# How Good is *Tarka the Otter* as Literature?

*J.W. Blench*

Since it first appeared in 1927 Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter: His Joyful Water-Life and Death in the Country of the Two Rivers* has never, so far as I know, been out of print. It has appeared in a variety of editions, the most attractive being those with illustrations—by C.F. Tunnicliffe (1932), by Barry Driscoll (1964), by 'stills' from the Rank Organization film of the book (1978) and by Tunnicliffe together with photographs by Simon McBride (1985). Williamson won the Hawthornden Prize with *Tarka* in 1928, thus attaining to literary recognition, although he justifiably felt somewhat nettled that he was ever afterwards popularly thought of as 'the *Tarka the Otter* man', when he was also and more importantly a major novelist.

The initial reaction to *Tarka* was overwhelmingly favourable. John Galsworthy, who had seen it before publication, wrote about it to Williamson in glowing terms:

> *I recognise in it an extraordinary piece of work, packed with observation transmuted with remarkable imagination. Apart from its value as an imaginary history of the otter, it confirms you as a really fine writer. The passage describing the coming down of that terrible winter is really inspired. I do hope it has the success it deserves.*[1]

Recommending Williamson's work to Edward Garnett, Galsworthy characterized Williamson as 'a strange and sensitive nature lover, and worshipper of Jefferies and Hudson', and went on to remark:

> *The Old Stag is his best book, but he's got one in Press on the life of an otter that he thinks is better. I told him to send you proof of the new book. If you like it give him a word of encouragement. He can see and he can write.*[2]

Garnett did like it and wrote to Williamson:

> *Well* Tarka *is a wonderful thing, a regular epic. It is like nothing I've read — so strong and racing and so convincingly fresh in all its details . . . Altogether I think you are going strong and I shall follow your work with great interest.*[3]

Shortly before *Tarka* was published, Garnett in turn recommended it to Arnold Bennett, writing:

> *There is an extraordinarily fine thing to be published on Oct. 12. "Tarka the Otter" by Henry Williamson . . . It's beautifully written. If you take it up you will see what I mean.*[4]

In fact Bennett reviewed *Tarka* very favourably in *The Evening Standard*, declaring that he was giving up descriptive writing as a result of Williamson's achievement.[5] The reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* for 10 November 1927 described the picture of wildlife which Williamson paints in *Tarka* as 'a brilliant one presented with great charm and technical skill'. True, he states that he noticed what he considers to be an inclination to preciosity of style, and remarks upon Williamson's use of 'a great number of strange words, or words divorced from their ordinary meanings'. However this is not for him a serious blemish, because 'the general effect is remarkably live, and we are won over to forgive extravagances by the vividness of his descriptions'. The reviewer's summing-up is generous, he characterizes the book as 'a brave tale, bravely told' (p. 805).

In the autumn of 1927 Edward Garnett sent a proof copy of *Tarka* to T.E. Lawrence ('Lawrence of Arabia') then serving in the R.A.F. in Karachi, as Aircraftsman Shaw. Lawrence acknowledged the receipt of the book in a letter dated 23 December 1927:

'Tarka was good. I am having it stitched together to lend to the erks'.[6] Lawrence followed this up with a letter to Garnett dated 20 January 1928 containing a detailed criticism of *Tarka*, leaving it to Garnett's judgement whether or not he forwarded the letter to Williamson.[7] Garnett did so, and in *Genius of Friendship: T.E. Lawrence* (published in 1941, although written in 1936) Williamson describes the euphoric excitement which the arrival of the letter written in 'a small and meticulous hand' caused:

> *'It's from Lawrence of Arabia', I said to Loetitia. 'I knew it would happen. When I read the first paragraph of his Revolt in the Desert I knew we were alike, mentally, and one day we should be friends.' I felt firmer within myself, more self-strong; for generally I was without self-assurance, owing to loneliness and the need constantly to hold my ideas in a community which did not accept those ideas or beliefs. No work was done that day in the little writing room . . .*[8]

The letter itself can be read conveniently in a posthumously published collection of Lawrence's criticism introduced by his brother A.W. Lawrence, *Men in Print: Essays in Literary Criticism* (1914). His general reaction is given in an enthusiastic postscript:

> *Very many thanks for sending it* [Tarka] *to me. It has kept me sizzling with joy for three weeks. The best thing I've met with for ever so long. Fresh, hopeful, fecund, and so, so, careful. It is heartening to see a writer caring much for his words, and chasing and chiselling them with such firmness.*[9]

The detailed criticisms in the main body of the letter were offered on the mistaken assumption that *Tarka* was Williamson's first book, but they are of considerable interest nevertheless. With accurate percipience Lawrence recognizes the greatness of the winter scene in Chapter 9, deeming its climax[10] to be 'almost fit for its wonder to be put next to Traherne's "orient wheat", as one of the finest passages of English prose. Sense, sound, colour all quite beyond criticism; beyond ordinary admiration too.'[11] He likes Marland Jimmy the old otter and Nog the heron,[12] although he reacts against the predatory nature of otters and is uneasy with the violent scenes.[13] He considers the last paragraphs in the book to be 'very fine stuff', yet finds them 'almost too skilful':

> *A piece so cunning, so composed, so artful, requires to be read in court dress, rather as Machiavelli used to write! Symbolic, parabolic, realistic:—but not real.*[14]

However he sees clearly the difficulty of achieving a traditional simplicity by anyone writing at that time: 'so spiced and tormented a generation as ours can hardly find a simplicity which does not ring false: so perhaps it is better to admit our complexity, and develop it to the nth.'[15] Being a very busy man with limited time for reading Lawrence found, he declares, the closely packed prose of *Tarka* very exacting; he feels that a chance to do some skipping would have helped him.[16] Furthermore, like the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer already noticed, he is uncertain about the wisdom of using Devon dialect words:

> *. . . Dimmity, skillet, cranching, peggle, vuz-peg, quap, fitch, vair, eve-light, uvver, hover, pill, day-hide, up-trends, channer, glidder, mazzard, yanning:—all these are words of local value only: and while one or two of them might add colour, twenty only bring darkness.*[17]

Williamson did not resent these criticisms; after all, Lawrence had stated frankly: 'I shouldn't have written so much about the book if it was not, in my judgement, particularly well worth writing about.'[18] In fact Williamson made some revisions in the light of the criticisms to the new edition of *Tarka* which appeared in June 1928, but nevertheless

he retained his artistic independence and where he believed Lawrence to be mistaken, he left the text unaltered.

Williamson replied to Lawrence's letter, sending him his only remaining copy of *The Old Stag* 'with notes of how this and that idea and detail had been gleaned or grafted; how this sentence, like some of his own, had the Conradian aural rhythm reinforced by a sharper modern freedom of sight . . .'[19] Lawrence's reply to this letter confirmed Williamson's belief that he and Lawrence had an affinity of spirit, and subsequent re-readings of *Tarka* strengthened Lawrence's high opinion of it. 'You'd laugh,' he wrote to Williamson about a year later, 'to hear that I still pick up Tarka often, read a few pages and put it down. I find it holds more than I thought, even at first . . .'[20] Then, shortly before Christmas 1933 he wrote: 'Lately I have re-read Tarka—and find the old mastery that shocked and startled me in India. It is a fine book. You could make Bradshaw interesting, if you edited it.'[21]

Thomas Hardy also thought highly of *Tarka*. In a fascinating passage in *Goodbye West Country* Williamson recounts the circumstances of how Hardy came to read *Tarka*. When travelling to London with two friends in the autumn of 1927 Williamson called upon impulse to see Hardy at Max Gate. He was received courteously and asked permission to send Hardy a copy of *Tarka*. 'Wasn't otter-hunting cruel', asked Hardy with 'a bird-like glance of wisdom'. Williamson replied that he did not like it, 'but had tried to write a book without that not-liking in it'. In due course he sent a copy of the vellum-bound subscription edition of *Tarka* to Hardy. Later, Mrs. Hardy wrote to the publisher 'that Hardy wanted his opinion quoted in an advertisement, in the words "A remarkable book" '.[22]

This high praise from one of the most distinguished men of letters then living was followed by the award of the Hawthornden Prize to Williamson for *Tarka*. Presenting the prize on 12 June 1928 at the Aeolian Hall in London, John Galsworthy, in the words of *The Times* report (13 June 1928, p. 11):

> *. . . said that Mr Williamson was the finest and most intimate living interpreter of the drama of wild life. For sheer beauty and power it was not easy to match his phrases in the whole of English literature. In him they had a writer akin to Richard Jefferies and W.H. Hudson in the power of feeling, seeing and expressing nature in her many moods.*

The event was given wide press coverage[23] and Williamson was fully launched upon his literary career.

A few years later *Tarka* received further praise from I. Waveney Girvan in his book *A Bibliography and Critical Survey of the Words of Henry Williamson* (Chipping Campden, 1931). 'The naturalist and novelist combined', he declares, 'to make *Tarka the Otter* one of the finest and most moving of animal stories. . .'(p. 11). He notices with approval the lack of sentimentality in the book together with its blend of careful observation and imagination, although he has reservations about its style;

> *Williamson seems to have attempted faultlessness of style and somewhat faultily to have achieved it: it is further testimony to the novel that it is able to carry its author's style successfully. (ibid.)*

An aspect of the style of *Tarka* was criticized more severely, by Colin Wilson, in a short general appraisal of Williamson's achievement which first appeared in *The Aylesford Review*,[24] and was subsequently reprinted in the collection *Eagle and Earwig* (1967). While readily admitting that Williamson can 'write superbly' in *Tarka*, nevertheless, he avers:

> Tarka *for all its precision is full of overblown words and bits of would-be fine writing. There are words like 'sere' and 'a-glimmer', he never seems to know when to stop the beautiful*

> *sentence: 'At the tail of the pool [the river] quickened smoothly into paws of water' is spoiled by the addition: 'with star-streaming claws'. One can see why T.E. Lawrence admired him, for Lawrence also had his delusions about 'fine writing', as when, at the beginning of* Seven Pillars, *he writes that the heat of Arabia 'came out and struck us like a sword'.*(p. 232)

That image of course came home with tremendous force to Williamson, when he read it in *Revolt in the Desert*, the abridgement of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.[25] Wilson returns to the attack in a later piece on Williamson, a review-article in *The Literary Review* on Fr. Brocard Sewell's symposium, *Henry Williamson: the Man, the Writings* (1980). In this article Wilson declares that he perceives in Williamson 'the tendency to overwrite, to use "poetic" language where concrete expressions would do a better job', revealing in his opinion 'the element of show-off' in Williamson's character.[26] Nevertheless Wilson does believe *Tarka* and its companion-piece *Salar the Salmon* (1935) to be excellent for the 'mysticism' to be found in them; they are, he affirms, 'Williamson's declarations of the oneness of life.'[27] This theme in *Tarka* has been stressed by Bryan Wake in his percipient and sensitive article *'Tarka*: the Wonder and the Oneness' in *The Henry William Society Journal*.[28] For him, the 'rich prose poetry' of Williamson's words is fully justified as the medium by which the reader is enabled to enter imaginatively into the rich and varied non-human natural world which is the main substance of the book.

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How good then *is* Tarka the Otter as literature? Does it deserve its popularity when looked at critically? I believe that assuredly it does, and I shall now discuss Williamson's artistic achievement in the book, as I see it.

While it is a fairly straightforward task to describe the appearance and manner of life of non-human species in an external or 'scientific' way (as for example in the works of J.H. Fabre,[29] in Richard Clapham's *The Book of the Otter* [1922], in Philip Wayre's *The Private Life of the Otter*, 1979, or in Paul Chanin's *The Natural History of Otters*, 1985) there is a considerable artistic problem involved in presenting such species in literature in such a way as to render something of their 'thoughts', 'feelings' and sensations *from within*. Whereas human beings can, by observation and imagination 'get inside' other human beings in actual life with remarkable success, and indeed can create in literature human characters with striking verisimilitude, nevertheless we know that we cannot with any degree of accuracy 'get inside' animals and fish in this way. However, it is not fanciful to recognize some kinship between all living sentient creatures. This recognition leads, in traditional fables and folk-tales, to the anthropomorphic presentation of such creatures. Their natural qualities suggest human equivalents, and the 'beast' characters can then be used in stories from which 'morals' applicable to human beings can be drawn, or more simply the stories can illustrate general truths about human life. This is the method used in the fables of Aesop, Phaedrus and La Fontaine, in the *Roman de Renart*, Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*, the Uncle Remus stories of Joel Chandler Harris, and in Kipling's *Jungle Books*. Richard Adams's *Watership Down* (1972) does indeed attempt to portray much of the genuine life-style of rabbits, but his rabbit characters use human speech and his story has within it elements of allegory and symbolism. A simpler attempt to render the actual life of animals is made by Sir John Fortescue in *The Story of a Red Deer* (1897) although his animal characters also use human speech. Similarly Brian Carter in his *A Black Fox Running* (1981) and *Nightworld: the Saga of the Sea-cliff Badgers* (1987) is primarily interested in getting his readers to understand and love wildlife, but he too makes his animals talk.

Henry Williamson strikes a balance between 'external' presentation and anthropomorphism in his presentation of wildlife. He gives his wild creatures names and presents them as 'characters' but he anthropomorphizes them only up to a point. He renders their lives from within, and in many respects from their point of view, but he never makes them use human speech. On the contrary, he tries to give the sounds they actually make, in so far as this is possible using the alphabet. For example, within the first paragraph of *Tarka* we hear the cry of Old Nog the heron, written as *Kra-a-ark!*, and various otter sounds are heard throughout the book; the mewing of the cubs, the whistle of greeting, *Hu-ee-ee-ic!*, the threat *Iss-iss-ic-yang!* and the cry of anger *Yinn-yinn-y-y-ikk-r!* Many other sounds are also heard; the *peet!* of the kingfisher, the *Chee-chee* and *Chizzy-chizzy-te!* of the coal-tit, the *Chissick, chiss-ick* of the grey wagtail, the *Cu-u-ur-leek, cur-r-r-leek!* of the curlew, the *Crr-crr* and *Kron-n-n-nnk!* of the raven, the *Aa-aa!* of the crow, the angry *Aik-aik-aik* of the peregrine falcon, the *Kak-kak-kak* of rage of the weasel and the bark *Wuff, wuff!* of the seal. It maybe that Williamson was influenced in his method of presenting wildlife characters by Frederick St. Mars, who in some of his stories gives his creatures names but does not make them talk. It seems likely that Williamson knew Mars's work just before the First World War, as in *The Innocent Moon* (1961) the ninth novel in the *Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* series, Phillip Maddison, drawn in many aspects from Williamson himself, remembers reading Mars's stories at that time.[30] Certainly Williamson believed profoundly in the kinship of mankind and non-human species and declared in several places that the best way to understand them was to recognize this fact. For example, in the introduction to *Nature in Britain: an Illustrated Survey* (1936) he writes:

> *My own personal belief is that animals and birds, which are structurally akin to us, and appear to feel and act in many ways as we feel and act, are best to be understood by those despised individuals who "humanize" them. Furthermore, I believe the judgements, based on feeling, of such "sentimentalists" are likely to be truer than those of mediocre science based on observed effect and a strict determination to assume no cause . . . Again and again I have seen animals and birds behaving exactly as I would have behaved in the same circumstances.* (pp. 2–3)

In *Tarka* Williamson develops the method which he had used in the earlier volumes, *Chakchek the Peregrine* (1923) and *The Old Stag* (1926); indeed some of the characters in *Tarka*, like Chakchek, Mewliboy the buzzard, Old Nog the heron, Swagdagger the stoat, Kronk the raven, Bloody Bill Brock the badger, and Deadlock the hound are first encountered in these earlier volumes.

Tarka is however a more memorable character than any of these. Why should this be so? The answer is, I think, that Williamson had for a time, in his early days in Devon after the First World War, a tame otter, to which he became much attached and with which he felt an imaginative affinity. The circumstances in which he got his otter are significant for an understanding of why he came to love it so dearly. One morning, in 1921, when he was living at Skirr Cottage in Georgeham, a stranger called to enlist his help in saving the lives of some otter cubs whose mother had been shot by a local farmer. The stranger had been badly wounded during the war and lacked the strength necessary to dig out the cubs, which were within an old earth-choked field drain. As an ex-service man himself, Williamson was delighted to help, and he was able to bring out safely the one cub that remained alive. The cub was difficult to rear, and Williamson looked after it for a time on behalf of his new friend, whose remaining strength was now slowly ebbing as a result of his wounds. Fortunately the otter was accepted by Williamson's pets, two spaniels and a cat, and in due course it was able to go back to its master. However during that summer of 1921 Williamson himself had great fun playing with it.

Although it had been born wild, it took him as its friend, 'and', he writes:

> *for hours we used to play with a jet of water from a hose-pipe on the lawn, the animal natural in its fur and the man in a bathing suit; and while playing thoughtlessly, happily, it seemed that the personality of the otter was the same as my own: interchangeable. I would lie on my back in the sun and hold the hose so that the water splattered on my chest, while a friend* [i.e. the wounded ex-soldier] *took the whining otter indoors. He would release it, and it would return in a gliding run, low and swift, and greet me with a sort of mutter, like* tuckatuck, *and lie on my chest so that the water should splatter on its chest. When the jet was turned on it, the otter would try to clutch and bite it, and roll over and hug it and romp round me full of joy. We shared identical feelings; and if a mediocre scientific attitude tries to prove otherwise, it will be from its own dull wits.*[31]

In the autumn of the same year, Williamson's friend, now dying, went into hospital, and the otter came to live at Williamson's cottage. He tried to keep its existence fairly secret, but at twilight it would accompany him and his dogs on walks in the fields and lanes nearby, hunting for eels and small trout in a stream, or romping on the sea-shore. One night disaster struck; the otter was caught by a paw in a gin-trap, and before Williamson could release it, it escaped at the cost of leaving two toes of the paw behind. He searched for it for months afterwards, but never found it again, although on several occasions it seemed to him that perhaps he had been near it.[32] In some ways *Tarka the Otter* is a tribute to its memory. This pet otter was dear to Williamson, I would suggest, not only because of its attractive ways and the affinity he felt for it, but because, like its original owner it was a victim—he of the war, the otter of man's cruelty. It became associated in Williamson's mind I believe with his dead and wounded comrades of the war. His quest to find it again sprang from the same sort of compassion which he felt for the oil-contaminated razor-bill he looked after at Skirr Cottage together with an assortment of other wild pets, and especially of course from the same sort of love which he felt for the owls that lived between his ceiling and thatched roof.[33] This sort of imaginative sympathy is like that recommended by Coleridge in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and ultimately is of a religious nature, akin to the universal charity of St. Francis of Assisi. I shall never forget the way that Williamson spoke to a dog and stroked its head, when I met him in September 1975; the communication between them was quite beyond that usual between a man and a non-human creature. The dog looked at him with eyes full of adoration as he spoke kindly and gently to it, expressing a sympathy which had about it an element of genuine mysticism.

It is undoubtedly the successful artistic presentation in *Tarka* of a religious vision of the at-one-ness of all natural things including man, 'under the fostering hand of the Creator' (to use a beautiful phrase of Sir Oswald Mosley, which became one of Williamson's favourite quotations) which makes it the great book it is. By means of imagination and observation Williamson creates Tarka's life so that the reader can identify in many ways with it, can see things from Tarka's point of view and live his life with him, entering into the inner world of his sensibility. This does not mean that the reader becomes less human; on the contrary, he becomes more truly human as he realizes that he is part of the living natural world. He recognizes that while he is a member of a distinct species, nevertheless this species is not isolated from the rest of Creation. This is a genuine spiritual illumination, and it is the reason why for so many people *Tarka* is a book which has changed their outlook by enriching their appreciation of the natural world and their place within it.

Tarka's life takes place within a real countryside, that of the rivers Taw and Torridge, together with Exmoor, part of Dartmoor and the coast between Bideford and Lynmouth.

His journeys can be followed on a map. However the countryside of the book is not just simply and externally described; it is presented through the eyes of a poet, so that familiar things become magical. This magic is not superimposed upon reality, it is reality itself observed by a man 'possessed of more than usual organic sensibility', to use Wordsworth's famous characterization of the poet in the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*. The reader is able to move easily from the heightened vision of the countryside to the less familiar reality of the lives of Tarka and the other wild creatures in the book. The opening paragraph begins immediately to create the magic; it is masterly in its presentation not merely of a scene, but in its rendering of an 'atmosphere' and an aura:

> *Twilight upon meadow and water, the eve-star shining above the hill, and Old Nog the heron crying* kra-a-ark! *as his slow wings carried him down to the estuary. A whiteness drifting above the sere reeds of the riverside, for the owl had flown from under the middle arch of the stone bridge that once carried the canal across the river.*[34]

The sense of the peace and mysteriousness of evening is excellently conveyed, together with a hint of sadness, appropriate to a story which ends with the death of the protagonist. Otters spend much of their time in water, and it is appropriate that the river should quickly make its impression upon the reader's sensibility. Williamson ensures this by contrasting its power in spate, when it washed away one of the thirteen trees below Canal Bridge, with its present calmness:

> *Now the water had dropped back, and dry sticks lodged on the branches marked the top of the flood. The river flowed slowly through the pool, a-glimmer with the clear green western sky.*[35]

However the river is in constant movement and below the pool, its flow quickens:

> *At the tail of the pool it quickened slowly into paws of water, with star-streaming claws. The water murmured against the stones. Jets and rills ran fast and shallow to an island, on which grew a leaning willow tree. Down from here the river moved swift and polished. Alder and sallow grew in its banks. Round a bend it hastened, musical over many stretches of shillet, at the end of the bend it merged into a dull silence of deep saltwater and its bright spirit was lost.*[36]

The saltwater itself nevertheless is in motion:

> *Every twelve hours the sea passed an arm under Halfpenny Bridge, a minute's heron-flight below, and the spring tides felt the banks as far as the bend. The water moved down immediately, for the tide's head had no rest.*[37]

We recall this passage as we read the end of the book, where Tarka, exhausted by hours of pursuit by the Hunt, drifts up with the tide to meet his death in the jaws of the hound Deadlock. The dominant tone of the opening scene in contrast is quiet, and the feeling elegiac:

> *Over the meadow a mist was moving, white and silent as the fringe of down on the owl's feathers. Since the fading of shadows it had been straying from the wood beyond the mill-leat, bearing in its breath the scents of the day when bees had bended bluebell and primrose. Now the bees slept, and mice were running through the flowers.*

It is spring time, but the past both recent and remote is remembered:

> *Over the old year's leaves the vapour moved, silent and wan, the wraith of waters once filling the ancient wide river-bed—men say that the sea's tides covered all this land, when the Roman galleys drifted under the hills.*[38]

The effect is analagous to that of a theme in a minor key in an operatic overture which anticipates the calm which returns after the tragic story has run its course. At the end of *Tarka* we are left with the peace of nature and I think that this opening is doubly effective when we come to re-read the book.

The whole of Tarka's story takes place against the background of nature in its different seasons, types of landscape and varied moods. Williamson admired Richard Jefferies's keen sight and his ability to describe nature vividly;[39] he in his turn is remarkable in *Tarka* in his portrayal of the scenery of North Devon—so much so that it is now called by many 'the Williamson Country', just as that part of Dorset around Dorchester is referred to as 'the Hardy Country' or as the Lake District is known as 'the Wordsworth Country'. One could illustrate Williamson's powers in this respect by many passages,[40] but I should like to point particularly to two of them, which I think are of exceptionally fine quality. The first is the celebrated description of the coming of winter to the Braunton Burrows, and especially the following paragraph. Tarka and Greymuzzle are lying up near a cattle-shippen (i.e. a roofed shed, one side of which is open to allow cattle to come in and out of the shelter provided):

> *A dull red sun, without heat or rays, moved over them, sinking slowly down the sky. For two days and two nights the frosty vapour lay over the Burrows, and then came a north wind which poured like liquid glass from Exmoor and made all things distinct. The wind made whips of the dwarf willows, and hissed through clumps of great sea-rushes. The spines of the marram grasses scratched wildly at the rushing air, which passed over the hollows where larks and linnets crouched with puffed feathers. Like a spirit freed by the sun's ruin and levelling all things before a new creation the wind drove grains of sand against the legs and ruffled feathers of the little birds, as though it would breathe annihilation upon them, strip their frail bones of skin and flesh, and grind them until they became again that which was before the earth's old travail. Vainly the sharp and hard points of the marram grasses drew their circles on the sand: the Icicle spirit was coming, and no terrestrial power could exorcise it.*[41]

The sun, the source of heat, light, and naturally speaking, of life itself has become ineffective. The freezing fog is dispersed by a keen wind which makes the atmosphere unusually clear—the image of 'liquid glass' is strikingly felicitous in expressing this. The wind transforms the marram grasses and sand into instruments of destruction against the birds. It seems to be more than a mere wind, it is the destructive principle itself, loosed upon the world by 'the sun's ruin'. The movement from particular scene to the negative force within the Cosmos is finely managed. In contrast, I should like to draw attention to a passage which celebrates the benign, creative aspect of nature. Spring follows upon winter; the 'south wind breaks the roots and talons of the Icicle Spirit' and Tarka, having escaped from a gin-trap in a farmyard (at the cost of some toes, like Williamson's tame otter) journeys up the river Taw to its source on Dartmoor. Williamson renders admirably the mystery and awesomeness of this region. Again there is mist, but now it is not destructive; it is kindly and fostering as it enfolds the moor:

> *Bogs and hummocks of the Great Kneeset were dimmed and occluded; the hill was higher than the clouds. In drifts and hollows of silence the vapour passed, moving with the muffled wind over water plashes colourless in reflection. Sometimes a colder waft brought the sound of slow trickling, here in the fen five rivers began, in peat darker than the otter that had followed one up to its source.*[42]

Then (if I may borow phrases from Shakespeare and Hopkins) in a passage full of feeling for 'great creating Nature'[43] Williamson responds sensitively to the 'dearest freshness deep down things':[44]

*The river's life began without sound, in darkness of peat that was heather grown in ancient sunlight; but on the slope of the hill, among the green rushes, the river ran bright in spirit, finding the granite that first made its song.*[45]

'Ancient sunlight' was to become one of Williamson's key concepts; here its meaning is less developed than it became, it expresses quite simply his sense of the remote past. He realizes nevertheless that the present is fully alive; the river emerges from nature's past into a vital and hopeful 'today'. Tarka lives his life against a background of living nature, and at the end of the book his spirit returns to the life of nature whence it came.

Tarka's life itself is portrayed with extraordinary immediateness; the reader becomes deeply involved in his doings and concerned about his welfare from the beginning. He feels a deep sense of loss at his death. It is noteworthy that Williamson holds the balance very well between the joyous aspects of Tarka's life and the sorrowful; he renders both the attractive side of his nature and the less agreeable, darker, more negative side. We delight in his playful ways, not just as a cub, but as an adult when he has fun with an old cocoa-tin or a glass pebble.[46] We share his happiness with his mates Greymuzzle and White-tip, and we enter with him into the pleasing freedom of his wanderings. However, in accordance with the nature of his species, he is a predator, and must kill fish and other creatures in order to live; he is fierce and ruthless in this and occasionally kills, as otters do, beyond necessity and in blood-lust.[47] We react to Tarka as an individual, and not just as a typical member of a wild species; furthermore we relate him to the other otters with whom he is in contact—his parents, his sisters, his mates, his cubs and his friend the delightful old dog-otter Marland Jimmy. Again, Williamson places Tarka 'in context' not only with the natural scene, but also with other creatures who, like him, must struggle to live. The lives of Old Nog the heron, Iggiwick the vuz-peg (hedge-hog), Stikersee the weasel, Jarrk the seal, Kronk the raven, Mewliboy the buzzard, Bloody Bill Brock the badger, Swagdagger the stoat and the unnamed White Owl form part of the background of Tarka's life and impinge upon it.

Otters in England are not preyed upon by other wild species, but until recently they had an enemy in man, who resented their taking of game-fish. For centuries they were treated as vermin and killed by spearing after having been caught in nets or cornered by hounds. However, in the nineteenth century the Otter Hunt attained the status of a field sport, and otters were given a start on the hounds to give them a fair chance of escape, and they were killed not by spearing but by a worry of the hounds.[48] Williamson's treatment of the Hunt in *Tarka* also shows very well his striving for a balanced outlook.[49]

The Hunt is very prominent in Tarka's life, indeed his whole existence is overshadowed and threatened by it, and finally it kills him. The day before he is born, his mother is hunted[50] and his father is killed by the Hunt.[51] Marland Jimmy, whom he encounters on his first long journey is hunted, but escapes by hiding in a drainpipe and refusing to move either for terriers or for the discomfort caused by paraffin poured down towards him.[52] White-tip's first mate is killed by the Hunt,[53] and her second litter of cubs is drowned when she throws them into the river in a vain attempt to save them when she is being hunted.[54] She is hunted again some days later, and Tarka himself is pursued. He hides behind the trap-door of a sluice, and it seems that he has escaped. The pack is recalled, but as the Hunt is going home the sagacious old hound Harper scents him. The terrier Bite'm is sent in to drive Tarka out; he seizes him by the rudder; both are pulled out. However Tarka bites the hand of the man holding him upside down by the udder and makes off with Bite'm still gripping him. Plunging into the river he manages shake off the terrier and the other pursuers.[55] On another occasion when hunted on

the river Lyn he runs for a time on the road and finally reaches the sea where he pulls the fiercest hound Deadlock's head under the water and would have drowned him if the huntsman had not intervened.[56] Finally Tarka is hunted to death on the river Torridge after a hunt lasting some nine hours, during which his son Tarquol is killed. In spite of his valour and skill, utterly exhausted, he succumbs to Deadlock.[57] The narration of this hunt is admirably managed by Williamson; it is exciting, moving, and totally absorbing to read. Tarka's death is both a tragedy and a triumph. Deadlock kills him, but in his dying throes he bites the hound in the throat and drags him under the water so that he too dies. Both sink, but oak leaves rise to the surface, and I do not think that it is an unwarranted fancy to see in this Williamson's tribute to the valour of both creatures; oak leaves are the crown of heroic action in war, and both otter and hound have fought with extraordinary gallantry. For me, and I am sure for many other readers, there is an element of symbolism in the whole episode, if one remembers Williamson's attitude to the war on the Western Front. Otter and hound are united in a heroic death, as were many British and German soldiers. We can admire Tarka's and Deadlock's courage, but we feel also a sense of waste; both creatures have been exploited and it seems to us that they should never have been thrown into opposition to each other. Williamson wept as he wrote the last few pages of *Tarka*,[58] and the reader feels a sense of bitter grief. However he shares also the feeling of consolation as Tarka's spirit returns to nature. The members of the Hunt recover Deadlock's body and look down at it 'in sad wonder':

> *And while they stood there silently, a great bubble rose out of the depths and broke, and as they watched, another bubble shook to the surface and broke; and there was a third bubble in the sea-going waters and nothing more.*[59]

Life on earth began in the sea; ultimately it is the womb of all living creatures. Furthermore, the ocean had a cleansing power; Keats wrote of:

> *The moving waters at their priest-like task*
> *Of pure ablution round earth's human shores*[60]

and we feel that Tarka has returned home, his body to the purifying sea and his spirit to the air. Surely the ending of *Tarka* is one of the great endings in all literature. It was not however the original ending of the book. Williamson excised four succeeding paragraphs in which he tells of the temporary recovery of Tarka's body by fishermen, who return it to the waters of the estuary, and utters a plea that White-tip after her many sorrows might be allowed to live the rest of her life in peace.[61] I think that he was right to drop these paragraphs from the published book; the ending is so resonant that it echoes in the mind and *suggests* further reflections which do not need to be *stated*.

The sense of balance which Williamson shows between Tarka and Deadlock is seen also in his treatment of the members of the Hunt. They are genuine sportsmen; they give otters a fair start on the hounds, they call the hounds off bitches heavy with young or nurturing cubs and they never behave with wanton cruelty. Generally speaking they lack the imagination which Williamson himself has, to feel with the otters, although among them is the pretty girl (drawn from Loetitia Hibbert who became Williamson's wife) who keeps silent when only she sees Tarka hiding near a fallen bough of willow during his last hunt. Her sympathy for the hunted animal and her generosity of spirit forbids her to speak, and Tarka is safe until an old man, her father, also sees him and utters the fatal cry *Tally Ho!*[62] Nevertheless the sportsmen's conduct of the hunt shows a chivalry singularly lacking in the action of the keeper who baits the gin-trap that catches one of Tarka's sisters, or that of the farm hands who beat Greymuzzle to death with a ferreting

bar.[63] Then again, Williamson contrasts the more generous attitude shown to wildlife by the landowners than by the farmers,[64] and he makes reference to the châtelaine who forbids all hunting on her estate, thinking of the wild creatures 'as the small and persecuted kinsfolk of man.'[65]

Williamson's own intense involvement with the story and a clear indication of his association of his pet otter with Tarka is shown by the fact that he himself appears briefly in the book in first-person narration. At the end of Chapter 10, having told how Tarka hides by a marsh pond near the Burrows when he has escaped from the trap in the farmyard, Williamson goes on to describe the slow coming of spring. The linnets sit singing on the lighthouse telegraph wire:

> *And when the twitter ceased, I walked to the pond, and again I sought among the reeds, in vain: and to the pill I went, over the guts in the salt grey turf, to the trickling mud where the linnets were fluttering at the seeds of the glasswort. There I spurred an otter, but the tracks were old with tides, and worm castings sat in many. Every fourth seal was marred, with two toes set deep in the mud.*
>
> *They led down to the lap of the low water where the sea washed them away.*[66]

This is a strange fusion of fiction and real life; unless one knows the story of the pet otter the author's quest is obscure. In the strict terms of art it is a blemish, but the psychological compulsion behind it is understandable, and when one understands what the quest is for, one's heart is touched in a way which transcends aesthetic judgement. One reacts similarly to the second passage of first-person narration founded on Williamson's belief that one night in the winter of 1922 or 1923 his pet otter perhaps passed his cottage door.[67] In the fiction, in chapter 16, Tarka definitely does go by as he searches for White-tip. His scent is blown under the door and the cat fumes and growls:

> *The cottage door was pulled open, my spaniel rushed out barking. A white owl lifted itself off the lopped bough of one of the churchyard elms, crying* skirr-rr. *An otter's tiss of anger came from the culvert under the road. Striking a match I saw, on the scour of red mud, the twy-toed seal, identified with the seal that led down to the sea after the Ice winter.*[68]

*Tarka* is, then, a moving, profound and memorable book. What of its style? Is the book in fact 'over-written'? I do not think so. The important thing about style is that it should be appropriate to its subject matter. This is the case, I think, with the style of *Tarka*. It is, I believe, well suited to the presentation of an imaginative vision of Tarka's life and death within a finely observed living countryside. True, it is at times mannered, but never I think, is it precious. It is rich and poetic, but the life of the English countryside *is* rich and intensely beautiful. Some of the qualities of the style have been illustrated by the quotations already given, but I should like to comment on two further passages, to show the appropriateness of the style in them. The first is found in Chapter 1, and describes a kingfisher which Tarka sees when he is a cub, gazing forth in wonder from Owlery Holt upon the fascinating natural scene:

> *One morning as he was blinking away the brightness a bird about the size of a sparrow alighted on a twig over the hole. It may have been that the Quill Spirit had painted the bird with colours stolen from rock and leaf and sky and fern, and enriched them by its fervour, for the bird's feet were pinker than the rock-veins in the cleaves of Dartmoor, his wings were greener than opening buds of hawthorn, his neck and head were bluer than the autumn noonday sky, his breast was browner than bracken. He had a black beak nearly as long as his body. He was Halcyon the Kingfisher.*[69]

The use of comparisons drawn from nature illustrate the extraordinary brightness and richness of the bird's colouring, but emphasize that these colours are but the colours around it enhanced, they are not gaudy or artificial. The bird is itself part of the natural scene. The second passage is in the grand manner, and describes the awesome winter scene above the Burrows after the passing of a snow-storm:

> *And the sky was to the stars again—by day six black stars and one greater whitish star, hanging aloft the Burrows, flickering at their pitches; six peregrines and one Greenland falcon. A dark speck falling, the* whish *of the grand stoop from two thousand feet heard half a mile away, red drops on a drift of snow. By night the great stars flickered as with falcon wings, the watchful and glittering hosts of creation. The moon arose in its orbit, white and cold, awaiting through the ages the swoop of a new sun, the shock of starry talons to shatter the Icicle Spirit in a ruin of fire. In the south strode Orion the Hunter, with Sirius the Dogstar baying green fire at his heels. At midnight Hunter and Hound were rushing bright in a glacial wind, hunting the false star-dwarfs of burnt-out suns, who had turned into Darkness again.*[70]

The linking of the stars with the birds of prey suggests the sense of menace which overhangs the scene, but the birds are magnificent in their power and are hunting lesser creatures as prey; so Orion and Sirius are hunting dead stars. The world seems to await a New Order, the moon is expectant of a final shattering of the Icicle or negative spirit by a new sun. This would be a Cosmic Revolution which, as in the myth the *Götter-dämmerung* would herald a new and better world. There could also be, as Richard Williamson has suggested, some symbolism of a political revolution,[71] which Williamson thought of in the 1920s as being on the lines of that of Lenin.[72] There is too a secondary meaning that the spring will come, and the sun's rays will shatter the Icicle Spirit. An elevated, even portentous style is, I think, appropriate to a passage which conveys such a rich grandeur of meaning. The fact that the style of *Tarka* was parodied with such amusing success by E.V. Knox ('Evoe')[73] does not mean that it is *bad*, any more than the success in *Rejected Addresses* of James and Horace Smith in parodying the styles of Wordsworth, Byron, Moore, Southey, Coleridge, Crabbe, Sir Walter Scott and Cobbett means that *their* styles are bad. Any writer with any individuality at all can be parodied!

What is the effect of *Tarka* upon the sympathetic reader? It will have made him see, hear and understand much more than he did before; his life is permanently altered and enriched. Paul Chanin in his recent study of the natural history of otters referred to earlier remarks that Williamson's *Tarka* and Gavin Maxwell's *Ring of Bright Water* (1960) have had a major effect in altering people's attitude to otters.[74] The effect is however much wider than this. After reading *Tarka* we have attained to an enriched appreciation of the whole natural world. Within this we gain an enhanced delight in nature in Devon, and I think that Williamson is entirely justified in his use from time to time of Devon dialect words. They are part of the environment of the story, and provide agreeable 'local colour'. On this point I disagree with T.E. Lawrence; the Devon dialect is for me one of the most delightful in England, it has about it something of the rich pastoral quality of the scenery, and carries with it the benignity, good humour, imagination and wisdom of the inhabitants. After all, Williamson did provide a glossary, and if we can cope with the Scottish speech in Scott's novels, or the Irish idiom in the plays of Synge, I do not see how we cannot manage easily with an *English* dialect! The use of dialect words is part of Williamson's striving for accuracy in *Tarka*. The first published edition is in fact the seventeenth re-writing; he went over the terrain covered in the book to make sure that he had got it right; he attended otter hunts, spoke to members of the Hunt, especially to W.H. Rogers, the Master of the Cheriton Hunt, and he observed the behaviour of

otters at London Zoo.[75] He integrated into the artistic whole of his story some incidents drawn from real hunts which he read about or heard about,[76] but it is by no means necessary for the reader to know this to appreciate the achievement of the book. Williamson admitted both in print and on the television that a former Master of the Crowhurst Hunt tried to discourage him from proceeding with the composition of *Tarka* on the grounds that he was rather ignorant about otters and otter-hunting and that in any case the field had already been covered.[77] It is in the television interview with Patrick Garland, entitled 'The Survivor' (BBC1, 8 May 1966) that Williamson tells us that the former Master mentioned specifically that the field had been covered 'by Tregarthen'. He was thinking no doubt of J.C. Gregarthen's *The Life Story of an Otter* (1909), which is discussed as a probable 'source' for *Tarka* by the Pseudonymous 'Tee Rum' in a recent article in *Hounds Magazine*.[78] Having summarized the plot of Tregarthen's book, which in his opinion 'prefigures that of *Tarka* very closely', he declares that he finds 'at least 21 motifs in *The Life Story of an Otter* that appear in *Tarka*, some of them very closely paralleled'. This leads him to the conclusion 'that far from being the unique creation of a remarkable mind, *Tarka the Otter* may be a clever re-working of another man's previously published work.' Is this charge justified? I have compared the two narratives and I did find within them some 21 parallels, but many of these are, I think, the result of the fact that the life stories of two members of the same wild species are bound to share more typical incidents than those of two human beings.[79] The range of possibilities is much narrower for wild creatures. However there are two important parallels which are not merely typical. First, both Tarka and Tregarthen's unnamed otter are hunted to death in the district of their birthplaces, and secondly, both suffer the privations of an unusually severe winter. Furthermore each author tries hard for accuracy and each uses a real countryside as setting for his story; Williamson those parts of Devon already detailed, and Tregarthen the Penwith Peninsular in Cornwall, especially the Lamorna Valley and the Drift Valley near Sancreed.[80] However the endings of the two books are very different in effect; Tarka returns to nature, but Tregarthen's otter is stuffed and exhibited in a glass case in the hall of the local squire's residence, because of its unnaturally large size. There are many incidents which are not common to both books, and the tone, temper and style of the authors are different. I do not wish to depreciate the value of Tregarthen's book; it is a pioneering work, it is interesting, enjoyable, well-written, very well worth reading and indeed reprinting, but it is in essence the book of a naturalist, a Fellow of the Zoological Society and a sportsman rather than of a creative artist. It does not show the depth of Williamson's poetic insight. While it seems very likely, on internal evidence, that it stimulated and helped Williamson, I would suggest that he used it as he used the works of Richard Jefferies—to appreciate and delight in, but more importantly to assist him in his own *individual* writing. There is a great difference between being a 'derivative' writer and being able to integrate an influence into a new artistic vision. This after all is the method of many great writers including Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Dickens, and T.S. Eliot to name but a few. It is noteworthy that the former Master of the Crowhurst Hunt mentioned above was quickly won round by Williamson's courteous request for help in understanding otters, and he came to regard *Tarka* as 'the best thing of its kind in all sporting literature.'[81] He was, I think, recognizing Williamson's extraordinary power of imaginative insight into wild creatures. This is seen clearly also by Charles Causley in his admirable short article 'Man into Fox: a Note upon Henry Williamson as a Nature Writer', where he writes of Williamson's 'astonishing self-identification with the subject' in his nature books.[82]

In conclusion, then, I believe that the answer to the question I asked in the title of this article is that *Tarka the Otter* is very good as literature; its poetic vision is successfully expressed in a remarkably fine and vital work of art which will deservedly remain a classic within its field.

NOTES

1. Quoted by Williamson, with permission, in the *Prospectus* sent to potential subscribers to the first limited edition of *Tarka* (100 copies) numbered and signed by the author, for private circulation (1927) p. 2. This four-page prospectus was reprinted in 1987, with the permission of the Henry Williamson Literary Estate, by the Henry Williamson Society to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of the publication of *Tarka the Otter.*
2. See the letter of 29 November 1926 from Galsworthy to Garnett; *Letters from John Galsworthy 1900–1932,* edited and with Introduction by Edward Garnett (1934) p. 243.
3. Quoted by Alan Hancox in *A Catalogue of a Collection madeby Alan Hancox Fine Books* [1973] p. 6, and by Stephen Francis Clarke in *Clearwater Books: the Henry Williamson Catalogue* (1983) p. 12. These catalogues, together with Mr. Clarke's second *Henry Williamson Catalogue* (1986) contain much bibliographical and scholarly information not found elsewhere.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., and see Henry Williamson, *Goodbye West Country* (1937) p. 271.
6. T.E. Lawrence, *Men in Print: Essays in Literary Criticism,* with an Introduction by A.W. Lawrence (1941) p. 13.
7. Ibid., pp. 13, 53.
8. *Genius of Friendship,* pp. 13–14.
9. *Men in Print,* p. 54.
10. This in Lawrence's reference is the central paragraph on p. 106 of the first edition of *Tarka* (1927), 'And the sky was to the stars again . . . who had turned into Darkness again'. The edition of *Tarka* which I consider to be the most useful to the student of literature, and which I refer to in this article is that published in 1978 with an Introduction by Richard Williamson, and with illustrations from the Rank Organization film of the book. The text follows that of the Nonesuch Cygnet edition designed by Sir Francis Meynell (1964). The paragraph admired by Lawrence is found in the 1978 edition of *Tarka,* pp. 130–1. I give a critical commentary on it, *post* p. 108.
11. *Men in Print,* p. 48. The Traherne passage to which Lawrence refers may be read in Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations,* ed. Bertram Dobell (1908) 'The Third Century', paragraph 3, pp. 152–3.
12. *Men in Print,* pp. 46, 48, 52.
13. Ibid., pp. 44, 47, 49, 51, 52.
14. Ibid., p. 53.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., p. 48.
17. Ibid., p. 43.
18. Ibid., p. 53.
19. *Genius of Friendship,* p. 14.
20. Ibid., p. 22.
21. Ibid., p. 56.
22. *Goodbye West Country,* p. 273.
23. A generous selection of these reports, taken from Williamson's own scrapbook, is reproduced photographically in *The Henry Williamson Society Journal: 'Tarka* Diamond Jubilee Issue', no. 16 (September, 1987) pp. 30–4.
24. *The Aylesford Review,* Vol. iv, no. 4 (Autumn, 1961), pp. 131–43.
25. *Goodbye West Country,* p. 228; *Genius of Friendship,* p. 14, quoted *ante,* p. 100.
26. *The Literary Review,* no. 29(14–24 November, 1980) pp. 16–17.
27. *Eagle and Earwig,* p. 232.
28. *The Henry Williamson Society Journal,* no. 16 (September, 1987), pp. 12–14.
29. See e.g. J.H. Fabre, *Animal Life in Field and Garden, translated by Florence Constable Bicknell and Kate Murray* (1926). Jean Henri Casimir Fabre (1823–1915) was known as 'the Insect Man' because of his distinguished books on the natural history of insects. However he did write well on other aspects of the natural world—see Eleanor Doorly, *The Insect Man. The Story of J.H. Fabre* (1936). Fabre is mentioned in Williamson's novel *The Innocent Moon* (1961) in an amusing exchange between Mrs. Portal-Welch and

Phillip Maddison. She asks him if he has read Fabre, and upon his admission that he has not, replies ' ''Then you should. He is a *real* nature-writer, dealing with living realities'' ' (chapter 6, p. 120).

30. *The Innocent Moon*, chapter 5, p. 105.
31. *Nature in Britain*, p. 6.
32. Williamson tells the story of the pet otter at length in two places; first in *Goodbye West Country*, pp. 330–40, and secondly in an article 'Genesis of *Tarka*', in Martin Boddey (Ed.), *The Twelfth Man: a Book of Original Contributions brought together by The Lord's Taverners in Honour of their Patron H.R.H. Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh, with a Foreword by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales* (1971), pp. 71–8. The two accounts differ slightly in that in the first Williamson speaks of one spaniel, in the second of two spaniel pups. In this particular I have followed the second account.
33. *Goodbye West Country*, p. 332; 'Genesis of Tarka', *The Twelfth Man*, p. 72. The barn-owl became Williamson's totem; he writes about his owls also in 'Birds of Skirr Cottage', *Life in a Devon Village* (1945) pp. 30–4. Williamson loved the swifts too which nested in his thatch (ibid.) and see 'A Bird Mystic', *The Lone Swallows*, revised edn., illustrated by C.F. Tunnicliffe (1933) pp. 66–8.
34. *Tarka the Otter* (1978 edn.) referred to *ante*, note 10, chapter 1, p. 45.
35. Ibid., p. 46. 36. Ibid. 37. Ibid. 38. Ibid.
39. See *Richard Jefferies: Selections from his Work, with details of his Life and Circumstance, his Death and Immortality* (1937) pp. 12–14, 21–4; also Williamson's Introduction to Jefferies's *The Gamekeeper at Home*, Jonathan Cape's 'The Traveller's Library' series no. 205 (1935), ps. 9; and further his *Introduction to An Anthology of Modern Nature Writing* (1936), p. x.
40. See *Tarka*, e.g. chapter 2, p. 61; chapter 4, pp. 84–5; chapter 6, p. 101; chapter 8, p. 117; chapter 11, pp. 150–1; chapter 14, pp. 182–3, 186; chapter 17, pp. 207, 213, 215; chapter 19, p. 244.
41. Ibid., chapter 9, pp. 128–9. This paragraph, together with much of chapter 9 of *Tarka*, is included by Williamson in his own anthology from his writings, *As the Sun Shines* (1941) pp. 62–6.
42. Ibid., chapter 11, p. 147.
43. Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, Act IV, scene iv, line 89.
44. Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur', ll. 9–10.
45. *Tarka* chapter 11, p. 147.
46. Ibid., p. 155; chapter 8, p. 125.
47. Ibid., chapter 6, p. 102; chapter 11, p. 160; chapter 17, p. 212.
48. See Richard Clapham, *The Book of the Otter: a Manual for Sportsmen and Naturalists* ([1922]) chapter 3, 'Otter-hunting, Past and Present' pp. 73–111; Philip Wayre, *The Private Life of the Otter* (1979) chapter 7, 'The Oter and Man', pp. 64–7; Paul Chanin, *The Natural History of Otters* (1985) pp. 144–8.
49. Williamson declared in his *Prospectus* for *Tarka* that it is 'a work without personal bias' (p. 1). Balance was one of his major artistic aims in all his major works; 'to see as the sun sees without shadows' (cf. *As the Sun Shines*, 1941, p. 101; *The Story of a Norfolk Farm*, 1940, p. 55).
50. *Tarka*, chapter 1, p. 47.
51. Ibid., chapter 2, p. 71.
52. Ibid., chapter 4, p. 84.
53. Ibid., chapter 12, p. 157. 54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., chapter 12, pp. 164–9.
56. Ibid., chapter 15, pp. 189–97.

57. Ibid., chapters 18–20, pp. 222–51.
58. Ibid., Appendix, 'The Original Ending', p. 253.
59. *Tarka*, chapter 20, pp. 250–1.
60. Sonnet, 'Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art', ll. 5–6.
61. *Tarka*, 'The Original Ending', pp. 252–3.
62. Ibid., chapter 20, pp. 247–8.
63. Ibid., chapter 4, pp. 86–9; chapter 10, pp. 143–5.
64. Ibid., chapter 14, p. 183. 65. Ibid., chapter 2, p. 63.
66. Ibid., chapter 10, p. 146.
67. See *Goodbye West Country*, p. 338; 'Genesis of Tarka', *The Twelfth Man*, pp. 76–7.
68. *Tarka*, chapter 16, pp. 204–5. 69. Ibid., chapter 1, p. 55.
70. Ibid., chapter 9, pp. 130–1.
71. Ibid., Introduction, p. 23.
72. *Goodbye West Country*, p. 229. It was 'about 1927', the year of the publication of *Tarka*, Williamson tells us, that he bagan to think that Hitler's point of view was 'an improved model, based on every man owning, in a trustee-to-nation sense, his own bit of land and fulfilling himself in leading a natural life' (ibid.). The writing of *Tarka* was completed in 1926, so at the time of writing it, Williamson was still an admirer of Lenin's political outlook.
73. See E.V. Knox, ';the Doom of the Otter', after Mr. Henry Williamson, in *Here's Misery! a Book of Burlesques* (1928), pp. 1–9.
74. *The Natural History of Otters*, p. 134.
75. See Richard Williamson's Introduction to *Tarka*, pp. 21–2.
76. In particular he used some incidents recounted in W.H. Rogers, *Records of the Cheriton Otter Hounds* (Taunton, 1925); see Richard Williamson's Introduction to *Tarka*, pp. 34–6. The 'Cheriton' hunted the rivers Torridge, Taw and Lyn, and Williamson knew Rogers well, dedicating *Tarka* to him.
77. *Goodbye West Country*, p. 901; 'The Survivor', an interview given to Williamson by Patrick Garland on BBC1 Television, 8 May 1966.
78. *Hounds Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 2 (February, 1985), p. 19.
79. Williamson was in fact extremely interested in the unique elements in human personality; one of his favourite quotations is from Heine: 'Under every gravestone, a world lies buried' (see e.g. *Goodbye West Country*, p. 343, 'The Tragic Spirit', *The Adelphi*, vol. 20, no. 1, October-December 1943, p. 18). The quotation may be found in chapter 30 of Heine's *Journey from Munich to Genoa*, one of the *Pictures of Travel* (*The Works of Heinrich Heine*, translated from the German by Charles Godfrey Leland, Vol. 3, 1891, p. 107).
80. Dr. Arnold Derrington of Penzance has kindly supplied me with this information. He points out, however, that not all the illustrations in the book are of the Penwith Peninsular.
81. *Goodbye West Country*, p. 93.
82. *The Adelphi*, vol. 25, no. 4 (July-September, 1949), p. 280.

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