

## The Genius of Friendship — Part I: T.E. Lawrence

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Thomas Edward Lawrence was born in August 1888, thus being just over seven years older than HW. He was the second of five sons. His accidental discovery at a fairly early age that there was a mystery surrounding his parentage led him to believe that he (alone) was illegitimate. This was to affect him greatly, as it would any sensitive child, especially in those days, and especially as he apparently discussed this with no-one. He did not learn the truth until after his father died in April 1919, and the facts were not made public until Richard Aldington's book *Lawrence of Arabia, A Biographical Enquiry* was published by Collins in 1955. Readers wishing to clarify points surrounding the life of TEL should also read *Lawrence of Arabia* by Jeremy Wilson (William Heinemann, 1989, Minerva paperback ed. 1990).

The facts are, as is now well known, that TEL's father was Thomas Chapman, second son of a wealthy Irish gentleman landowner. His mother, Sarah Junner, was herself the illegitimate child of Elizabeth Junner and John Lawrence, the son of the household in Sunderland where Elizabeth was a servant. Sarah Junner later took the name Lawrence and entered the Chapman household as governess to Thomas Chapman's daughters in the late 1870s. She was apparently much liked in the household especially as the wife was very sternly religious. Sarah became pregnant by Thomas Chapman in 1885, and then left the household, living in rooms rented by TC for her. Their first son, Montague Robert, was born in December. Thomas Chapman later left his wife and family and set up house with Sarah, at first briefly in Wales where Thomas Edward was born in August 1888, then moving first to Scotland and then to Brittany where TEL's early childhood was passed. Then back to England in 1894, first to the New Forest, then finally to Oxford in 1896.

Thomas Chapman had given up his life interest in his family estate in return for an annuity which together with other income gave them a modest living. He also changed his name to Lawrence. (See *Lawrence of Arabia*, Jeremy Wilson, Heinemann 1989, Appendix 1 'Note on T.E.L.'s Ancestry, pp.941-944)

T.E.Lawrence entered Jesus College Oxford in the autumn of 1907, reading History, but continued to live at home due to lack of funds (a small two roomed bungalow was built in the grounds for his use). His specialisation was Military History and Strategy. He had studied medieval architecture, visiting castles and churches whilst on cycling tours of France in 1906 and '07 and was to use this as the basis, along with research garnered on a tour of the Middle East in his last year at Oxford, for his eventual thesis — 'The Influences of the Crusades on European Military Architecture', eventually published as *Crusader Castles* in 1936 (reissued by Oxford Clarendon Press 1988).

After finishing University in the summer of 1910, TEL was involved in excavating expeditions in the Middle East, learning Arabic by inclination and necessity. When the First World War began in 1914, Lawrence with his now specialist knowledge of the Middle East, offered his services to Military Intelligence. He was put on hold until such time as Turkey entered the War, and meantime was employed in map-making, finally leaving for intelligence work in Egypt in Dec. 1914.

This is not the place to chronicle Lawrence's involvement in the Arab War. The subject has been well covered elsewhere, particularly in the books already cited. Suffice it to say here that his war was very different from HW's. TEL became famous because of his unique contribution to that war (whatever conclusions one

draws from the mountain of controversy) while HW's contribution was the same as many thousands of other men involved in it, but became famous because of his unique ability to write which in due course included first hand descriptions of that war. Although so disparate, their experiences must have made a common bond between the two men in due course, even if largely unspoken. Both men were certainly profoundly affected by their war experiences which in turn affected their separate views of life in the world afterwards.

Both needed time and quiet for recuperation. Both were to work it out of their system, so to speak, by writing. Though TEL did his almost immediately with the mammoth (especially in its original form) work *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* written in 1919, although not of course published at that time; HW had decided to be a writer, but being in a very different position to TEL he had to earn his living, and in his early writing healed himself first with nature writings before he was able to turn to his war experiences. As soon as he was able, HW sought peace and quiet in a remote Devon village. TEL was to seek peace and quiet through (he had hoped) anonymity in the services.

What else did the two men have in common? Both had a penchant for speed — TEL had his motorbikes, the Broughs, known at various times as either Boanerges, or George I, II, III etc. HW had his Nortons, Doris I and II, and then first the sleek Alvis (though this was not his first car) and then the racy Aston Martin. Money features largely, or rather the lack of it, in the lives of both men. TEL seems to have been permanently short of money for various reasons. He would appear not to have wanted money, either as part of his inborn philosophy, or as a facet of the image he wanted to portray. HW also was always short of money, though for different reasons, but HW wanted money and the outward trappings of success (at this early stage of his life at any rate).

One reason in common for a lack of money was the pouring of money into book production. Vellum *Tarkas* when you are penniless and have a family to support would not appear to be compatible. TEL likewise poured money into the production of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, commissioning portraits of all its protagonists etc., and setting up an expensive edition for private circulation.

And of course one of the most interesting small details about these two men is the similarity of their handwriting — to the extent that when a critical note by HW on D.H. Lawrence apparently accidentally found its way into the T.E. Lawrence file that HW sent off for copying for an edition of TEL letters to be edited by David Garnett, it was presumed to have been written by TEL, and always published as such, and in due course was considered to have been, if not a deliberate deception on HW's part, then certainly a practical joke in very poor taste, causing a rift between HW and the Garnetts.

Now let us examine the actual friendship between these two men. By default of other sources this means examining the correspondence between them and therefore much of this information is already available in HW's *The Genius of Friendship* (first pub. Faber & Faber, 1941, HW Society reprint ed. 1985). In order to maintain a continuity of thought, some of that information is by necessity repeated here.

One of its main features is the fact that the friendship was of short duration — only seven years — beginning with that well-known letter of criticism of *Tarka* which TEL wrote in January 1928, and ending with his premature death in May 1935. In that time they met only twice and both times very briefly. But because of the nature and character of the two men involved that friendship has been a focus of interest to many people.

There are in total in the Henry Williamson Literary Estate archive file (and thus in the TEL archive also) copies of 56 letters, plus THE telegram; twenty-five from HW to TEL, and thirty-one from TEL to HW. At some point these letters were typed and exchanged by HW and TEL's brother, Prof. A.W. Lawrence, who was the Executor of TEL's Will and Estate, so that both should have a complete record of the correspondence. It is obvious that one or two letters are missing, mainly from HW to TEL — this is most probably because they were enclosed with books and were only notes. It would not appear that they would have held much of import — but I will return to that later. The typed versions of TEL's letters agree exactly with the originals (which are kept safely in a bank vault) and I am sure that the typed version of the HW letters are also verbatim — these being held in the TEL archive.

But before discussing the correspondence in detail we need to go back a little to see how these two men came together. The immediate catalyst was Edward Garnett, writer and critic (1868-1937), that most extraordinary publisher's reader who was personally responsible for launching so much writing talent into the world — Joseph Conrad and W.H. Hudson, for example, and for an apparent total moral support and encouragement of every writer with whom he was in contact.

Edward Garnett met TEL in the early 1920s, at the time that he (Garnett) went to work for Jonathan Cape's new publishing venture in 1921, as a consultant editorial advisor. Cape writes in his contribution to *T.E. Lawrence by his Friends* (ed. by A.W. Lawrence, pub. Cape 1937) that in 1920 Lawrence went to see him about the proposed reprint of Doughty's classic travel book *Arabia Deserta* and it was agreed that TEL would write an introduction for the new edition. It appears that possibly Jonathan Cape is glossing over the finer details of the train of events here but that is the overall gist. Edward Garnett apparently had an 'obsessive regard' for Doughty's work. (George Jefferson, *Edward Garnett A Life In Literature*, Cape, 1982, p.197). Cape continues;

*During 1921 Lawrence was at the Colonial Office and sometimes after working hours would come to my office where we would talk over books and publishing projects. He met Edward Garnett at this time, and as Garnett read for me this made another link.*

[the inference here would appear to be that TEL actually met Edward Garnett elsewhere — Jeremy Wilson's biography does not give the instance.]

TEL sent a copy of the original *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (one of the only eight copies printed by the Oxford Times press during the first half of 1922) to Edward Garnett in Aug. '22 (and probably a draft before that) and to quote further from *T.E. Lawrence By His Friends*, this time from Edward Garnett's contribution entitled 'T.E. as Author and Critic', Garnett writes that he told TEL (among other things, including the fact that *Seven Pillars* was unpublishable in its present form, and undertaking to make an abridged revised version but which Lawrence felt very strongly should only be undertaken by himself) that the effect of *Seven Pillars* would have been greater had Lawrence not suppressed his feelings;

TEL: 'With whom are you comparing me?'

EG: 'With WH Hudson — in his books Hudson does not hide his feelings.'

TEL: 'Hudson is above us all.'

Edward Garnett had first met W.H. Hudson in 1901 and was instrumental in getting him published in this country, firstly in Duckworth's 'Greenback' series. The published letters from Hudson to Edward Garnett comprise at least 60,000 words

which gives some ideas of the contact between these two men.

As HW is in the direct line of descent in the nature writing genre from WH Hudson and Richard Jefferies, it was obviously a natural progression for Garnett to encourage HW and for TEL to admire HW's work in due course.

To return to the point that Garnett was making, HW certainly was not a man to hide his feelings either within his writing nor in real life, whereas it is obvious that T.E. Lawrence did in both spheres.

HW's first contact with Edward Garnett apparently came via John Galsworthy, who wrote to EG on 29th November 1926:

*Do you know the work of Henry Williamson? It's uneven but at its best extraordinarily good I think. A strange and sensitive nature lover and worshipper of Jefferies and Hudson ... The Old Stag is his best book, but he's got one in Press on the life of an otter that he thinks best... If you like it (the otter book) give him a word of encouragement. He can see and he can write ... (Edward Garnett: A Life in Literature, George Jefferson. Cape, 1982, p.242 — letter quoted from E. Garnett (Ed) Letters from John Galsworthy 1900-1932, Cape, 1931, no. 243)*

The same day Galsworthy had written to HW:

*We greatly enjoyed seeing you today. I've written to Edward Garnett. So do send him a copy of the proofs. You must not be discouraged. All will come in good time.*

*All good wishes, Sincerely yours, John Galsworthy.*

*(Letter in HW Literary Estate archive)*

HW then obviously wrote to Edward Garnett, enclosing a copy of *The Old Stag* published earlier that year, as a letter from EG to HW dated January 3rd 1927 reads:

*I am very glad to hear from you about your book on the otter. Will you let me see the proofs?... Have you arranged yet with a publisher? If not I would read it for Jonathan Cape. I liked the account of the Red Deer you sent me at Xmas. It was very exact... (etc)*

HW was already reasonably established by this time and had already written, *The Beautiful Years* (Vol. 1 *The Flax of Dream*) (1921), *Dandelion Days* (Vol. 2 of *The Flax of Dream*) (1922), *The Lone Swallows* (1922), *The Peregrine's Saga* (1923), *The Dream of Fair Women* (Vol. 3 of *The Flax of Dream*) (1924), *The Old Stag* (1926) all published by Collins. Plus many articles in newspapers and leading journals and magazines of the time.

About this time *Revolt in the Desert*, the abridged version of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* was serialised in *The Daily Telegraph*. Jeremy Wilson states in his authorised biography of TEL that it was two months before publication date — which was 10 March 1927 — but is not specific as to the exact date. [Trying to check with *The Daily Telegraph* was not productive.]

HW states in *HIS* contribution to *TE Lawrence by his Friends* (and in his book *Goodbye West Country*) that he had read the opening instalment while in the train from Redhill to London, and was struck by the essential similarity in thought between a sentence of Lawrence's and a sentence from his own MS of *Tarka*, and immediately felt that he KNEW Lawrence of Arabia, that he was perhaps the friend he had always longed for 'with whom even words would be superfluous'. HW says he wanted to contact Lawrence and send him his book but could not quite bring

himself to do so, and never made that first move.

TEL had as much trouble getting *The Seven Pillars* written and published as HW had with *Tarka* — rewriting, polishing, honing, unable to find a publisher, although HW's rather sweeping assurance that he rewrote *Tarka* seventeen times is somewhat suspect (as I've stated elsewhere only seven versions are really accountable for, see HW Soc. *Journal*, No. 23 March 1991, Letters, p. 54/5) as is his apocryphal assertion that he too lost the *Tarka* MS on a train journey and it had to be rewritten from memory.

Throughout his life HW had only to imagine an incident for it to become fixed as factual in his mind. This was not a question of telling deliberate lies (except occasionally!) but of the imagined incident being so vivid that it was more real to him than reality. This is one attribute that made him such a good writer — but it does make the task of finding the truth much more difficult for the researcher. Apparently this was also the case with TEL, which fact was to prove devastating for Richard Aldington, who first researched the truth for his biography in 1955 (See Part II of this article).

However — to return to our thread: HW and Edward Garnett were exchanging letters fairly often in 1927. HW was obviously in need of support over the production difficulties with *Tarka* and was also seeking Garnett's advice about other books, notably his revision of *Dandelion Days* (the 2nd. vol of the tetralogy *The Flax of Dream*). Garnett did not like *Dandelion Days* and did not hesitate to say so — 'The revisions bore me, as you supposed'. But he was very enthusiastic and supportive about *Tarka*, of which a limited edition and a full trade edition were published in October of 1927 by Putnam's (although the privately printed vellum edition of 100 copies had come out in August).

From his letters we know that Garnett sent copies to several contacts, asking Galsworthy to review it in *The Observer*, whilst he himself undertook to do the *Manchester Guardian* & etc., and also prompted several other publications to review. Further EG suggested HW arrange for Putnam's to send a copy to Arnold Bennett, whilst he himself would send a covering note direct to AB. (letters EG to HW, 7 April — 3 Oct 1927 — HW Literary Estate Archive)

And, of course, unknown to HW, Garnett sent a copy to TEL who was at that time stationed in Karachi in India and was 'hungry for intellectual stimulation' (J. Wilson, op cit). On January 15th 1927 TEL learned that his great friend Thomas Hardy (who had been ill before TEL left England) had died. Jeremy Wilson states that at this time TEL had become an 'extremely isolated person trusting nobody'. He had become nervously exhausted by the work he had put into his abridgement and revisions of *Seven Pillars* before leaving England and the complications again for arrangements for publishing, and was further working very hard at Karachi. Such words could just as easily be said about HW, who throughout his life veered between enthusiastically trusting people almost to the point of absurdity to being extraordinarily suspicious of even his best friends. Yet, in this supposedly depressed state, TEL wrote the long and detailed letter of criticism back to Edward Garnett on 20 January 1928; and so in mid-February 1928 HW received a registered envelope from Garnett:

*I am enclosing a very remarkable letter from Colonel T.E. Lawrence, the author of 'The Seven Pillars' & 'Revolt in the Desert': which latter book you had better read by the way (I am sending you a copy).*

*He has 'sizzled with joy over Tarka' for three weeks, & pays you the handsomest tribute at the end of his letter. — and etc. (letter in HW Literary Estate Archive)*

TEL's letter is well documented as it was published in *Men In Print. Essays in Literary Criticism* (1940). Suffice it to say here that it was enthusiastic but also analytically critical. It is interesting to note that TEL himself had received a very similar letter about *Seven Pillars* from E.M.Forster in February 1924. TEL was extremely grateful for this help which clarified his mind for revisions, and was to write later to a friend that 'detailed criticism is the only stuff worth having' (Jeremy Wilson — op cit, p.737)

TEL thought, mistakenly as we know, that this was a 'first' book — which was probably just as well, he would not have written so freely had he known the author was more established (as he states in a later letter). His closing paragraph is most revealing.

*I'm rather appalled to have written so much...*

*I shouldn't have written so much if the book was not, in my judgement, particularly worth writing about. ...*

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

HW was naturally very gratified at receiving such a letter, especially since it came before the ensuing Hawthornden Prize was announced. He replied on the 8th March, thanking TEL — whom he refers to as his 'twin psyche' and giving a long description of the background of his writing of *Tarka* and sending a copy of *The Old Stag*.

A startling fact emerges from this letter. You may recall that Dr. Wheatley Blench in his article 'How good is *Tarka* The Otter as Literature' (DUK; Vol. LXXX, No.1; Dec. 1987, pp.99-110: reprinted in the HW Society Journal, No. 22, Sept. 1990, pp. 22-37), refers to J.C.Tregarthen's book *The Life Story of an Otter* (1909) and the possibility that HW may have used this as source material for *Tarka*, an idea first explored by Tee Rum in *Hounds Magazine*, Vol 1, no. 2, Feb. 1985. This first letter to TEL contains proof that this was actually so.

*Tarka was 'originally written in 1923 in 8 chapters...*

*I borrowed a book on the subject and made notes and paraphrased — carefully so that no one could accuse me of cribbing...*

*Later I showed it to a friend (Ed. This was Richard de la Mare) ... who thought it was good... I determined to rewrite it as by that time I knew more about otters — not much: but I thought I could improve on the original crib taken from 'The Life of an Otter' by Tregarthen, one of Hudson's friends.*

At the end of this letter, HW in his turn makes but one criticism of *Revolt in the Desert*:

*The opening paragraph is great; the heat of Arabia coming down like a drawn sword and smiting one speechless... but I got a shock at the bottom of the page, when the heat was like 'a bath' ... That's the only fault I found. The rest I love. The descriptions are superb; and the actions fluid. Oh yes, it's the superior of the poor little tich of Tarka all right. Your criticisms have helped me enormously. ...*

*I've formed the opinion from the 'Revolt' that you could write short stories.*



And HW ends:

*There's a bedroom here for you if ever you want to come ... & the Burrows, and the headland, and the estuary, and 7 apple trees ... and my wife who is a sort of nature spirit, and as simple and true as an oak-tree and as calm. A quiet and lovely place; and rather lonely for me sometimes.*

In his next letter dated 2.4.28, apologising for presuming *Tarka* was a first book, Lawrence writes an illuminating sentence; but there is no way of telling whether he is referring to HW or himself — perhaps both? 'The worst thing about the war-generation of introspects is that they can't keep off their blooming selves.' He also states that he hasn't been able to read the book HW sent because: 'as soon as the old stag arrived he disappeared. He will return.' (i.e. the other RAF chaps had borrowed it).

At this time HW became involved with the Jonathan Cape Pub. Co. with the publication of *The Pathway* in 1928.

But after four more titles this relationship was to end precipitously in 1935 when HW announced that he had offered *Salar the Salmon* to Faber. Jonathan Cape was very upset by this development but behaved most restrainedly and gentlemanly, with only a plaintive letter to HW betraying his true feeling.

It is interesting to note a quotation in Michael Howard's biography of Jonathan Cape (Cape, 1971) in a letter from TEL to JC, 'I am glad you are annexing Williamson. He is a writer by birth and profession and will do a lot more good work. Don't worry too much over *Tarka*: he will surpass that, later.' (p.96) TEL is still not entirely sure about the merit of *Tarka*.

We move on. TEL had had to return to England in early 1929, due to the publicity and rumours his discovered presence near the Afghanistan border had caused. He was stationed at Plymouth and was being urged by HW to visit north Devon, and soon TEL was planning to visit HW at his cottage in Georgeham on Sunday June 30th 1929 — but a letter dated the 1st July says:

*If it rained at your end as it did here, all yesterday, this letter isn't needed to explain my defection.*

The last sentence in a letter written on 10th July 1929 says: 'Will try and reach Georgeham on July 28th if you'll be there.' And on the 22 July he writes:

*I'm off to London, crack of dawn, tomorrow. Schneider Race Committee Meeting. I have put down the 27th as an object to aim at.*

And as HW wrote in his book *The Genius of Friendship*, so TEL did ride across the county to have a very simple lunch with HW, wife and three year old son on the 28th July, despite the fact that it again rained hard.

The 'little maid' Gwennie — Gwendoline Brown — who died in 1990, always remembered the visit:— 'Oh, yes, Bernard Shaw came to lunch.' The confusion is understandable as TEL was of course being referred to as 'Shaw'.

One very interesting letter from TEL dated '18.3.30 — 21.3.30, labelled 'much interrupted' is about HW's book *Patriot's Progress* — the story of a 'universal private' — John Bullock — which had been commissioned to be long captions to be set around William Kermode's stark lino-cuts but which HW turned into a full length story. TEL thinks 'this book is all right — it is a tapestry' — and he gives a

longish list of particularly good phrases which he 'notes with pleasure' e.g. 'light ran and trembled', 'gangrenous light of dawn', 'rootlets of their minds growing in hope'.

HW and family had by now moved a few miles east to Shallowford in the valley of the River Bray and then in the autumn of 1930 HW visited the USA. Just before he left he received a rather sad letter from TEL dated 6 September:

*I wish I knew what was the matter with me. ...*

*It has come to this, that I feel afraid and hesitant outside. The camp itself is like a defence to me, and I can't leave it. I think I have only been outside three times this summer.*

This inability to stir oneself is today recognised as a symptom of agoraphobia which in itself is now a well-known symptom of deep depression. It was just after this that TEL went to Collieston on the Scottish coast where he had hired John Bruce 'to organise a gruelling routine of swimming and riding' (Jeremy Wilson, *op cit*, p.870). Unable to trust himself he ensured that someone else saw to it that he kept to the proposed routine he had so wisely prepared to clear his mind and possibly his soul.

HW's next letter urges a meeting on his return from the USA for the companionship of 'the marriage of true minds'. But time passed and no meeting ensued — as a letter from TEL dated 6 Sept. 1932 shows:

*Another year gone, and us still wide apart, despite one perfectly good Silver Eagle Alvis, and one — — Brough.*

Then on 13 February 1933:

*I've been grinning through the weekend over the (Gold) Falcon, of which a vellum and gold copy reached me from Faber on Saturday.*

*By the same post arrived a plain copy, sent me from an indignant reviewer, demanding to know why I had fathered this decadent bilge on the world.*

HW had, as we know, originally published *The Gold Falcon* anonymously and many famous writers were thought to be the author, including Robert Graves. The arguments for and against were fast and furious and, of course, created much interest in the book. The story is based on HW's visit to the USA but with a metaphysical almost mythological overtone.

TEL continues:

*The Falcon has that jumpy, nervous, stipple technique that you were developing in The Dream of (Fair) Women. It fits a jazzy subject, and conveys an astonishing sense of moment, all through the tale.*

Then just before Christmas 1933 TEL writes:

*I have a feeling that you are not in England — despite evidence of articles in the Sunday Referee ...*

*I hope my feeling that you are unhappy is not true ...*

HW's reply on the 30th December shows that he was indeed very unhappy at that



time, mainly because he had fallen in love with a young girl he calls 'Barley-bright' and this is obviously not working out.

*I am about to leave Shallowford for ever: but haven't heart to start, I don't know where to go, or what to do.*

Throughout his life HW was falling in love with 'barleybright' girls. His psyche searched forever for a perfect being, a goddess — who in real life just cannot exist. Yet he was at the same time always joined in spirit to his first wife with whom, despite all the difficulties, he remained friendly to the end, mainly due to her patient and stoical nature.

TEL obviously did not reply to this letter (we know that he disapproved of such excesses of emotion, viz. his reaction to Robert Graves and Laura Riding; (see J. Wilson, op cit, p.870) for on 23rd February 1934 HW writes:

*Dear Shaw*

*My last awful letter must have put you off. All I can say about its contents is, please wait until you read The Sun In The Sands.*

But for various reasons this book was not in fact published until 1945 — where HW states in his foreword that it is autobiographical. To some extent that is so — but Part III, 'Barleybright' — is very much a fictionalised version of the Barleybright incident. It is the story of a walk that HW did go on when having a holiday in the Pyrenees in 1924 accompanied by two friends H.V. Morton (Johnny in the book) and Wyndham Lewis (Bevan) from the Daily Express (both were 'Beachcomber, one after another); but the Barleybright part is entirely fictional. TEL is mentioned on the last page, but can it be coincidence that HW sets his story at LARUNS (a town which does exist in the Pyrenees) which phonetically is almost the same as the name by which Lawrence was often known in his arab phase, El Laurens.

But HW continues in this letter:

*This is to say also that I am sailing on the BERENGARIA from Southampton, next Wednesday, 28 February 1934, going alone to Georgia, to stay months with 70-year-old lady who invites me and pays Tourist fare both ways. A God-send! I wonder if you'll be about in a speed-boat?*

The letter then continues with an explanation of a 'Marvellous novel ... about RAF in the war.' This of course is what was to be *Winged Victory* by Victor Yeates, whom HW had known from schooldays and to whom Yeates turned for help with his book and who died of TB shortly after its publication. Several ensuing letters on both sides discuss both book and author. TEL replies:

*Yes, your unhappy letter was very unhappy. I wondered if I could do anything, and knew that I couldn't. ...*

*The best of wishes — I will turn up on Wed if I can manage it.*

He did manage it: — you can read a faithful reproduction of the meeting in not only *The Genius of Friendship* but also in *Devon Holiday* (pub. 1935) where TEL is G.B. Everest (Henry had once referred to TEL as an 'Everest to my Snowdon'.)

Another friend of HW's also came to see him off. Mysteriously kept anonymous in the published description he was, in fact, Sir John Heygate (also a writer) who

was HW's greatest and most longstanding friend throughout his life — although even they had a disastrous quarrel at one stage. John Heygate found TEL a man of great sensitivity.

This time HW only stayed two months in the States but whilst there he did send Lawrence a bag of pecan nuts from Florida, writing:

*Gosh, the sun there is good and the breezes from the Gulf of Mexico fan away his silver-tiger-whiskers.*

Lawrence enjoyed the nuts:

*I eat one per week, ritually, as I visit my cottage where they are stored.*

HW wrote again on 13th May 1934 whilst on the boat journey back to England:

*As I see you, you are a man with acute sensibility that was only in part encysted by your early years: a natural poetic mind that has survived itself. You have developed to the nth degree the art of diplomacy, tact, grace: your inner self, the 'small voice' has outgrown the (in most men) loud or external utterance. ...*

*I would think there are very few men with whom yourself is unlimited so you must be a rather said, or lonely, man at times.*

(this seems so very different from HW's usual mode of expression that I am inclined to consider that it is most possibly an extension of conversation HW held with John Heygate, which HW transferred to his own thinking — but he continues in his own vein)

*I would say you see things almost as the sun sees them — the sun who has given them life, therefore know them without the antagonisms of competition. Love is surely clarity, an almost secret sharing of the sun's vision among a very few people.* (editor's underlining)

Then again in a letter of 26th May 1934 which sees HW established back at Shallowford: 'Thanks for your two ripping letters, one welcoming me home (that was most welcome) and the one about *Winged Victory*.' (which he goes on to discuss, among other things — including his ideas about a film of TEL's *Revolt* the projection of which he has read about in the newspapers) 'I would have as a theme the drive onward towards clarity and human truth'. (editor's underlining)

As we know, this was one of HW's central beliefs — his striving to see 'as the sun sees, without shadows' and he often uses the word 'Kristos' in relation to this, which word he almost certainly derived from TEL whose classical education led him to a natural use of such concepts.

There is a gap in the file then until a long letter from TEL to HW dated 11.12.34 from the Ozone Hotel — 'this hotel with the funny name' — in Bridlington, Yorkshire, which is so obviously in answer to a cri-de-coeur of Henry's that certainly there is a letter missing here.

*I have so much the better of you; for when I want to talk, it is just putting out an arm and taking a book from my shelves.*

HW's *Linhay on the Downs and Other stories* had been published on Nov. 12 and had received little attention, according to HW's diary entries, e.g.

*Times says Linhay might be named after any of the 40 essays in the book. Unenthusiastic. Oh God, when will people see that I can write better than anyone living today? A generation to come I guess, when I am dead.*

As TEL's letter goes on to give him cheer, it is obvious that the missing letter was a similar cry of unhappiness:

*You write disarmingly well. You write better than Richard Jefferies, splendid fellow though he was. Better for me, that is. You look for the unusual, he for the average. ...*

*I am discharged from the RAF (my life, almost) next March and cannot make even the ghost of plans for afterwards. ... I hope an Alvis may visit me ... Keep cheerful. And let us meet after my RAF.*

HW's answer is dated 10.12.34 — an error for it mentions points raised in TEL's above postmarked the 11th. Typically of HW — doom and gloom have now disappeared and he is full of elation with his latest scheme — to form a company to make films about the English countryside starting with Tarka. Strangely, many of the brief ideas he mentioned came to fruition when David Cobham finally did make this film in 1977 — e.g.

*It means getting young otters and taming them ...  
travelling to Scotland with otters for the snow scenes.*

He also mentions Victor Yeates:

*I'm about to make a play out of Winged Victory. Yeates won't last much longer I fear — He's in a sanatorium (sic) at Hastings. I'm going to see him soon...*

*Will you come here for Christmas?... I don't like to think of you dreading the void in March... I am going to London in four or five days and return about 22 or 23 Dec. Can't you come down then? I can take you back in the olde olde Alvis (6/7 years — 90,000 miles). It would be fun. This family is fun too.*

*Yours ever, and thanks for your ripping letter. HW*

HW travelled to London via Sussex staying the night with his friends SPB and Jill Mais in Brighton. On Monday 17 December HW went to the Fairlight sanatorium in Sussex to see Victor Yeates. To be told he had died the previous Saturday morning, 15th December.

It is obvious that WH wrote to TEL to tell him the sad news but this letter is also missing from the Literary Estate file. Two letters follow from TEL mainly about Yeates but both including remarks which show how apprehensive he was about how he was going to cope with the loneliness of life once he had left the RAF (and many other people received letters at this time with similar remarks — see J. Wilson, *op cit.*) With hindsight these could be considered prophetic:

- 20.12.34.        *'my mind wholly blank about future..  
I have the RAF. I go to my cottage.  
And what happens after isn't my concern.'*
- 31.1.35.        *'One month to go: only a month.  
I can feel it happening now.'*

It was also in January 1935 that Robert Graves was asked by *The Times* to draft a

2000 word obituary of Lawrence to be held on file in case of need and Graves wrote to TEL to suggest he wrote his own —TEL refused but it is interesting to see that his letter of refusal contains enough information for it to be used in due course (see J Wilson's biog. op cit., and also see newspaper reports after TEL's death).

A further letter from HW dated 13 February 1935 mentions a 50,000 word 'fragment' left by Victor Yeates called *Family Life*, which he was radically revising and editing (but which was never published).

The file is then blank until the last letter from HW dated 10.5.35. Because of the controversy over the content of this letter and the subsequent claim that HW had arranged to meet Lawrence to discuss fascism and to arrange a meeting between Lawrence and Adolf Hitler, this letter is reproduced in full.

But before I do so, may I state definitively that nowhere in the correspondence between these two men, nor in HW's diaries, or private papers have we found any mention of fascism or Adolf Hitler in connection with T.E. Lawrence. If such material existed, it would be there for HW never destroyed anything even should it prove detrimental to his own cause. In this case, as it would have proved his argument, it is even more telling by its absence. It is only from 1936 onwards, well after TEL's death, that HW puts into printed form such thoughts and ideas.

Among his press cuttings file is one dated 23 April 1936, from the *Dorset County Chronicle* which would seem to be the first reference to what we can only call 'the myth'. This cutting reads:

## LAWRENCE'S LAST JOURNEY

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### Why He Made Fatal Ride

**The reason why Lawrence of Arabia went on the motor-cycle ride near Wool which ended fatally is disclosed in the current issue of 'Radio Pictorial'.**

A writer in the journal states:—

"The famous naturalist, Henry Williamson, now broadcasting regularly from West, has disclosed an hitherto closely kept secret about Lawrence of Arabia — a tragic secret, because it concerns his death. Henry had a big idea for a series of programmes for the support of world peace to be broadcast on a large scale from the Albert Hall. He wanted a partner to support his plan, and wrote suggesting it to Lawrence of Arabia. T.E. Shaw sprang at the idea with his full enthusiasm, rushed out of his cottage immediately, and jumped onto his motor-cycle to go and wire Henry that he would support him. Returning from the post-office, T.E. Shaw was killed in the accident which shocked the world. Henry has dropped the idea for the time being. 'There is not another man I can think of who would be so equal to it as he would have been,' he says."

It is obvious that these thoughts must have arisen after his trip to Germany in September 1935, made only just after three months after TEL's death, to see John Heygate who was working at the UFA studios in Berlin and to visit the Nürnberg Rally. This visit is written up in *Goodbye West Country* and would seem to be a factual and true version of the episode. This visit had a profound effect on HW and led him to believe that Hitler was a basically good man, the encourager of shining youth, the maker of good roads, the saviour of Europe. This may seem naive and even criminally stupid to us now but we must remember that many other people at that time also thought these things. Some of them recanted; others have kept quiet since. HW did neither. Although he did later equate Hitler with Lucifer the fallen angel, who had been (and could still be) equal with Christ but chose to be Satan. (*Lucifer Before Sunrise* — Vol. 14 of *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*, 1967), which shows that he did recognise that Hitler was an evil man. (The psychology of the split personality of Lucifer/Satan is a theme that readers and critics of HW's work would do well to explore, see my Editorial, HW Soc. *Journal*, No. 26, Sept. 1992)

We must remember that Henry had German blood in his veins. His father's mother was German, Adela Leopoldina von Luhn, a Bavarian by birth. The family house was named Hildersheim and there was a German nanny. Henry had not known his grandmother, she died at a fairly early age, but he was named after his grandfather, her husband, and no doubt was brought up to be proud of this German connection in his early years. That coupled with his experience of the Christmas truce in 1914 in the trenches when he made the discovery that the Germans also were fighting for their country and thought that God was on *their* side, which profoundly influenced his whole life, gives us an understanding of why HW was pro-German. He was an ardent admirer of the music of Wagner which is based on Teutonic mythology, and really in effect he transferred this whole Wagnerian philosophy of myth and legend into his own writing. What else, for example, is the climactic scene in *The Gale of the World* other than a word picture of the ride of the Valkyries and all its attendant implications of a chosen one going to Valhalla. However this is not the moment to digress into so deep a subject. To return to our present line of argument HW only saw Hitler as a man who was encouraging youth to live a clean and open-air life, who was building great roads and creating a country that was clean and efficient, with an agricultural policy that would support the whole country. This naive analysis has puzzled many, and was to make his progress in the literary world very difficult.

Again, there is no evidence that HW had any association with the BUF until late 1937, over two years after TEL's death, after he had moved to the Norfolk Farm, when he was urged to attend a meeting and to join the party by Lady Dorothy Downes, and his hero-worship and friendship with Oswald Mosley did not begin until after this date, so there can be no association between HW and any approaches supposedly made to Lawrence by the fascists in Britain. He was, of course, an avid reader of newspapers and would have known exactly what was happening in the political world and no doubt discussed such items with various friends and acquaintances. But not, apparently, with Lawrence.

It is another example of transference of fiction into fact, or rather in this case, the grafting of one fact onto another — and like all horticultural grafts, the resultant fruiting spur made *very* strong growth. One can hardly blame the world for speculating about an exciting inference when it is stated in print as the truth by one of the chief protagonists.

It is not really possible to understand what HW thought he was doing or what he hoped to achieve by such assertions. Clues lie perhaps in the newspaper reports

that appeared at the time of Lawrence's death. Among HW's archive was a large rolled up bundle of cuttings culled from the papers at this time. Side by side with the long reports of TEL's accident, the resultant hospital hiatus, the death, the funeral, the inquest, are articles about Adolf Hitler.

Side by side are headlines, for example:

*Daily Mail 20 May 1935*

'LAWRENCE OF ARABIA'S SECRETS REVEALED:

TRAGIC IRONY OF HIS DEATH'

'VITAL WEEK FOR EUROPE: HITLER'S SPEECH TOMORROW'.

*Sunday Times, 26 May 1935*

on p. 17 a short piece on Lawrence under 'Atticus' — on the reverse side

'HITLER AND AIR WAR' by 'Scrutator' and also

'GERMAN MOTOR ROAD OPENED BY HITLER' —

(reports of which appeared in all the newspapers, of course.)

Whilst a cutting from *The Daily Mail* June 4 1935 has a long article by Lord Rothermere (a family much involved in newspapers and related to Lord Northcliffe), of which I shall just quote the beginning and end: for it illustrates my previous argument. Students would do well to refer to the whole article.

*The most prominent figure in the world today is Adolf Hitler. His master-mind magnetises the whole field of foreign politics. ...*

*... It is reassuring to see that Herr Hitler's speech just over a week ago has greatly influenced his popularity in this country. I am profoundly convinced that the better he is known to the mass of the British Nation the higher its appreciation of him will be and the closer will become the relations between the two nations.*

Is it possible that the juxtaposition of the Lawrence and Hitler headlines became 'fixed' in HW's mind as being connected and followed by his subsequent visit to Germany so quickly afterwards, where he saw Hitler in action, convinced him at a later stage, that Lawrence, and only Lawrence, could have made Hitler see sense, and as has already been stated, — once *thought*, it became 'reality'? Lawrence, now dead, could not refute the statements.

Incidentally, another interesting point that arises from these cuttings is that several of the headlines use the word 'genius'.

*viz. The Daily Telegraph, 20.5.35. —*

RARE GENIUS OF LAWRENCE: Lord Lloyd on how he was found

... and a sub-head in the same paper:

VERSATILE GENIUS — W.F. Stirling, DSO.

*The Times, 20.5.35*

LAWRENCE OF ARABIA — A Genius of War and Letters

— Capt. B.H. Liddell Hart

So possibly he gained his own title *The Genius of Friendship* from here. The dictionary definition of the word genius, which, as with so many words has two interpretations; the one we commonly use today to mean ultra-clever in any particular sphere, but also an older more subtle definition which makes a good interpretation of the spirit HW encaptures by its use:



*Tutelary (serving as a guardian) spirit of person, place, or institution for good (or evil); protective; person who powerfully influences one for good (or ill). A nation's, age's, character's, spirit's prevalent feeling.*

At this point in the chronological unfolding of our tale we come to the somewhat bizarre mystery of the black car reported to have been seen by Cpl. Ernest Catchpole at the scene of Lawrence's accident which gave rise to subsequent wild rumours and speculation equal to James Bond or George Smiley. HW had his own version for he told RLCW (and no doubt others) that it had been rumoured that it was HIS Alvis that was seen that day. [This was supposedly in print in the press, but I have been unable to verify the assertion] However HW's diary entries over the critical period place him firmly at Shallowford:

*Saturday 11 May 1935*

*Windles (HW's eldest son — presently 9 years old) found a salmon lying belly upwards in pool and told me. I hauled it out. ...*

*'Fished for trout in Brayley, in vain, harsh, dry East wind for days & days been blowing.*

*'Wrote to T.E. Lawrence at his cottage near Bovington Camp, asking if I could stay with him on Tuesday next.'*

and the letter reads:

Shallowford,  
Filleigh,  
N. Devon.  
10.5.35.

*Dear Shaw,*

*I am expecting to go to London by Alvis next Tuesday and wonder if you will be home then? I travel with a flea bag and a little box of nutriment and am so flexible that if you are not there or are busy I shall burr onwards. The steering wanders and I'm going to have it fixed at the service station, new, Gt. West Road also see Faber and then it seems nothing to do so shall return very soon to go on with this awful book which drags out ones life, so boring, so dull so etc. etc. A filthy sweet-strangling cold thwarts me at the moment. Do you till a garden? I put 40 tons of river silt and molehills on mine this year, gotten in trailer with children scraping into pails, but the soil seems no richer. Perhaps it was over-doped with chemicals and lime; too ambitious. I am reading what I thought of it; read until 2 a.m. two days ago, couldn't put it down. Some dialogue wrong; social stratum idiom false in places, I think. Am adjusting, query ruining? Though of writing introduction, then the fragment, then epigraph ending like that article I sent you, him dying.*

*He may in this book have created the first real portrait of a modern man; the real inner fellow all the time, but O boy it scares me in places, being just myself. Soames as unlovable man in Forsyte Saga seems quite fictional and unreal beside the ideas loosed by Master Yeates. Poor chap, he had hell all right; his own family portraits (mother, sisters) are too terrible. I feel exaggerated. He was dying as he wrote; and kicking against the coils still holding him, but not intellectually. It is an awful hard-minded book. Query, it being a rough draft, can I trust my instinct to alter bits here and there, mostly toning down savageries. I have the typescript here, and my*

pencilled alterations above the typing. Would interest you to see it? I could leave it on Tuesday and pick it up on my return about Friday; expect to re-call in on Friday and go on to Devon after a few minutes.

The next book to be published, *Devon Holiday*, is a wildish farrago and rummage jumble sale of quittance. The rest is making furniture for the market. Blood-transfusions no go; and unsolicited not wanted any more.

See you soon? I'll call in anyway on Tuesday unless rainy day, probably about 1-2 p.m. noon that is.

Yours,  
H.W.

P.S. Mr Rubenstein found 15 possible libels in *D. Holiday* so the page proofs have been cut about awful, and will swallow up all profits if any I guess. There's a long description of you in the book, disguised under name of G.B. Everest and the meeting with another — disguised one on Berengaria. You are described as an expert mechanic, an authority on a number of wisdom's pillars, Homer, and the virtues of uncooked vegetable food in a cottage: your favourite nut is, or should be, the pecan nut from Florida.

I trust this isn't too offensive. The rest is favourable to you, without being personal. (I fear M.F.H. Zeale will sue me for defamation; he's a full length portrait, but only superficial; nothing of the Yeates-truth about him.)

I must do some work Oh how I hate the idea of having to write in blood turned to water.

Back to the diary:

Sunday 12 May 1935

*'In bed with filthy influenza cold which has been enfeebling me for days.*

*For past 4 days have been reading & revising Yeates' posthumous Family Life —*  
*[& etc. — continues with details of this]*

Monday 13 May 1935

*Telegram from T.E.Shaw timed 11.25 from Bovington Camp.*

*'Lunch Tuesday. Wet Fine cottage 1 mile north Bovington Camp.*  
*Shaw.'*

Tuesday 14 May 1935

*'Heard over the wireless that T.E. Shaw, just after leaving Bovington Camp yesterday morning on his motorcycle collided with a cyclist and now lies 'critically ill' in the military hospital there, with a fractured skull. About an hour after hearing this news I began to ache in the breast; while my thoughts before this were only of myself, of how in some future book I would have a photograph of the telegram, the last thing he wrote. Not a dominant thought though: surprise, consternation: then later pity, pity for the thought of his lonely life, bare cottage, aloneness after the things he had dreamed and done and failed, and now, to be lying there with a cracked head. Perhaps Ida's thought of her father lying dead, with a bruised head after the old chap's fall, stirred this pity.'*

[Charles R. Hibbert, HW's father-in-law, had died from a fall a fortnight before. Although he had heard of this in the morning, to avoid social difficulties HW had withheld the news from his wife until after lunch that day was attended by John Heygate and Charles Tunnicliffe and his wife.]

There are no more diary entries for that year at all, other than two or three very short notes to remind him of essential business, which is very unusual. Any journal he kept of the visit to Germany in the autumn, which he obviously did, has vanished. He may well have typed his notes straight out for future publication and incorporated it directly into the *Goodbye West Country* typescript.

One of those few diary entries referred to was on Thursday June 13th 1935:

*Lawrence article posted to Atlantic Monthly*

I have been so far unable to track down any trace of such an article actually being printed. It would be interesting to see exactly what HW intended to publish at this point so near to TEL's actual death. For as we have seen, by April 1936 he was hinting at a bigger course of events than the actuality.

It is possible that the thought connection made between Lawrence and Hitler arose from a conversation with Sir John Heygate. There is no evidence for this and it is pure supposition on my part, but having teased at the problem continuously over several months, it becomes for me the most obvious, and possibly the only, explanation. This is not to suggest in any way that John Heygate was connected with fascism. But HW would almost certainly have discussed TEL's death with Heygate, who had met him, however briefly, on the *Berengaria*. Heygate was there in Germany surrounded by the atmosphere and presence of Hitler and where Henry became overwhelmed by the theatrical presentations, the 'Wagnerian legends' translated into real life scenes. Even a most casual reference could, and would, have found fruitful harbourage in HW's fertile mind.

The next link in the thread is a diary entry for Thursday, June 4, 1936:

*Evening Standard article to go,*

*TEL article to go*

*John O'London to go*

A tantalising clue which can only, as far as I can ascertain, refer either to HW's contribution to *T.E. Lawrence by his Friends*, or to the subsequent publication in the *Anglo German Review* of January 1937 (the time lapse being viable for both items) of 'Lawrence of Arabia and Germany. The Story of a Plan for bringing about a better understanding in Europe, and of Lawrence's admiration for Hitler, told by Henry Williamson, the distinguished author'.

The latter is HW's most definite statement that TEL was interested in Hitler's policies, the subject being only hinted at in HW's contribution to *T.E. Lawrence by his friends* (Cape 1937) but as has been shown there is no way that HW could have had any actual knowledge of what TEL thought of Hitler and his policies. Such things are not discussed in the correspondence between the two men and the two brief meetings show no evidence of such discussion. This article can only be a manifestation of HW's own thoughts about Hitler being transposed onto Lawrence. Possibly he thought it would give his own ideas more credence and popularity if it was thought that the great hero, Lawrence of Arabia, had also thought in this way. The account is much more low key in *Genius of Friendship* published in 1941, which is a very faithful account of the friendship between the two men, the quotations from the letters being very exact; but with his final punch pulled back somewhat. He couldn't retract his thesis without admitting he had lied, so it is rather burred over there.

There are those who will query that we cannot know what HW was actually thinking; that he could have been planning to involve TEL in such matters in his mind. But with such a total lack of evidence to support it, I think we must assume that it was not so. If it was so, there would be evidence somewhere. There is just one letter, from HW to David Garnett (son of Edward Garnett), written 5th February 1955 which refers to this episode. This is mainly an apology (twenty years late) for earlier misunderstanding over the handwriting error referred to at the beginning of this article and for the subsequent coolness with Edward Garnett. It also contains a somewhat complicated explanation about TEL which I will refer to at a more appropriate chronological point in Part II. For at this point the story goes into dormancy for several years, and when it emerges a new actor is centre stage.

(to be concluded)

### Acknowledgments

I am grateful for permission from The Henry Williamson Literary Estate, whose copyright they are, to use passages from *The Genius of Friendship* and unpublished letters from Henry Williamson to T.E.Lawrence and others. And for the co-operation of Gaye Poulson of Jonathan Cape Pub. Co. on behalf of the T.E.Lawrence Seven Pillars Trust for permission to use extracts from TEL letters (all material used has actually already been published elsewhere).

\* \* \* \* \*

Readers may like to know that a very prestigious publication of the correspondence between HW and TEL, edited by Jeremy Wilson (author of the official TEL biography, op cit) is being prepared by The Whittington Press, and will be published in due course (not in the immediate future — details will be made available in the *Journal* when forthcoming).

### Mystery Quotation

Mr. Harold Webster sent in the only reply to the quotation used in Mick Loates' letter, which is the closing sentence of 'Boy' in *The lone Swallows*. Our thanks go to him for taking the time and trouble to participate and he has been sent the usual £2 voucher. Unfortunately there is no room for a further quotation in this issue.