirium. When he comes to, he is in bed at home and his mother is ministering to him. Two days later he is told what happened. He had been found wandering, delirious; he had been recognized and taken home in a cart. During his illness two letters have arrived for him. He opens them to find that they are both from Marjorie. The first is dated 1st September, and in it Marjorie apologizes for not speaking out when he appealed to her in front of her father and Jefferson; she was terrified, but will have the resolution to go off with him now. His mother tells him that he has been in bed for nearly a month, and it is with bitter regret that he reads the second letter, dated 10th September. In this, Marjorie reproaches him for not coming to her; she is now heart broken. Jefferson had left and Peter's mother had not known from whom the letters were. It is her sad duty to inform her son that Marjorie has, a short time ago, married Jefferson. Peter's bitter comment on the story in his role as narrator is borrowed once more from *Pagliacci* (the last line):

The comedy has ended.

Even if the reader is willing to accept that Marjorie did not hear about Peter's illness — she was in London, and presumably her parents would keep the news from her — nevertheless her character seems to be inconsistent. For most of the story she behaves in a cold and distant manner to Peter, then when totally unexpectedly she accepts his love she ceases to show the practical nature which is said to be hers. When she hears nothing in reply to her first letter surely she would have come to Kent to see what was going on even if her pride would not have permitted her to call at the rectory. Once in the village she would have been bound to learn the truth and act accordingly — even

in 1919. However, whatever shortcomings novel B might have, Williamson did complete it. In it he tried to create, inadequately it may be, a fictional 'world' distinct from his own actual life, although bearing a relationship to it. The attempt was, I believe, a necessary step on the way to becoming the excellent writer he did become in due course.

(To be concluded)

NOTES

9. These dates are given by Williamson in the manuscript notebook containing the beginning of novel C and at the end of the typescript which concludes the novel. See Part III of this article.
10. See Leland L. Duncan, *The History of Colfe's Grammar School, 1652–1952*, ed. H. Beardwood (1952), Appendix H, 'Roll of Honour', p. 186: 'BRYERS, Rupert Bede. Cpl., 9th Battn. Rifle Brigade.'
11. Cf. the quotation given in Part I of this article from *The Village Book*, pp. 157–8, recounting how in 1916 Williamson and a friend ran naked over the sands in Devon. Here he is using the same original experience in a somewhat different context.
12. For an explanation of these terms see John Brophy and Eric Partridge, *The Long Trail: What the British Soldier Sang and Said in 1914–1918* (2nd edn., 1965) 'Glossary of Soldiers' Slang', pp. 138, 204, 85, 102, 132, 121.
13. This striking cartoon by the Dutch artist Louis Raemaekers (1869–1956) is reproduced in *Raemaekers' Cartoons* ('Land & Water' edn., 2 vols., 1916–17, vol. I, part 6, p. 149). The full caption reads as follows: 'The Marshes of Pinsk, November, 1915. The Kaiser said last spring: "When the leaves fall you'll have peace." They have!' There is a commentary on the cartoon by Alice Meynell, *ibid.*, p. 148.
14. This passage from chapter 1 of Richard Jefferies' *Wild Life in a Southern Country* (1879) is included in Williamson's *Richard Jefferies Selections of his Work* (1937) pp. 103–5, 'The Hare's Skull'.