

The Apprenticeship of a Novelist: the Early Unpublished Fiction of Henry Williamson — Part III

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The third unpublished novel in the Williamson Archive at Exeter, which I shall refer to as novel C, is entitled *The Flax of Dream*, although it is different in many respects from the published tetralogy of that name. It shows a considerable advance upon novel B, but it is still quite some way from the artistic achievement of the published *Flax* in its first edition. It is yet further away from the revised edition.

Novel C consists of four books and is found both in a manuscript text (dated November 1919–March 1920 by Williamson) and in a typescript text (which gives the same date of composition) although neither is complete in itself, and together the corporate text remains incomplete. The difference between the two texts in the passages common to both is very slight, and using both versions together it is possible, I think, to arrive at a fairly complete notion of the novel. As in the case of novel A, the hero is Willie Maddison who enjoys a boyhood friendship with Jack Temperley. His first love is Elsie Norman, who has somewhat similar characteristics to the Elsie Donaldson and Marjorie Dalrymple of novels A and B. A second heroine, quite unlike Joan Barnwell of novel B, is introduced. Her name is Pauline Vereker, and she is an initial sketch for the portrait of Eveline Fairfax of *The Dream of Fair Women*, playing a somewhat similar role in the story. There is of course nothing in novel C comparable to the action of *The Pathway* which was not begun until 1924.¹⁵ The events in novel C following upon Willie's jilting by both Elsie and Pauline have no parallel in Williamson's published fiction and will be described in due course. Let us now consider novel C in detail.

The manuscript text of novel C is found in two foolscap-size notebooks with soft covers, the first of which bears the inscription: 'H.W. Williamson: His Book'. The typescript text is found in two books of bound sheets and in various fugitive unbound sheets. We learn from the first manuscript notebook that Williamson's first title for what became novel C was to have been *The Three Phases*, but this is crossed out and *The Flax of Dream* substituted. Following this are the words: 'Mentally composed during 1919 at Folkestone; commenced to be written on paper, Nov. 14, 1919. Ended' (a blank; but from the end of the novel we learn that it was finished in March 1920). A cancelled plan shows that the three phases referred to in the original title are: 'Illusion', 'Love' and 'Aftermath'. The details of the cancelled plan differ in several respects from the novel as actually written, but the basic plan of the three phases is adhered to, although the central portion, 'Love', is split into two books, thus giving the novel four books in all. Thus Book I gives some scenes in the life of Willie Maddison from the age of nine to twenty-two. The 'illusion' is his ultimately unhappy love for Elsie Norman. Book II presents the happy and fulfilled period of Willie's love for Pauline Vereker. Book III deals with the events leading up to Pauline's final betrayal of Willie's love. Book IV describes Willie's life in London after the war, his illness and the final recovery of his health and wholeness of heart leading to a realization of the new values by which he will live.

Book I, part 1, chapter 1 of novel C opens in a springtime during the early boyhood of Willie Maddison and Jack Temperley. The reader is immediately struck by the improvement in style upon that of novels A and B. Gone are the clichés and

occasional clumsiness; Williamson is now reaching out towards that easy mastery of style which will shortly be his. He involves the reader immediately in the action:

From the wood across the meadow a continuous mellow call floated: 'cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo'. Two small boys who had been sitting at the foot of a pollarded ash that stood at the corner of the field, looked at one another . . .

Willie, the smaller dark-haired boy, asks Jack to help him find the cuckoo so that they may be able to find out where its egg will be laid. He is interested too in the arrival of the chiff-chaff. However, as in novel A Jack is more interested in fishing for carp in the lake, and he tries unsuccessfully to catch a worm for bait. He follows Willie into the wood, described with the beginnings of that visual particularity which was to become the hallmark of Williamson's writing:

The air was warm and the sunlight streamed down through the branches of the trees. Through the layer of last year's dead and rotting leaves, the thin green shoots of the new grass stretched daintily in the sunshine. Wherever he looked, he could see the evidence of the mighty life force stirring after its seeming death during the winter.

Willie responds with elation to the spring scene: he catches Jack by the arm and exclaims:

'Oh Jack, isn't it all wonderful! Look, there's hundreds and thousands of blue-bells over there. Do let's come and get some. And I say, isn't it simply spiffing in this wood? We'll have such luck here later on, I'm sure. There's bound to be a hawk or two nesting here, and there may be a carrion crow. Oh my hat, we'll make this the great egg season!'

The schoolboy slang belongs of course to the Edwardian period rather than today, but Williamson has captured well the mixture of Willie's feelings; poetic delight in the beauty of the scene and boyish anticipation of bird-nesting expeditions.

Jack agrees that they will have a good egg season, but warns Willie that they must beat Jackson and Smyth in their collection of eggs, to which Willie snorts in reply that they are much better than these rivals. The harsher side of nature then makes its appearance: Jack draws Willie's attention to a dying rabbit, which has been bitten by a stoat. Willie feels sad at this spectacle, but with the volatile emotions of boyhood they are quarrelling within two minutes about which of them should have the rabbit's fur to cure. Characteristically Jack yields it to Willie, whom he admires for his fearless behaviour at school — he took his pet rat there one day and as a result was caned by the Head Master.

This chapter is in essence a first draft for chapter 7 of the published *The Beautiful Years*.¹⁶ A comparison of the two shows that the published version is clearer and sharper in description and narrative. In addition some of the details are altered — the rivals in egg-collecting become in *The Beautiful Years* the 'Vicarage kids', Charlie and Bobbie Cerr-Nore, while the blue-bells in the wood become primroses. The taking of the pet rat to school becomes an episode in which Willie 'in one of his silly moods had thrown a plate of porridge at the Vicar from behind the hedge', and had been thrashed by his father as a result.

Chapter 2 of Book I, part 1 of novel C introduces Elsie Norman as a small girl sitting on a stile reading. Looking up, she notices Willie in the distance lying by the hedge. He admires her, but is too shy to go up to speak to her, being conscious of his untidy appearance. Briefly he wonders if he might offer her his moleskin cap, now worn only

in his bedroom, but rejects the idea. He rejoices in the summer sun, and hearing the call of a titmouse watches the bird's activities. In fact Elsie is hoping to see Willie whom she likes. He comes towards her, but she walks away with her spaniel, hoping nevertheless that he will follow her. She gives him a backward glance, but he is too shy to heed this encouragement, and goes off in search of Jack who has been filling with tow the chinks in the side of an old boat which he intends to use for expeditions on the lake.

This chapter is a first draft for chapter 15 of *The Beautiful Years*,¹⁷ which again is sharper and richer. In it Elsie wonders where Willie has vanished to; in fact he is hiding at the base of a hawthorn hedge in shyness, lacking the courage to approach her. Elsie's attitude is different from what it is in novel C; in *The Beautiful Years* she is merely curious about Willie, although she prefers his untidy hair to that of Charlie Cerr-Nore, 'smarmed down with hair-oil'. As in novel C Jack is repairing a boat with tow, in this case a catamaran; but Williamson adds a humorous narration of how Jack had stolen the tow from inside a stag's head mounted on oak, which he had taken down from its place in the hall of his home.

Chapter 3 of Book I, part 1 of novel C, opens with a good description of the revolution of the seasons from summer to winter. Willie feels sad in winter because his beloved birds are silent. He is fourteen now; one day he meets Elsie and they speak for the first time. Elsie is friendly, and encourages Willie by saying: 'You're Willie, aren't you? My father knows yours'. As they converse a hawk kills a blackbird in spite of Willie's attempt to save it. Elsie is upset and cries; Willie feels sorrow but restrains his tears which he feels would be 'soppy'. They bury the dead bird and as they walk away together something of the shyness between them disappears. However Willie remembers with considerable mortification how he and Jack some years previously had pelted Mr Norman with mud as he was sketching. He had taken it in surprisingly good part, calling the boys 'a couple of unlicked cubs'. Of course Willie had now known that it was Elsie's father he was annoying, but the recollection of the episode inhibits him from asking to see her the next day.

The main action of this chapter is a first draft for Chapter 18 of *The Beautiful Years*.¹⁸ In the published version however Willie is only eight and Elsie is seven; the action having followed straight on in the same year that Willie and Jack catapult mud at Mr Norman as he is painting.¹⁹ It is as he runs away that Willie catches his first glimpse of Elsie and begins to fall in love with her. However the most striking difference between the first three chapters of novel C and *The Beautiful Years* is that in the published novel Willie's life is set in a much richer and more varied human context. In novel C there is nothing of his father John Maddison, nor of Jim Holloman, Dolly, Bidy, Jack's sisters, Mary Ogilvie, John Fry, nor of the masters and pupils of Colham Grammar School. Indeed in novel C Willie's life at school receives little mention, except that in chapter 4 Williamson recounts how Willie had been unable to agree that Elsie is anything like the low picture of girls painted by a schoolfellow, Lascelles major!

In chapter 4 of Book I, part 1 of novel C Willie is nearly 18; he is now a tall youth and has recently left school. It is late summer; he has been playing tennis and is enjoying a smoke. It is evening and he hears the melancholy hooting of a barn owl. This accords with his mood; he feels sad and does not want to grow up, but the next day he must leave to begin work in London. He now feels less affinity with Jack, who has lost much of his interest in birds, while his own love for Elsie is burgeoning. Willie and Elsie have supper in the tennis pavilion, and afterwards he is bold enough to kiss her for the first time. They declare their love for each other and decide to become secretly engaged. After exchanging signed photographs of each other they part feeling radiantly happy. However a hint of the breach to come is given when Williamson recounts that Elsie's father wonders how their affair will end, as they are of such different temperaments. This chapter is

much less rich and satisfying than the corresponding action in *Dandelion Days* in the section 'Over the Hills and Far Away' (chapters 28–32).²⁰ Here Willie is unsuccessful in winning Elsie's love, and he is thrown back on the faithful friendship of Jack, not yet having realized Mary Ogilvie's great worth and the depth of her love for him.

Chapter 5 of Book I, part 1 of novel C deals with Willie's life in London shortly before the First World War, and has no parallel in the published *Flax of Dream* nor any real affinity with anything in the *Chronicle*. The chapter opens with Willie, now nearly twenty-one, writing a letter to Elsie. He describes his daily journeys from Blackheath to his office in Mincing Lane. It is his custom to lunch at Leadenhall Market where the sight of the game being sold there brings back his longing to return to the country. A colleague, Phipps, also brought up in the country, realizes that they both must of stern necessity work in London, although he advises Willie to emigrate to one of the colonies. Willie has tried his hand at writing nature-sketches, but has been unable to sell any, and he wonders how long it will be before he and Elsie can marry. Could she in fact bear to live in the suburbs, he asks? The reader learns that Willie's father is now dead, his mother having died when he was a child, and their house in the country has been sold. However that summer he is looking forward to staying with Jack who is farming. Willie posts his letter, and that night he has a prophetic dream. He is by the sea, leaning against a wreck in the sand. He sees a girl on the dunes who calls to him: he reaches out towards her, but falls back frustrated. This is a vision of his next love, Pauline Vereker, who, as has been noted above, is to be a first sketch of Eveline Fairfax of the published *The Dream of Fair Women*.

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Part 2 of this first book takes the story into the First World War up to the autumn of 1915. Chapter 1 opens with a group of young people by a fire in the garden of the Norman's house. A party is in progress and the guests are neighbours, including Willie and Jack. They move into the house where Elsie joins them. One of the guests is the eccentric Johnson, who is nevertheless a fine pianist, and whose rendering of a nocturne of Chopin and 'Autumn' by Chaminade²¹ moves Willie so deeply that he forgets all about Elsie's presence. However after dancing to the gramophone Willie and Elsie slip out to sit on the stairs and converse. Elsie's mother joins them; she likes Willie and sees in him his dead mother's nature. A little later Willie and Jack are invited into Mr Norman's study to drink whisky. They discuss the uncertain future of Europe. After more dancing followed by supper, Johnson plays some pieces by Grieg. Once again Willie is totally absorbed in the music which hurts Elsie who feels neglected. At dawn the party breaks up amidst feelings of sadness. As they leave Willie and Jack hear the guns of the Ypres Salient; it is autumn 1914. Incidentally this informs the reader that the party is taking place in a village in Kent.

In chapter 2 of Book I part 2, Willie and Jack are at the war. They are marching through a village up to the front line. Seasoned troops are being brought out of the line and the two friends advance under fire to a wood, finally entering a trench. There they experience a 'wind-up'.

Chapter 3 of Book I part 2 moves back to England. Mr Norman sits at home in the firelight; his wife comes into the room knitting a muffler for Willie. They discuss the love between Willie and Elsie and how it seems to be progressing Elsie enters with two letters from Willie in her hand. Before she reads them to her parents, Williamson gives the reader another hint that the love between her and Willie will not last. Elsie wants an officer to be billeted on them — it will be fun she thinks. In the first letter Willie relates

his experiences during the Christmas Truce, and how he explored a farmhouse containing dead German and British soldiers. His description of the dead has horrifying clarity, but Mr Norman does not believe him to be morbid; only sensitive. In his second letter Willie writes that he will shortly be getting a commission. In spite of this Elsie persists in wanting to have officers billeted on them. This makes Mr Norman reflect on the differences in temperament between his daughter and Willie. He does not know that at that very moment, Willie is lying wounded in a shell hole. In the published *Flax of Dream* of course Williamson does not present Willie's war experiences; he had realized, I think, that the tone and temper of the work as by then he perceived it, would not accommodate the use of war experiences.

Chapter 4 of Book I, part 2 of novel C, depicts the wounded Willie in hospital in England. In the next bed lies a sergeant of the RFC who has lost a leg. He has been betrayed by Sylvia his wife, as the reader shortly discovers that Willie is by Elsie. Jack has been killed in the action in which Willie was wounded, but Willie consoles himself with what turns out to be the mistaken thought that he still has Elsie, now a nurse in a hospital for officers. He is expecting a visit from her that afternoon, but in the event she does not appear.

In chapter 5 of Book I part 2, Willie now discharged from hospital and on a month's leave, is at a children's party at the Norman's house. Elsie has jilted him, and he is staying with Jack's mother. Willie has an easy way with children, and Elaine, a little girl at the party, is delighted at the kindly interest he takes in her. Elsie arrives but remains cool to Willie. In chapter 6, the action of which follows immediately upon that of chapter 5, Elsie asks Willie if he is likely now to get his discharge from the army. He may very well do so, he replies, but probably he will manage to go back to the front. He goes into the garden and hears the sound of the Folkestone express which transports the troops on their journeys to and from France. Williamson implies that the train is summoning Willie to return to the war. Before leaving Willie brings himself to ask Elsie if she loves *him* or his unnamed rival. She replies that indeed she loves *him*, whereupon Willie accuses her of lack of candour. His chance of winning her back thus lost, they return to the house, where Mr Norman tries to get Willie to put a brave face on his disappointment by quoting from *Pagliacci*, the line:

Laugh Pulcinello, the world will cry bravo!

Willie takes his leave and this book concludes with Williamson's comment that 'the Flax has been woven hurriedly and the web broken'. However, the Master will weave another design. (At this point both the first manuscript notebook and the first collection of bound typed sheets end.) The narrative of chapters 5 and 6 has no real parallel to anything in the published *Flax* and the material was, I think, rightly rejected by Williamson. Its main psychological weakness is that no adequate motivation is given for Elsie's jilting of Willie except a certain shallow fickleness and the desire for social amusement. It is much better to make her cool to Willie throughout, with the love all on his side, as Williamson had done in novel A and was to do again in the published *Flax*.

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As I mentioned at the outset, Books II and III of novel C deal with Willie's next love affair, that with Pauline Vereker, which also ends unhappily, although before this the lovers enjoy a period of rapturous happiness. I found ten chapters of part 1 of Book II in the second manuscript notebook, which in fact seems to constitute the whole of Book II.

I was unable to find part 2 of this book anywhere in the Archive at Exeter, and I am unable to say whether or not it was ever written. Furthermore, I found no typescript text of any of Book II. I shall now describe the action of Book II in so far as the text available permits.

Chapter 1 of part 1 of Book II opens in 1917 some two years' later than the end of Book I, with Willie sitting near to the Atlantic Ocean on what the Williamson reader is likely to identify as Venton Sands, although the place is not named. He watches gulls wheeling in the sky and sees a peregrine falcon kill a crow and then take a stock-dove. Gulls eat the crow which he has thrown into the sea. He lies down in the sun and as a swallow passes, he remembers the events of his boyhood. A desire to bathe is frustrated by the absence of a costume when he hears a slight cough made by a girl wearing a white jersey and blue skirt. She has long hair flowing down her back and her legs and feet are bare. As she moves away Willie passes her without speaking, returning to the village.

In chapter 2 Willie is found that evening in the Rock Inn (obviously in Georgeham, although the village is not named). John Gammon, the landlord, Williamson recounts, wanted the Roc (fabulous bird encountered by Sinbad) as his inn sign, but the local painter who did the job gave him a cockerel instead! Willie has rented a cottage in the village and he enjoys a convivial evening with the locals, who treat him with great politeness. He sits by Tom Brown, a ploughman and great drinker of ale, who if he becomes drunk is likely to be ordered home by his wife. Also present is John Smith who is playing whist with Bill Brown, a one-eyed shepherd, who wears an eye-patch and a glass eye on alternate nights. Willie is fascinated by John Smith's tale of how his father went down a cliff (doubtless at Baggy Point) and took two young ravens from a nest. The angry birds attack his cottage, and in the end he has to let the young birds go.²² John Smith is a notable *raconteur*; he will, he declares, tell ghost stories if invited! Willie buys a drink for everyone in the bar at a total cost of 2/8d and at the end of the evening witnesses the arrival of Mrs Brown to collect her husband. This scene recalls that described in the prologue to novel A, and looks forward to those in chapters 2 and 12 of *The Dream of Fair Women*.²³ The scenes in the published novel (set in 1919 not 1917) are much better presented. The characterization of the locals is more skilfully handled and the scenes themselves are more firmly linked to the main narrative.

In chapter 3 of part 1 of Book II of novel C Willie walks along a flower-scented lane towards the sea. The lane itself is excellently described as are the birds which he sees — some swallows and a kestrel. Willie wonders sadly if this idyllic place will soon be developed for summer visitors and its simple charm spoiled. He is on his way to the beach for a bathe and notices as he approaches it a woman in the distance. Can it be the same girl he saw a few days ago, he wonders?

In chapter 4 he goes down to the beach but is disappointed not to see the girl whom he hoped to meet, believing her to be like himself, a nature-lover. He is gratified however when she appears and goes into the sea for a swim. Willie does the same and is then given an opportunity to speak to her. After she inadvertently swallows some sea-water, he gallantly escorts her ashore where she expresses pleasure that he has spoken to her. Both are on leave; he from the Army, recovering from trench fever; she from the Air Ministry at Bolo House in London. In reply to his question what the book was that she was reading as he approached the beach, he is delighted to learn that it was Richard Jefferies's *The Story of My Heart*. He has found a kindred spirit, which of course Elsie was not. The reader will remember at this point that it was in the spring of 1919 that Williamson bought a second-hand copy of *The Story of My Heart*, which brought him great spiritual refreshment and illumination. Willie speaks of his home in Rookhurst (named now for the first time), which interests her greatly; probably it was to be revealed later

that she came from near there, as does Eveline Fairfax in *The Dream of Fair Women*, although of course the location of Rookhurst is moved to an imagined part of Wiltshire in the published *Flax*. The conversation concludes with Willie telling about Jack, killed in 1914 and about his father, now dead. The two then retire to dress.

In chapter 5 they climb the cliff nearby, and as they talk love begins to burgeon between them. Willie speaks of how he watches the peregrine falcons, and tells his companion that she resembles a sweet little girl whom he knew. This makes her slightly jealous, until Willie reassures her by revealing that he has in mind Elaine Macray, the little girl of five whom he met at the children's party at the Normans some two years previously (described in Book I, part 2, chapter 5 of novel C, noticed above). He omits all mention of Elsie, but when asked directly, he does admit that he did love a girl once before. It is at this point that his new friend reveals that her name is Pauline Vereker. He tells her that he has rented a cottage in Darracot where owls nest under the roof. Darracot of course is a real place near Georgeham, but it is obvious that Williamson in fact has Skirr cottage at Georgeham in mind, which he himself rented. Willie and Pauline have lunch together, and she reveals that her father is English but her mother is French. He is happy in her company; they spend the afternoon together and his love for her grows:

... he marvelled at the quick glow that suffused her cheeks, the brightness of her eyes, shining like the far-flung sea under the summer sun; then at her rich brown hair, almost chestnut in colour, tied loosely in a big bunch at the back. She was marvellously beautiful! The very spirit of the wild was within her young body, the beauty of the sea within her eyes.

Willie is seeing her as a richly *natural* girl, rather like Felise, the heroine of Richard Jefferies's *The Dewy Morn*. In *The Dream of Fair Women*, although Eveline is described in broadly similar terms (chapter 7) she has red hair, the colour of the coat of a vixen, which suggests something of her dangerous quality, and Mary Ogilvie in *The Pathway* is much more distinctly Felise-like.²⁴

Chapter 6 of Book II, part 1 of novel C, shows clearly the influence of Richard Jefferies's *The Story of My Heart*. Willie tells Pauline how he feels that his soul [or subconscious] can reach the stars, although in fact he is aware that Nature is indifferent to man. The harsher side of nature becomes visible to them at this moment, as they see two wings of a peacock butterfly taken by a finch lying on the path at their feet.

The remainder of this part of Book II describes the progress of the love between Willie and Pauline until they spend a night together in his cottage. Williamson handles this less well than the growth of the love between Willie and Eveline in *The Dream of Fair Women*, but nevertheless novel C does show him reaching out towards the presentation of a passionate love-affair. Chapter 6 continues by narrating how Pauline, moved by Willie's sadness at the killing of the butterfly, touches a hand in sympathy. His rapture is so fierce that she becomes afraid and runs off, with him in pursuit. When he catches up with her she declares that she is a foolish creature, and that he would scorn her if he knew the truth about her. She departs for Clawbay (Croyde?) where she is staying and Willie returns to his cottage, but not before he has got Pauline to promise that the next day she will accompany him to the headland (doubtless Baggy Point). Willie has supper with Tommy Brown, who ribs him gently about his burgeoning love-affair with Pauline. Chapter 7 narrates how the next day Willie and Pauline visit a ruined cottage, while in chapter 8 they reach a spring. As they are admiring its beauty Pauline sighs and calls Willie "sweet one". This prompts him to quote from Browning's lyric *Suummum Bonum* (in *Asolando*, 1889):

*All the breath and the bloom of the year in the
bag of one bee:
All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart
of one gem:
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine
of the sea:
Breath and bloom, shade and shine, — wonder, wealth,
and — how far above them—
Truth, that's brighter than gem,
Trust, that's purer than pearl, —
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe —
all these . . .*

and here he breaks off to her annoyance. He tells her that she is like the sun and the earth and passion begins to rise between them. Night is falling and Pauline, matching Willie's poetic mood, quotes the last stanza of Tennyson's lyric 'Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white' (in *The Princess*, 1847):

*Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,
And slips into the bosom of the lake.
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip
Into my bosom and be lost in me.*

However her mood changes rapidly and she warns Willie about her defects; she is primitive, a throwback, she declares. In chapter 9 they reach the headland and the colours of the landscape fade as darkness approaches, making them feel sadness at the transience of earth's beauty. The moon begins to shine and Willie feels that he wants to kiss Pauline, but that he cannot do it passionately, only reverently. In an attempt to heighten the passion between them he tells her that the poem he quoted from ends with the words

*— all were for me
In the kiss of one girl.*

This is rather clumsy; there is too large a gap between the breaking off of the poem and its conclusion. However the quotation has the desired effect. After weeping a little at the beauty of the sentiment, Pauline kisses Willie passionately. However she declares immediately: 'I've dug my own grave! I've dug my own grave!' Willie is nonplussed and remains silent and immobile. In *The Dream of Fair Women* the lovers do not quote poetry at each other, but Eveline does exclaim that she has dug her own grave.²⁵

In chapter 10 of Book II, part 1 of novel C, the puzzled Willie asks Pauline why she believes that she has dug her own grave. It is, she declares, because she is an abandoned creature. Nevertheless she asks him why he does not now return her kiss, to be told that it is because he has never kissed anyone on the lips before! Once again she takes the initiative and kisses Willie. A moth passes, which suggests to Pauline the transience of earthly joy:

"That moth is living its one brief hour of happiness," said Pauline. "See — it breathes in the night wind: it sips of the flowers' honey: then comes death and oblivion." Her eyes were wistful as she looked across the great grey sea. "But it is happy now," she went on, "why shouldn't it drink the honey while it can?"

That she is thinking 'of the brief happiness' which she and Willie can enjoy in their love is suggested by the continuation of her reflections on the life of the moth: '... it meets a mate — a mate Billy dear — and, its mission ended, it dies. . . ' Nevertheless, love has come to Pauline, and she finds it glorious. This allows Willie to declare his love for her and ask her to marry him — he thinks of her, he says, as his wife and the mother of his children. At this she becomes rigid, but then after a struggle declares that she will tear aside family ties. She is of course, like Eveline in *The Dream of Fair Women*, already married, although unlike the case of the published novel, this is not yet revealed to the reader. In novel C Willie thinks that the family difficulty is that Pauline is well-born, and that objections will be raised should she seek to marry beneath her. This is much less successful artistically than the strategy which Williamson adopts in *The Dream of Fair Women* where Willie knows that Eveline is married and has a daughter, Quillie, from the beginning of their relationship, and he wants her to leave her husband for him. This makes it easier for the reader to respond to Williamson's intention of presenting a feverish, doomed love growing out of post-war neurosis.

To return to the action of novel C, Pauline asks Willie not to condemn her; he agrees and the lovers thereupon experience intense emotional ecstasy. As they are returning home an owl is shot. Willie is deeply upset by this, taking it as a bad omen for the future of their love, remembering the occasion years before, when on the first day he spoke to Elsie they saw a hawk kill a blackbird which they buried (Book I, part 1, chapter 3, described above). However in chapter 11 of Book I part 1, the love between Willie and Pauline is consummated. A storm breaks, and Willie realizes that he will have to let Pauline sleep in his cottage. He considers going himself to Tommy Brown's, but irresistible passion draws him to Pauline and he takes her in his arms quoting the opening lines of Browning's *Pauline* (1833):

*Pauline, mine own, bend o'er me — thy soft breast
Shall pant to mine — bend o'er me — thy sweet eyes,
And loosened hair, and breathing lips; and arms
Drawing me to thee — . . .*

The violence of the lovers' passion is suggested by the transformation in the brook outside the cottage as a result of the storm:

*Outside in the night the rain came down; the brook whilom so clear of water pure as light
itself — was changed into a dull-brown torrent; its lark-trill of wonder song drowned in
the tumultuous roar of the rain-water from the hill beyond . . .*

This is pretentiously over-written and Williamson's own comment in the margin is 'Damn Rotten!!'. Certainly the handling of the love affair between Willie and Eveline in Devon in *The Dream of Fair Women* is much surer and more satisfying, especially in the revised version. It is much better to introduce Eveline in the company of Pat Colyer, and to make her curious about Willie because she has known his cousin Phillip already. It is better also to make Willie falsely imagine that she has similar interests to his own than to make her a fellow enthusiast for Richard Jefferies. In the published *Flax* it is Mary Ogilvie who is the Jefferies enthusiast. The placing of the love affair in Devon in the summer of 1919 rather than in that of 1917 is also better, because it allows Willie to believe that he is reconstructing his life after the war. Although in the first edition of *The Dream of Fair Women*, as in novel C, Willie rhapsodizes aloud in the vein of Jefferies's *The Story of My Heart* and later essays, in the revised edition he is writing a book, *The Policy of Reconstruction*

or *True Resurrection*, and much of his rhapsodizing is found more realistically within its pages. The consummation of the love between Willie and Eveline in his cottage, when he keeps his strange collection of pets out of his bedroom (chapter 11),²⁶ is handled much better than the episode already noticed in chapter 11 of Book II part 1. Furthermore, the minor characters in *The Dream of Fair Women* are not only more varied and portrayed with greater skill, but also Willie's relationship with them and with his pets is used to illustrate his sympathy and compassion in a way not attempted in novel C.

As already mentioned, I was unable to find part 2 of Book II of novel C in the Archive at Exeter. If it was ever written it would have related the circumstances of the break-up of the love affair between Willie and Pauline in Devon, leading to her departure for Wintersea (Folkestone). However it may well be that Williamson changed his plan, and intended the transition from Devon to Wintersea to follow immediately after the consummation of the love between Willie and Pauline. Be that as it may, Book III of novel C corresponds roughly to the Folkestone chapters of *The Dream of Fair Women* (14–41; the sections 'The Scarlet Thread' and 'The Broken Web'),²⁷ but again the earlier novel is much less rich and satisfying.

Chapter 1 of part 1 of Book III of novel C opens with old Mr Goring sitting alone in an old-fashioned room in a house at Wintersea. He is worried in case his daughter Milly might marry and leave him. Calling Tommy his cat to him for comfort, he recollects that Pauline (his granddaughter) and her husband John Vereker are coming to tea that day. He feels that he must speak severely to Pauline for running off from her husband to Devon. The reason for Pauline's folly he believes to be the fact that her mother was a Frenchwoman who married his scamp of a son Harry. John is shortly going to Mexico and has suffered much from his wife's wayward behaviour. She left Willie in Devon, having sent him a brief note declaring that she is unworthy of him and that she must leave Wintersea with her husband. In *The Dream of Fair Women* the elderly clergyman Mr Fairfax is the grandfather of Lionel, Eveline's husband, and he has two daughters, not one. Eveline is by no means well-born, originally being Eve Caw, illegitimate and of a bad family, removed from her job as under kitchen-maid at Essantville Castle because she has attracted the attention of the young heir. This makes her unstable love-life more credible, and prepares the reader for her ultimate marriage to Naps Spreycombe.

In chapter 2 of Book III part 1 of novel C, John Vereker and Pauline walk on the sea-front at Wintersea. As they listen to a band playing, Milly joins them, and John recalls wistfully his early married happiness with Pauline, who is ten years his junior. He hopes that going to Mexico will make Pauline love him again. As Pauline leaves them she notices Willie in the distance. In chapter 3, as she sits before her looking-glass preparing to go to the theatre to see a revue, *Rumbled*, Milly reflects upon Pauline and her doings. She has indeed returned after having run off for a time to Devon, but now she has another admirer, Captain James Holland, whom she calls Jimmy.

Chapter 4 describes the visit to the theatre, which bears some resemblance to that in chapter 24 of *The Dream of Fair Women*.²⁸ In chapter 5, after the visit to the theatre, John Vereker walks with Pauline and Willie, who has taken a dislike to Jimmy Holland, recognizing him as a rival. They go to Milly's and dance to the gramophone, but when they leave Willie feels depressed, realizing that his *amour* is not prospering. In chapter 6, the next day, Milly reflects further about Pauline, coming to the conclusion that she would be better if she could have a son. However, at the same time Gloria the maid, while dusting Pauline's photograph, addresses it, saying that *she* knows what Pauline is really like! Milly goes shopping and calls for an ice-cream at Spaghetti's. She is still thinking about Pauline and decides that it will be best if her father speak to John and try to advise him on how to win back his wife's love. By chance Milly overhears Willie

and Pauline talking in the restaurant, declaring their love for each other. This makes her resolve to write to her cousin Jenny at Rookhurst, who is in fact Mrs Norman, although on no account must John be told of this further complication. In chapter 7 John makes preparations to leave the next day for Mexico. (I found no more of Book III in the Archive, although it is obvious from Book IV that the affair between Willie and Pauline ends badly.)

The 'Folkestone' chapters of *The Dream of Fair Women* are very much richer and satisfying than the 'Wintersea' chapters of novel C. Apart from the firmer and more mature handling of the main story, the published novel has a rich galaxy of ancillary characters such as Julian Warbeck, Sandy White, Naps Spreycombe, Archibald Dodder, Quillie, Martha, and Aubrey de la Hey to name but some. Then again there is no character to correspond to Mary Ogilvie who really understands and loves Willie, and who is to play a major role in *The Pathway*. The incidents and scenes themselves are also much finer; for example there is nothing in novel C of the Ball on 'Peace Night' nor of Willie's communing with the war dead on the Downs above the town.

* * * * *

Book IV of novel C gives the 'Aftermath' of Willie's affair with Pauline, leading to a new spiritual maturity and hope for the future. It consists of 11 chapters in one part only. Chapter 1 opens on Peace Day, 19 July 1919. Willie is not in Folkestone, as in *The Dream of Fair Women*, but in the Haymarket in London, wearing an ancient straw hat with the brim cut away except for a peak in front. His trousers are slit along the crease. It is a drizzling-wet night and Willie walks to the Embankment. He sees a Verey light go up in celebration, and gets into conversation with two army officers standing nearby. They recall the battle they were in the previous year, in July 1918, and Willie speaks of his dead friend Jack. They then go their separate ways.

In chapter 2 Williamson explains that Willie has been in London for a fortnight looking unsuccessfully for work. He is thinking of a girl, Fragilia, a fellow lodger in the house where he is staying. She has been left with a baby, after the young soldier who was its father was killed in battle. As Willie is reflecting, a bearded but well-spoken tramp approaches, to whom Willie gives a cigarette. The tramp offers to tell the story of his life for a little money, so Willie gives him some, speaking the while about the celebrations which are going on. The tramp has a coughing fit, which Willie fears might be consumptive, but is reassured when his bizarre companion informs him that it is the result of being gassed during the war. His lungs are gone, he declares, and he exists upon a tiny pension. He has had an unhappy love affair, and warns Willie never to trust in the faith of a beautiful woman. This makes Willie recall his betrayal by Pauline at Wintersea. Dawn approaches, and they see Eosphors, the Morning Star, always an important symbol for Williamson.

In chapter 3 Willie and the tramp go to a stall for sausages and tea. That Willie is still obsessed by Pauline is shown by his rage at seeing a tout seeking custom for 'the captain's wife'. He knocks him down, remembering the situation between John Vereker, Pauline and himself. Willie then asks the tramp, who is known as 'Tousled Joe', to join him for breakfast, although Joe has admitted that he has been in prison. They walk together to Willie's lodgings, which are near Paddington Station — at 21, Drearview Place, as we learn in chapter 10. The residents of the house are described: Mr Reeves, a middle-aged man who has made some money during the war; the girl Fragilia and her baby; the 'Colonel', that is Mr G. Simpson, late RQMS of the 'Royal Horse Marines' (perhaps meant to stand for the Royal Horse Artillery?); and Mrs Heddake, the landlady who lives in the basement. Willie conducts Joe to his sombre room on the top storey, where he

fries some bacon and gives the tramp some clothes. While Joe is having a bath, Willie thinks with regret about his early years.

In chapter 4 Fragilia knocks at the door to ask if Willie is all right. She did not hear him come in, and she has been concerned about his absence overnight. He tells her about his encounter with Joe and how he has brought him back with him even if the landlady might not approve. Fragilia recounts the events of the previous night in the house; the 'Colonel' singing over-loudly after celebrating Peace Day and thus angering the prim Mr Reeves with whom he had had an altercation, during which her 'reputation' had been mentioned. Willie goes in to see her baby, Rexie, and Williamson tells how the girl is really Miss Baker, but was given the name Fragilia by a poet who preceded Willie in the room he occupies. Joe decides that he must go, but hopes, he declares, to be able to return Willie's kindness. In the event, as we learn, he does this with his life. Left alone, Willie returns to obsessional thoughts about Pauline. He feels that he cannot go back to Rookhurst; it is spoiled now and no longer the place of his boyhood. Yet, adds Williamson, the swallows are wiser than Willie, for they always have an instinctive belief in *life*.

In chapter 5 it is now autumn 1919; Willie has stayed on in London. In Trafalgar Square a newsboy and a policeman discuss his eccentric appearance and behaviour, wondering if he is mad. He is in a reverie, but is taken out of it by meeting Mrs Norman and Elsie who have just come from Charing Cross Station. They all go to a restaurant, where Willie refuses their offer of taking him back to live with them at Rookhurst. Mr Norman is starting a chicken farm, they inform him, and Willie could help him with the venture. However Willie tells them that he is getting a job on *The Daily Recorder*. Elsie is disappointed by Willie's refusal; now she regrets having given up Willie for Dick, having discovered that really she loves Willie. Mrs Norman thinks that the refusal probably has something to do with Pauline, and wishes secretly that Willie could forget her.

In chapter 6 it is Armistice Day, 11 November 1919. Crowds of people are in the streets; a maroon goes off and the silence follows. Later Willie meets Joe, whom he invites the next day to dinner and to a performance of Stravinsky's *The Nightingale* at Covent Garden. Joe is no longer a tramp, having managed to get a job washing down motor cars.

In chapter 7, Willie, who has a cold coming on, and Joe queue for tickets at Covent Garden and are entertained by buskers. Once inside they find the performance so beautiful that they are reduced to tears. However they leave after the first act because Joe has a severe coughing fit. They walk to Piccadilly and Willie sees Pauline, or so he thinks, in a red cloak. She speaks to a man, and they go off together in a taxi. Willie in a state of excited rage jumps into a cab to follow them, telling Joe to go to his lodgings. Willie's obsession with Pauline has taken a morbid tinge; he is wracked by anxiety that she might have been divorced by her husband and gone on the streets. The supposed Pauline and her escort alight at a house near Paddington Station and go indoors. Willie, whose cold is by now turning feverish, rings the bell and bursts into the house only to discover that the girl is not in fact Pauline. The man is abusive, and as Willie is leaving, he kicks him in the back. In Willie's overwrought state he reacts violently; 'smashes' the man and then runs off. In the published *Flax* Williamson has sense enough not to include an episode like this. Although it is doubtless meant to illustrate Willie's neurosis, it is distasteful, ill-contrived and well omitted.

In chapter 8 Willie reaches his lodgings through a thick fog which has come down. As he arrives he hears Mr Reeves complaining to the landlady about the 'Colonel's' behaviour. Willie now has a distressing fever, but reads what he has already written of a novel, *The Pathetic Iconoclast*. He feels hollow inside, and recalls Richard Jefferies's words: 'I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strew the sward of the hills.'²⁹ *His* Pauline, the Pauline of his imagination had died that evening when he saw

her kissing Captain Holland. He contemplates suicide; he will shoot himself with his service revolver. In preparation for this he writes a letter of farewell to Pauline. However, recalling Francis Thompson's poem 'The Hound of Heaven' he is unable to kill himself. He cries out in bitter distress and sinks to the carpet. Frailia hears him and comes to comfort him. She sees that he is ill, and advises him to go to bed. He refuses and rushes out into the night in delirium. Just as he is about to be knocked down by a cab, Joe, who is on his way to Willie's lodgings, intervenes; he pushes him away, but is himself knocked down.

In chapter 9 Willie has been taken back to his lodgings and is in bed. The 'Colonel' feels sure that a gentleman like Willie must have some relatives somewhere, but the problem is, how to get in touch with them? Should the letter to Mrs Vereker be posted or not? Willie is still delirious and shouts: 'Pauline, Pauline — why don't you notice me any more?' From this it is obvious to his fellow lodgers that he has been jilted. Willie has developed double pneumonia and pleurisy; his serious condition makes Frailia recall the death of her lover, Reginald Sinclair, married but despised by his wife, falling in love with herself and then being killed in France. The doctor pronounces that Willie has not yet reached the crisis of his illness. Joe is dead; his back having been broken in the accident. A newspaper reporter arrives, scenting a 'story'; he looks at Willie's novel, and declares that it is very promising. Frailia decides to write to Mrs Vereker to tell her of Willie's condition. In his delirium he imagines himself to be back before the Hindenburg Line; he is a Transport Officer to the Machine Gun Corps and witnesses the failure of an attack. Frailia hearing him quote the words of Christ: 'Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden' (Matt. xi. 28) wonders if perhaps he will die.

At this point, at the beginning of chapter 10, Mr and Mrs Norman and Elsie arrive. The landlady admits them, and judging by their speech and manner, thinks that Willie may be an earl in disguise. Willie's crisis passes successfully and he survives. As he is very weak, Mr Norman pretends for the time being that Joe is still alive, as is Big Willum from Rookhurst, although in fact the latter died during the war. The women withdraw and Willie asks Mr Norman if he can see Pauline. Mrs Norman now regrets being harsh to Willie about Pauline when they met in the early summer. She has since been to see Pauline who agreed that it was her duty to give Willie up. Pauline herself now arrives; taken to Willie she embraces him and wills him to live.

Book IV and the whole novel conclude with chapter 11. It is now just before Christmas 1919, and Willie is going to Rookhurst the next day. Frailia and Rexie are to accompany him for the Christmas season, and afterwards it might well be that in due course the 'Colonel' will marry Frailia. Willie is sitting in front of a log fire in his lodgings:

. . . burning in the grate the tawny flames gave back that which they had absorbed: the sunlight, the flower-fragrance, the purity of the rain-drop. Up the chimney they curled and fluttered, eager to wander into the night sky under the stars that had gleamed through the dark foliage of their remembered tree . . . nothing was lost.

Willie remembers the fire of logs kindled by Pauline on their last evening together in Devon when the rain had lashed down (novel C, Book II, part 1, chapter 11):

But then he had not thought of the flames being so beautiful; he had been weaving the Flax of Dream with woman beauty only as the pattern before him.

Now, however, he feels at peace; he does not feel that Jack and Joe are dead; they seem to be near him. He has matured greatly and he can now look forward to the future with hope:

Oh, he was going to be so happy! All the beauty of the country he would watch, and the beauty that was in every fellow creature if one only sought for it! One day, perhaps, he would meet a dear sweet girl: they would be wonderful pals — love the same things: how happy they would be! Love that had a chance of lasting, not built on Illusion — poor shattered Illusion!, but on kindness, respect and affection.

In the grate only the grey purified ash remains. 'The weaver has learnt his craft.'

Expanding slightly the account given in the Valediction to the revised edition of *The Dream of Fair Women* (1931) the epilogue 'Post-War' to the same novel in the finally revised one-volume edition of the *Flax* (1936) recounts that Willie goes to Phillip in London, after leaving Folkestone, and then works as a labourer with the War Graves Commission in France. In *The Pathway* in this same edition of the *Flax*. Willie speaks of having been to Germany also, where he saw both the post-war distress of the German people and what he regards as their hope for a happier future under the leadership of Hitler.³⁰ This is much better than the story of Willie's life after he leaves Folkestone in Book IV of novel C, which has elements of melodramatic sensationalism about it. Nevertheless, the upshot is the same: Willie gets over his disastrous love-affair and emerges with a new idealism and altruism. His 'message' in *The Pathway* has followed upon a longer and more rewarding period of struggle, but the Willie at the end of novel C does have the potentiality of spiritual growth.

The writing of novel C seems in many ways to have been a spiritual and emotional therapy for Williamson. In a notebook in the Archive at Exeter 'begun April 1919 — at No. 3 Rest Camp, Folkestone', he writes down some 'Thoughts for the "Three Phases" '. Having quoted Richard Jefferies's words from *The Story of My Heart*: 'It is eternity now, I am in the midst of it. It is about me in the sunshine. . .',³¹ he writes that this notebook was written 'during the rhapsody of the "Second Phase" which commenced on March 6, 1919 and flowered exquisitely, and suddenly died on June 10, 1919'. This seems to relate not merely to his discovery of Richard Jefferies's *The Story of My Heart* and to the joy he felt in writing the short nature essays found in this notebook, but also to the personal experience which he describes in a short plan for a poem about the people he has loved, dated '20/9/19'. The relevant passage is:

*Mignon loved me, cherished me, made me happy
and everything bright and beautiful.
Then my dream faded. She never really cared.*

In *The Dream of Fair Women* Sandy White's pet name for Eveline is Mignon,³² and it appears likely that in novel C Williamson is exorcising an experience by portraying its essence in art. As well as the Mignon experience it may well be that he is reliving his friendship with, and loss of, Terence Tetley, referred to also in the plan:

Terence does not want me. He wants to break away.

Williamson at the moment of writing believes himself to be 'really alone', and sadly asks:

Can anyone wonder that I feel just about ended with everything?

Of course Williamson was anything but ended; he was only beginning upon a career as a major creative writer! Shortly after completing novel C he began *The Beautiful Years* in the form in which we know it in the first edition. The manuscript notebook of this novel is also in the Archive at Exeter; it is undated, but Williamson informs us in the first printed

edition that it was written 'June–November 1920'. On the inside of the front cover of the manuscript notebook, in a modest and self-deprecating note dated '21/1/21' Williamson wrote: 'This story was written anyhow. I never knew what to write next. My characters grew as I wrote.' In fact it is obvious that the book welled up from the depths of his creative imagination, being very much better than the three unpublished novels which I have discussed. It represents not only a great advance in writing skill, but also in maturity of outlook. It may have been written spontaneously, but from the start Williamson did have an overall intention in what became the published *Flax of Dream*. In the manuscript note which I have just quoted, he goes on to admit that: 'the description of Jim Holland is an exact copy of Besant's description of Jefferies in his *Eulogy*.³³ It is done on purpose. This book is meant to be one of 4, thus:

- The Beautiful Years (8–11)
- Pauper Spirits (14–18)
- The Flax of Dream (18–22)
- The Bludgeon (The Life of Mary Ogilvie and W. Maddison coming in half-way, and then le fin).'

In the published version of course this plan was somewhat modified, but in essence it was adhered to. In the revised version of the novels in the *Flax* and especially in the one-volume edition of 1936 Williamson merely expressed more faithfully and successfully his underlying idea. The apprentice novelist had become a master.

NOTES

15. For an account of the circumstances and chronology of the composition of *The Pathway*, see the Preface to the de luxe edition (1931) pp. 1–7, dated 9 August, 1931.
16. *The Flax of Dream*, 1 volume revised edn. (1936) pp. 65–8.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–12.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 121–4.
19. *The Beautiful Years*, ch. 11, *Flax*, 1 vol. edn. (1936) pp. 86–88.
20. *Flax*, 1 vol. edn. (1936) pp. 511–46.
21. Cécile Chaminade (1857–1944) was known mainly for her light piano pieces.
22. Cf. the story 'Tiger's Teeth', *The Lone Swallows*, 1st edn. (1922) pp. 96–115; *ibid.*, revised edn. (1933) pp. 24–36.
23. *Flax*, 1 vol. edn. (1936) pp. 566–81, 682–7.
24. I have discussed this point in my article 'Henry Williamson's *The Flax of Dream*: a Reappraisal', *Durham University Journal*, vol. lxxvi, no. 1 (December, 1983) p. 93.
25. *The Dream of Fair Women*, ch. 10; *Flax*, 1 vol. edn. (1936) p. 660.
26. *Flax*, 1 vol. edn. (1936) pp. 666–72.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 697–981.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 822–35.
29. This is a slight misquotation; Jefferies wrote: 'I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill' ('Hours of Spring', *Field and Hedgerow*, 1889). The essay is included in Williamson's *Richard Jefferies: Selections of his work*, 1937, pp. 378–401. The quotation is found on pp. 383–4.
30. *The Pathway*, ch. 2; *Flax*, 1 vol. edn. (1936) pp. 1029–30.
31. *The Story of My Heart* (1883) ch. 3. The quotation is to be found in Williamson's *Richard Jefferies: Selections of his Work* (1937) p. 226.
32. *The Dream of Fair Women*, ch. 14; *Flax*, 1 vol. edn. (1936) p. 717.
33. See Walter Besant, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies* (1893) ch. 2, pp. 57–8.