

The Genius of Friendship - Part II: Richard Aldington

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After T.E. Lawrence's death in 1935 and the subsequent publication of HW's *Genius of Friendship* in 1941, as examined in Part I of this essay, this thread in HW's story went into dormancy for several years, to re-emerge when Richard Aldington began research for a biography of T.E. Lawrence in the early 1950s.

HW and Richard Aldington were brought together by Alister Kershaw, a young Australian poet who travelled to Europe in 1947 hoping that whilst there he would meet certain writers for whom he had formed great admiration, mainly Roy Campbell, HW and Richard Aldington. But there had been a contact between the two older writers much earlier, for in 1929 Aldington had written to HW in response to a carping review of *The Wet Flanders Plain* in the Times Literary Supplement. His letter is generous and full of encouragement. Aldington's own book of the first world war, *Death of a Hero*, was published soon afterwards.

Alister Kershaw had read and been impressed by *Tarka the Otter* as a child and as he grew older had discovered more of HW's books, latterly *The Story of a Norfolk Farm*, and knowing he would need money to finance his European sojourn had written in advance to ask if HW would/could employ him on the farm. But by the time the young Kershaw arrived in England HW's farming days were over. However contact had been made, a meeting was arranged and much was to ensue. (See A. Kershaw, *The Pleasure of their Company*, Univ. Queensland Press, 1986, chapter on HW reproduced in this Issue of the *Journal* p. 24, for a refreshing first-hand account of their meeting.)

Richard Aldington, three years older than HW, was highly established as a writer. He was born in Portsmouth in July 1892, but lived in Dover as a youth.¹ His father was a solicitor with some literary talent, having two books published, whilst his apparently 'strong willed and turbulent' mother was also a writer with seven books published between 1900-1920. Apparently Aldington had an active dislike for his mother - presumably a domineering woman - which possibly influenced his future reactions. (Cf. TEL's relationship with his mother).

In 1910 he enrolled at University College, London, where he was actively engaged in writing poetry, but family money troubles meant he had to leave university before graduating and so he decided to earn his living by writing. And at this time Brigit Patmore introduced him to Ezra Pound; he discovered the French '*vers libre*' poets, was introduced to Hilda Doolittle (known always as H.D.) and in April 1912 they were both involved with Pound in founding the Imagist movement, and worked with Pound on *The Egoist*. He married H.D. in October 1913. Later in his life Aldington became rather bitter that the credit for his early achievement tended to go to others, ignoring his own primary contribution. In July 1914 he met D.H. Lawrence, and was to become a strong advocate of his work.

Aldington had strong objections to the concept of war. Although he did try to enlist in 1914, he was turned down on medical grounds, and was then happy to be out of uniform, despite criticism. During the early part of the war he was engaged in 'literary research' (alongside Ford Madox Ford) for the government, preparing a volume of propaganda designed to overcome pro-German feeling in Britain - *Between St. Denis and St. George*. But in mid-1916, after the Conscription Act, he joined the 11th. Devonshires and in January 1917 he became a non-commissioned

officer in the Sixth Leicestershire Reg. with the BEF on the Western Front in France until April 1917, when he returned briefly to England. Later that year his commission was announced in the December Army List. On return to civilian life after the war Aldington found people hostile to the demobilised troops and motivated largely by self interest. All this, of course, is experience that he held in common with HW and which was to make an 'old soldier' bond between them in due course. In fact they had many things in common, in particular the steadfast and total application of their writing talents, despite the many difficulties they both encountered.

After the war Aldington took on the job being vacated by John Middleton Murry, as French Literature critic for *The Times Literary Supplement*. He overworked, writing for a wide range of periodicals and was in a state of nervous debility and physical exhaustion. He was to suffer throughout his life from bad health, in the form of chronic bronchitis, attributed by him in a letter to a friend in 1958 to WW1 phosgene gas poisoning, and nervous exhaustion, which often interfered with his continuously heavy workload.

He and H.D. parted at this time. Aldington had become involved with Dorothy Yorke whilst H.D. had an affair with Cecil Gray, and was expecting his child. Despite supposedly holding modern ideas about the openness of marriage, they could not cope with the situation. Over the ensuing years Aldington was involved with various other women, including Brigit Patmore, but he and H.D. did not actually divorce until mid-1938 when Aldington immediately married Netta Patmore (wife of Brigit's son Michael); their child, Catherine, being born two weeks later. The complications arising from divorce settlements were to cripple him financially for the rest of his life.

Richard Aldington and Netta spent the second world war in America where he gave lectures and published various books, including a novel *Rejected Guest, Life for Life's Sake* (a book of reminiscences) and edited an *Anthology of Poetry of the English Speaking World*. They lived mainly in Florida where Aldington was happy to be able to add greatly to his butterfly collection, and also for a time living and working in New Mexico, where Frieda Lawrence allowed him the use of D.H. Lawrence's adobe cottage. But at 9000 feet his health rebelled and he had to return to Florida. He was also briefly involved with writing filmscripts for Hollywood. He was marginally drawn into the Ezra Pound indictment for treason in July 1943 (Pound had broadcast for the Mussolini government cursing the 'Jew Roosevelt'), being interviewed by the FBI, but later he denied categorically the rumour that he had given evidence against Pound. (And later, in several of his letters to HW there is concern about Pound's predicament.)

At this time he wrote a biography of the Duke of Wellington as his response to the times and his desire to celebrate a British hero. This book was widely acclaimed and in England was awarded the James Tait Black prize. Aldington admired Wellington's brilliantly successful soldiering career but of greater appeal apparently was the great general's modesty, openness, truthfulness, and professionalism. His attitude here perhaps gives a clue to his subsequent reaction to the problems that arose when he came to write the TEL biography.

In 1946 the Aldingtons moved to Jamaica but Richard immediately hated it and it did not suit his health, and a mere three weeks later they were back in New York and shortly en route to Paris where they arrived on the 17th August.

And as previously noted, in 1947 Alister Kershaw arrived penniless in England from Australia contacting (apart from HW) Roy Campbell, who arranged a BBC assignment for him which financed a trip to Paris to meet Aldington. Aldington

and Campbell became warm friends, as did Kershaw, who became in effect RA's secretary, assistant and helpmate, and over the years worked very hard on his behalf, becoming his literary executor in due course.

Finding Paris expensive, the Aldingtons moved to Villa Aucassin at Le Lavandou on the south coast of France near St. Tropez. At this time he was working on a book about D.H. Lawrence, *Portrait of a Genius But...*, a waris and all study of his complex and extraordinary talent, demonstrating that despite his wayward, domineering and self-righteous temperament, Lawrence was a great writer and 'the most vividly alive man of his time'. Well before this book was actually published in 1950 Aldington was already in 1949 contemplating his next project, suggested to him by Alister Kershaw - a biography of T.E. Lawrence - a subject that possibly arose from a conversation between HW and Kershaw about HW's friendship with TEL (see letter from HW to David Garnett quoted later in this article). Although Kershaw was already an ardent admirer of TEL, and may have contemplated doing the biography himself at an early stage of the research.

Previously, Alister Kershaw had written to HW on 4th September 1947, establishing his address as 'c/o Richard Aldington, Le Lavandou' and extolling the countryside and attendant wildlife, 'on the hills are large green lizards; they are light as parrots in the trees and when startled leap from prodigious heights and disappear among the dry grass with a great noise' (Letter in the HW Literary Estate Archive). Such a description no doubt attracted HW's attention to the area.

The first real contact between Aldington and HW came in July 1948 when HW sent a Georgeham picture postcard, in response to a prompting by Kershaw, whom he had just seen in London, asking Aldington if he would send a contribution for *The Adelphi*, the quarterly literary journal which HW had just taken over from John Middleton Murry. Aldington replied by return, sending a chapter out of his forthcoming biography of the eccentric naturalist Charles Waterton entitled 'The Squire gets married'. This appeared in the October-December 1948 issue of *The Adelphi*, the first number to be edited by HW, and containing his own editorial, 'The Lost Legions', which was a tribute to Murry, and using James Farrar and his work as prime example of 'lost legions'. (Three poems by Alister Kershaw also appear in this issue.) HW had, of course, previously been a regular contributor to *The Adelphi* over several years. In his last editorial in Vol. 24, No. 4, July - September 1948, Murry says 'my friend Henry Williamson was one of its earliest contributors', (the September 1924 issue includes a short piece by HW 'The Doom of the Peregrine Falcon'). HW's editorship of *The Adelphi* lasted for a brief three issues only - he found the work interfered with creative writing - but such details belong to another thread in the tapestry of HW's life. One letter to Aldington does show how guilty he felt at having upset Middleton Murry by his abrupt disposal of the journal without previous discussion with Murry, who had only handed it over to HW thinking he would continue it in the same spirit that he himself had done for the previous twenty-five years.

Soon, at Kershaw's urging, HW was persuaded to visit Aldington, and he and his second wife Christine spent the major part of their honeymoon in the spring of 1949 in France near the Aldingtons. Having married on the 13th April, they crossed from Dover to Calais on the 21st and travelling in the Aston Martin, which inevitably played up both whilst still in England and again once in France, and visiting the battlefields en route, arrived at Le Lavandou where Aldington and his wife lived with their small daughter, Catherine, on the 27th April. Kershaw had found them rooms in a small inn by the beach. There was apparently an instant rapport between HW and Aldington and the letters they exchanged until Aldington's death



THE VILLAGE OF GEORGEHAM

N. DEVON.

OF ALL ENGLAND'S
LOVELY VILLAGES SURELY
NONE CAN CLAIM TO
BE MORE TRULY
ENGLISH THAN
GEORGEHAM/
ITS VERY



NAME IS DERIVED FROM 'ST. GEORGE' AND 'HAMA', THE
SAXON WORD MEANING 'HOME'. THUS THE 'ST. GEORGE OF
OLD ENGLAND' SPIRIT IS FOUND TO PERMEATE THE
WHOLE VILLAGE AND IS TYPIFIED IN THE UNIQUE
VILLAGE SIGN, WHICH STANDS AT THE ENTRANCE TO

THE ANCIENT
PARISH CHURCH
CONTINUES THE 'ST.
GEORGE' THEME
FOR ITS NAME OF
DEDICATION IS
'ST. GEORGE' AND
THE 'FLAG OF ST. GEORGE' OFTEN FLUTTERS ABOVE THE LOFTY TOWER.



THE VILLAGE, BESIDE -
THE INSTITUTE AND JUST
OPPOSITE THE 'VILLAGE
SMITHY'. IT WAS
THE GIFT OF MISS
KEMP-WELCH WHO
ALSO DESIGNED
AND PAINTED IT.

HERE IN GEORGEHAM PEACE AND SWEET CONTENT DWELL.
AMONG THE QUIET HOMESTEADS; HERE THE
PRESENT GENERATION OF ENGLISHMEN
CONTINUE TO PURSUE THE VILLAGE
CRAFTS OF THEIR
FOREFATHERS.



HENRY
WILLIAMSON,

THE AUTHOR AND NATURALIST WRITER, AT
ONE TIME LIVED IN 'SKIRR COTTAGE',
UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE
CHURCH TOWER. 'THE VILLAGE
BOOK' IS ONE OF SEVERAL
FROM HIS PEN DEPICTING THE
VILLAGE LIFE IN GEORGEHAM.



in 1962², show a deep bond of true friendship. This bond survived the trauma of the controversial TEL biography, possibly due to Aldington's persistence in maintaining dialogue. (Incidentally, nearly every letter from Aldington mentions his young daughter and her well-being. His wife Netta had left the family home soon after HW's original visit, and he found himself in sole charge of the young Catherine. His every movement was centred around her life, not in a possessive manner but for her wellbeing. It is a most moving testament to the love of a father for his daughter.)

Of course, only a small number of these letters contain references to the TEL biography. Early letters in the correspondence includes references to trying to unravel the mystery of TEL's parentage etc. Today we take all this information for granted but it must have been quite a problem at that time. The evidence was very well hidden and no-one was prepared to reveal the truth.

Richard Aldington to HW, 4 Jan. 1951

The TEL is the hardest book I have ever attempted, and I despair of success. Practically everything he professed at one time he denied at another; he gives contradictory accounts of the same event or motive; his friends contradict him and each other. There is some mystery about his family, a skeleton somewhere. I am trying to discover it. ...

The disentangling is heart-breaking. Which doesn't mean that the whole adventure wasn't an achievement for an Oxford archeologist with no military training but the Church Lads Brigade and the O.T.C.

Then in a letter dated 22 January 1951 Aldington asks HW if he would write to the publishers of *Who's Who* to endeavour to ascertain facts on his behalf, to establish whether TEL had himself written his own entry for 1921/22, or whether it had been written by someone in the office. Also the entries for consecutive years were contradictory. Aldington wanted to know whether TEL was telling the truth about repudiating his medals etc., as they were being listed in the *Who's Who* entry. Aldington thought that such information would not be made available to him, but would be to HW as an established friend of TEL. Apparently TEL had colluded in the entry and was thus guilty of saying one thing and doing the other and vice versa. (Information on this point was provided by Prof. Fred Crawford, USA, see end notes).

Further, we know that HW allowed Aldington to see copies of a small selection of his TEL letters in early March 1951, for there is a letter from Aldington to HW dated 10.3.51 thanking him for sending them, and a small package dated 21.4.52 when they were returned, with a further letter of thanks. This package includes the D.H. Lawrence 'critical' note written by HW referred to in Part I, and which RA refers to in the TEL biography (see illus. on p. 17).

It is obvious from Aldington's letters that he horrified himself by the mare's nest he was uncovering. He had accepted the challenge to write TEL's biography in good faith and as he amassed his material (and he was a painstaking researcher whose sole objective was to find the truth) he began to realise the dilemma he faced. He knew that his integrity as a teller of truth would be under fire by those who could not/would not believe his words. He could not make many of his notes cohesive because the evidence he obtained was so contradictory. He was frustrated by the secrecy and lack of co-operation that he met at all official levels. He was finally convinced that there was a cover-up on a far greater scale than was even obvious, which made him so bitter and suspicious that he suspected even facts that were true. Quotations from his letters illustrate his dilemma:

Richard Aldington to HW. 25.3.51. Le Lavandou.

More and more I feel I was the wrong man to be given this TEL job. It bothers me, and involves an amount of work out of all proportion to the result, work for which I shall not get the slightest credit. Moreover what makes it all so impossible and disheartening is the knowledge that Prof. L. (i.e. TEL's brother, Prof. A.W. Lawrence) sits there in his conceit ready to use the Copyright Acts to suppress any truth which might affect him. And there is Garnett with all sorts of withheld material in his possession waiting to produce it in triumph to prove me mistaken. The only way out is to abandon the straight biography, and call the book a biographical enquiry – and set out the pros and cons as conscientiously and impersonally as possible. I must say in a brief foreword that all I can do is to set before the reader the evidence I can find – what has been wilfully withheld must be the concern of my more fortunate successors. Or words to that effect. But I wish I had never undertaken it, there's so much which leaves a rather nasty taste. The whole thing makes me nervous and unhappy.

RA to HW. 13.8.51 Montpellier/Herault

'I am much to blame for not having written to you but this TEL book occupies nearly all my energies and is by far the most exhausting task I ever undertook. There is so much conflict of evidence that I have had finally to abandon all hope of telling a coherent story like the DHL and Waterton books. There is nothing for it but to record the evidence as exactly and clearly as possible, but to do this in a manner satisfactory to readers I am compelled to give the exact reference for every quotation and reference, so that they may be instantly checked by any interested readers who wants to make sure that I am trying to tell the truth. No doubt in time some – possibly most – of these hopeless tangles can be cleared up, but it cannot be done whilst this hush-hush suppression of facts and documents continues. AW Lawrence has, as you well know, forced Garnett to mutilate the letters which have been published. Other letters and documents remain hidden away. The Foreign Office refuses to allow anyone to see the Child's Report on the Hejaz War, which was written in 1921 – thirty years ago! On the other hand, I have had access to information and many startling letters which none of his friends has ever seen. I feel that all I can do is write a "biographical enquiry", much as you suggested (RA seems to have forgotten that it was his own suggestion – see previous quotation) contributing what I have been able to glean and deduce with reasonable certainty, leaving to others the gigantic task of trying to clear up all the problems. This can't be done until all TEL's work is in the public domain, all letters and documents and Government secret reports made available. It will then – say in 1985 – be a damned long job and a very fat book!

(The Jeremy Wilson biography appeared in 1990 – and was certainly a very fat book!. So Aldington was fairly accurate in his prognostication.)

RA to HW 31.1.53

'I have no illusions about the value of my share in the TEL book. It is not I but the story and his immense renomm  . I just happened to be the first person who took the trouble to collect, sift and verify all the available evidence and to put it down with no particular bias....

It is a most intricate life which took some unravelling, but in the end it was done as nearly as one poor human can unravel another. In such a mass of detailed evidence there is obviously room for plenty of blunders on my part, but as even the lawyers

have said that the evidence is on the whole irrefutable I shan't much worry about contradiction on small points.

13.2.53

I have received the notes of the first 150 pages of my TEL from an Oxford don who is 'an authority'... In his preliminary note he cheers me by saying how very fair the book is and that I've given him a new view of the man's life and character.

It is interesting to note that Charles Doyle states in his biography of RA (op. cit.) that between Aldington writing *The Death of A Hero* in 1929 and the TEL book 'was the conviction that the British People had been betrayed by a portion of its leadership' and he quotes from a letter from Aldington to Alan Bird on 11th Feb. 1953, 'This Lawrence book is more than mere biography – it is the showing up and repudiation of a whole phase of our national life... Our life as a nation must not be based on lies and liars.' A much stronger language and philosophy than Aldington ever used in letters to HW.

At this point HW would have realised that publication of this controversial book was fast approaching. He had had time to assimilate the implications. He was in a dilemma; caught between his loyalty to his hero TEL and his loyalty to his newer friend, Richard Aldington, with whom he had a calm comradeship and who gave him staunch moral support in all his difficulties, both his personal life and his creative endeavours (most letters from RA offer sympathy and suggestions for solving HW's real and imaginary problems).

He had written a long letter to RA as early as the 31st March 1951, asking him to be very careful how he handled his material.

HW to RA. 31 March 1951

Dear Richard,

I do assure you from all you have written to me that you have an exciting story to tell.... TEL was a mystery man; popularly so; and intimately so. I am sure, indeed I know, that the Trustees, also D.G. (i.e. David Garnett) must have some anxiety, some fear, lest the spiritual truth be detracted from. ... I am sure that the form of your story should fit in with the mysteriousness of the elusive man. You could, and should, write an enthralling story of your coming to assemble your material for writing the book; almost a detective story. You state nothing; there is no libel in putting it that way.

'The Life and Adventures of T.E. Lawrence'

You can tell the story quietly and as a narrative....

Don't call him a romantic, a homosexual, a braggart, a phoney, a guttersnipe (as that ass Storrs did) – a hero, or this or that. What his brother said about his weak or sensitive or diffident or un-single-minded inner core controlled or TORMENTED by his will-power (which is not true strength, please note: it is based on desperation; it cracks in time, and often breaks others on the way. Cf. Hitler in this) But TEL broke off in time; as Jesus did. No leadership for him....

Now please do us a book of your wonderful characterisation and descriptions, and forget right or wrong, won't you?...

Write your book as though you were writing of Cathy. We love TEL as you love Cathy. He is like a son to me.... You have a noble subject. He won't let you down.

(Letter in the Morris Library Special Collections, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA)

Now he decided to state his own case and pre-empted Aldington's book with its controversial assertions, by writing a long essay 'Threnos for T.E. Lawrence' which was published in *The European* in two parts in May and June 1954.³

I will declare now: Even if the much publicised (by others) and mortifying (to T.E.) Arabian Adventure turns out to be moonshine or mirage, it will make no difference to my feeling about 'T.E.' himself, as I knew him and perceived what he truly was, a wonderful man.

Basically the material is that which appears in *Genius of Friendship* but with added passages which explain the Aldington connection and gives his own apologia for Lawrence's behaviour. It is perhaps also an apologia for his own behaviour. That he saw and recognised much of what was pertinent to the TEL story was also pertinent to his own story is obvious from phrases he uses in the article. He knew he was as guilty as Lawrence in telling exaggerated versions of events, even downright lies. He admits many such instances in the 'Threnos'. In excusing and forgiving TEL's behaviour it seems to me that he is asking us to excuse and forgive him.

HW wrote a further contribution which touched upon TEL for the November 1954 issue of *The European*; a review of *The Home letters of T.E. Lawrence and his brothers*.⁴ He had already reviewed this book in *John O'London's Weekly* on 2 July 1954 and in a talk on the West of England radio in August 1954 [see 'Pen and Plough', (H.W. Society, 1993)], but these were fairly formal reviews, which set out the wares of the book. The review for *The European* was more personal, his main purpose being to emphasise his own opinion of the innate truthfulness and integrity of TEL.

Since I wrote my Threnos ... I have been shown papers and letters which dispel all doubt. He was entirely truthful; and the records will eventually prove it.

But whilst maintaining this fact, and knowing that his friend Aldington was striving so desperately to find what he considered to be the 'truth' about TEL, HW still maintained his own fiction of the content of the last letter from himself to TEL, leading Aldington to repeat this on the penultimate page of his book, – *Lawrence of Arabia, a Biographical Enquiry* (Collins, 1955). I think that Richard Aldington would have found that very hard to forgive had he ever known the truth; as HW knew that one day it would be known, even as TEL's peccadillos had been found out.

But it is unfortunate that Aldington allowed the angst that arose from his unrelenting work to seep into his book in some places, despite his avowal that he would present the material objectively. This detracts from its implicit worth and no doubt made fuel for his critics to use. His anguish is understandable, but the book would have had stronger impact if he had removed all personal remarks. Unfortunately his copious file of notes of references and evidence to back up his presentation which he sent on to Collins apparently 'disappeared'. With hindsight, it was very naive to let them out of his hands: he should have arranged for them to be locked up in the strongest vault available! But he probably had no choice other than to hand them over as backup evidence of his sources for Collins' lawyers, who as he stated in an earlier letter to HW, examined his text with microscopic attention for possible libel.

So the book was finally published in January 1955 unleashing a furore of criticism. Aldington himself considered that it was unfortunate that Collins had,

some time previous to publication, issued a controversial press release in order to create interest in the book. This was taken up and exaggerated by the Press and by Aldington's several opponents. He felt his integrity had been prejudiced by this biased and damaging promotion. For instance as early as 19th January 1954, a year before actual publication, *The Evening Standard* printed:

The reputation and integrity of Lawrence of Arabia come under the most devastating attack ever launched on them ... the publishers claim the book will erase Lawrence from the pages of history.

This was not Aldington's intention; he was merely trying to show that much had been exaggerated, often by others, and that TEL had frequently gone along with such exaggerations, at times instigating some of his own. HW had seen the *Evening Standard* article and had written mentioning this to RA, who answered as follows on 12.2.54:

The 'news' of my book was sold to the Standard by an 'old friend' who had not much to go on and invented the lot. Standard rang Collins and they gave the story as published. I thought the way they gave it out provocative, and not altogether just to three years of struggle to get at facts which too often elude one, and are so recorded.

...

Collins have misrepresented me by their sensational 'erasing from history' which I never said and don't believe. I deplore the bang-slap way Collins publicity put the story out. I am sure when you get the book you'll see I've leaned over backwards to be fair. But there's an awful, awful lot which needs explaining.

Among others, Robert Graves and B.H. Liddell-Hart were known to be very angry and were apparently planning to sue; but the lawyers had been through the text very carefully, and as they could find no grounds for litigation this had to be dropped.

David Garnett published a review in *The New Statesman* on 5th February 1955 entitled 'Lawrence in the Dock', fairly blasting Aldington's interpretation of the TEL story, and citing several facts proving (to his own satisfaction) that RA was the one who was lying, (just as RA had prophesied would happen). Garnett obviously picked up those points which he could personally refute:- there is inordinate space devoted to the 'Morris' bicycle episode (did Lawrence own or not own a Morris designed bicycle) whilst ensuing published letters in subsequent issues take this point up - amazingly ignoring all the import of the 'biographical enquiry' as a whole.

Another important review was by Liddell-Hart who wrote six pages in *The London Magazine* in April 1955, giving a somewhat more analytical précis of disputed assertions by Aldington. This was answered by him in a spirited letter in the August issue, with a further reply by Liddell-Hart. Thereafter the Editor declared the subject closed!

Garnett, and indeed Liddell-Hart, were as stated, of the 'Lawrence Bureau' (RA's description) and as such, their remit would have been to uphold TEL's 'halo'. The complications of the 'rights and wrongs' on either side are beyond the scope of this inquiry, which merely seeks to show HW's part in it, or rather, of their part in HW's story.

HW read David Garnett's review and on the 8th February wrote him a long letter;

Dear David Garnett,

I read your review of the Aldington biography in *The New Statesman* with gladness and admiration for its clear and simple thoughts and penetration, particularly the last part (though I quailed a little, at the final sentence)...

Regarding the biography (i.e. RA's biography of TEL) I know only how it was inceptioned, indirectly, through an Australian poet who came here in 1947 or '48, heard about TEL (the little I knew; the greatness of my admiration and regard) from me and later, having made himself of use to Richard A. in France (an unusual role for a fan, surely) later suggested the biography to Evans Bros. who offered £1750 and paid some of it: and later Alister Kershaw the Australian went to Collins and got £4500, and so Evans was bought out. I wrote to RA again and again (knowing how amateurish, 'twenty-ish' mood was his writing in novels and character-drawing in sarcasm, jeers, etc and begged him not to write like that about TEL. I had already made a mutually guarded amity with RA in France – observed the non-personal codes of conversation, etc., and so won some sort of friendship for both of us misfits. But I knew that RA regarded my writing as fairly soppy – then followed many letters of his 'puzzlement', 'amazement' etc – and then 'sell your letters, Henry, while the going is good – TEL's a fake' – a remark kindly meant, but indicative of a 'twenty-ish' mentality, and no escape from the (non-) 'blooming self' (Ed. – a TEL phrase written in a letter to HW, see quote in Pt. I of this essay). For surely friendship and regard (for TEL) isn't dependent on proofs of this or that contradiction, line-shooting, or anything else. We like people for themselves not for literary reasons.

I heard (I hope I'm not being too unfriendly to RA) that you considered me to be 'unreliable' as regards TEL in the early years of the projected biography when you wrote to RA⁵.

I think I see entirely what was meant: the DHL-TEL 'fake' (As I thought you'd regard it) and the letter about the TEL-Hitler meeting (actually it was a peace-meeting or broadcast in London to clarify, for each of the opposed ideologies, each to the other: on the principle that Hitler himself once remarked 'When two opposing states of mind are in deadlock, both may be right.' That letter, after weeks of frustration at Shallowford (was it a frustration other than of war-thoughts? probably) was written: and I thought posted: although hundreds, perhaps thousands of letters, in envelopes, stamped and addressed, have, during the years, been thrown aside in books, cupboards, etc. etc. after the 'brainstorm' has passed. ...

I wrote, but never posted, several long letters to your Father: we seemed to be revolving in the same sad circle: I made the error some time before, of treating his mild satire of myself as a joke, and inventing 'funny' retorts – suddenly he froze up and for years I was unhappy about it. I meant to write only to ask permission to send you my apologia in the two matters as explained above: now I see my good angel has prompted me to impose all this upon you out of the blue. I do hope I have not offended by this directness.

Yours truly
Henry Williamson.

This whole letter is a most extraordinary one for HW to have written. He was obviously very worried about being associated with Aldington and the biography and had a bad conscience about the whole affair. Sadly though, in his anxiety to appease David Garnett (for HW couldn't afford to make open enemies among publishers) and show his loyalty to TEL, HW betrays what should have been his equal debt of loyalty to Richard Aldington. For this letter is not at all fair to Aldington; HW does not exactly do justice to their total friendship, nor to the

This is the original 'scrap'. H.W. 4 March 1951

What D. H. Lawrence means by "Lady Chatterley's Lover" is that the idea of sex, & the whole strong vital instinct, being considered indecent causes men to lose what might be their vital strength and pride of life - their integrity. Conversely, the idea of 'genitals being beauty' in the Blakeian sense would free the humanity from its lowering and disintegrating immorality of deed and thought.

Lawrence wilted & was made written by the "miners - chapel - dirty little boy, you" environment: he was ruined by it: and in most of his work he is striving to straighten himself. And become beautiful. Ironically, or paradoxically in a humanity where 'genitals are beauty' there would be a minimum of 'sex' and a maximum of beauty, or Art. This is what Lawrence means, surely.

25.3.30.

intricacies of their total correspondence nor to Aldington's reputation as an established and respected writer. Of course, Richard Aldington was unaware of this 'diversion' by HW, but he was very aware that HW did not approve of the outcome of his book and could not condone such a radical view of TEL.

Letters from both men previous to the publication of the TEL biography in January 1955 are dated early December 1954, and do not refer to TEL at all but from the following extract there was obviously a letter from HW which did refer to it – unless it could be that Aldington is actually referring to the 'Threnos' article. [There appear to be several of HW's letters missing from the total span of the correspondence – Aldington possibly kept some pertaining particularly to TEL in the 'file' that went to Collins – and were thus 'lost' – or others may have been lost by Aldington when moving or just put on one side without filing. My impression is that possibly when Alister Kershaw was not there to file etc., little 'office' work was achieved.] This letter to HW dated 7.2.55 also shows Aldington's exhaustion immediately following publication:

I thought that you wouldn't write to me again, but then I see you haven't read the book. Your stories of childish lies don't excuse him. He was a phoney, a liar and a praiser of pederasts, and that's that. If you, like Storrs, (enclosure) didn't know it, more fool you.

I was exhausted last week by reporters, English, French and American, in person and on the phone.

And again, on 12 Feb 1955:

*Dear Henry,
I am sorry I forgot to send the copy, which comes by express today. I have been deluged by demands [i.e. – for copies of the TEL book] ... Since the 1st of this month I have had to write about 150 letters, face a dozen interviewers in English, American and French and write three articles ... I am getting letters daily from officers of the Regular and Indian armies, and so far only one for TEL. ... The poison gas cloud of lies, malice, rage, put out by the little phoney's 'friends' baffles description. Keep out of it, Henry, never mind which side. It is a very dirty business, and I wish I had never got mixed up in it.*

*In great haste, but with all love to all,
Richard.*

Rest and the offer of further work restored his equanimity. (Although he had already written two further books since sending off the TEL typescript he obviously worried that such adverse publicity might end further offers of work.) And despite this outburst the two men were soon corresponding again on the old familiar level and continued to do so until Aldington's death in 1962.

One letter from HW is of particular interest to this story. Actually dated 4 Jan. 1955, it should have been 4 Jan 1956, (it refers to the imminent birth of his eldest son's first child, which was in Feb. 1956, and also Aldington answers points from this in a letter dated 10.4.'56). It is possible that here HW is covertly referring to his (somewhat treacherous) letter to David Garnett, over which he doubtless had a bad conscience.

*My dear Richard,
I owe you a thumping big apology, and for some time have known it. The apology is*

due to you because you had the graciousness to send me a copy of your book, on which you had worked for years with all your powers; and when this book came here, I looked the gift horse in the mouth, and sent you a letter to the effect that you ought to be someone else, preferably in the mould of my delightful and perfect self. I had not the sense or the manners to perceive what I see now: that human beings are different, and the chief error of most of us in the common mould ... is to strive to convert others to our own damned images. I am guilty. I apologise to you.

Furthermore, I was guilty of turning on you. I knew your feelings were most sensitive, I had had nothing but kindness and hospitality from you, given you nothing in return, except to advise to be not like yourself in your writings, but like me. For that is what it was. Disgraceful.

On the other hand, you never tried in the least to alter me, although my faults in writing were obvious to you, as they are to most others who have a sense of the classical objectivity.

[letter in the Morris Library, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA.]

In his contribution to *Richard Aldington: An Intimate Portrait* ⁶ HW writes most benignly of their friendship. He pays homage publicly to the debt of encouragement he owed to RA and states 'while I saw how the book [i.e. the TEL biography] was to progress I did not allow this to alter my affection for 'Riccardo'.'

But let HW have the final word on his genius for friendship with the closing paragraphs of his 'Threnos for T.E. Lawrence':

Dear Lawrence of Arabia, "world's imp" as the imaginative Arabs called you (and they knew!) did your imagination fizz over at times? Did you cry down your own solid achievements (if war-time acts are ever solid) and dismiss as failure what contacting men, the legitimate and the caste-marked, praised, since so often you fell, in your own must-be-better eyes, below the standards you had set yourself? Does the stalk which rises above other stalks in a field of barley fall of its own exuberance, from too much nitrogen, as a barley-bright mind dithers after one glass of whisky in the bar of Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo following days of radiant sand and torturing eye-blink? Were you conscious underneath your dither, despite the Arab robes, of that name of convenience, "Lawrence"? Is that the real reason why you refused all decorations? Were you afraid that one day one of those newspapers making money by sensation, might risk an action for libel, and print a photograph of your birth certificate? Did you, in fear, instinctively use words to conceal your true self, which was of the quality of gold beaten so fine that it quivers in stillest air and is near-transparent? Did you blurt out startling "facts" to break a constriction with unclear people? Was it fun, Irish blarney, to embroider a tale you did not really want to tell, always because of the haunting need to conceal the "reality" of Ned Lawrence who, with no real glee and certainly with dread, had become the Lowell Thomasian Uncrowned King of Arabia? Were your "facts" flung out anyhow and anywhere, because in truth the whole thing to you was "balls"? In the sense that V.M. Yeates, who wrote the classic of the R.A.F., *Winged Victory*, when asked to write a book about his post-war business experience, replied "If I wrote what you ask it would be hopelessly libellous. It would begin, 'Life is Big Business, Fornication, and Death'."

"A rare beast, does not breed in captivity," said Sir Winston Spencer Churchill of your true self. God save us all from the truth that is not multi-lateral! The world has seen enough of partisan truth. Which is, no doubt, muddled thinking; but Shakespeare, who created Hamlet as well as Prospero, Ariel, and Puck, would know what I try to explain. And you, I think, would be the last person to blame any

biographer who accepted a contract job and then did his best to say what happened. (Though if it has been said this time in the way that it did happen that will be a wonderful thing.) Let the critic who has never slurred or twisted in his own life throw the first stone.

* * * * *

Postscript

That the controversy surrounding this whole Aldington/TEL episode still exists is proven in recent editions of *T.E. Notes*⁷. In July 1992 a conference was held in Montpellier, France, to mark Richard Aldington's Centenary. One aspect of the Conference explored the Aldington/TEL controversy. Prof. Crawford presented a paper setting out a preliminary argument for his forthcoming book, which *T.E. Notes* printed in their November 1992 issue. Their February 1993 issue was devoted entirely to the very lively academic argument arising from that paper, showing that the dust has far from finally settled. HW is quoted by several people (on either 'side') as part of their argument. Although HW's role in the RA/TEL affair was of a very minor nature, it was possibly significant as the exchange between the two men gives some proof of the real state of Aldington's mind at this time, – that he was not against TEL from the outset, that he was at first genuinely puzzled and then increasingly angered by what he discovered.

My own opinion, based solely on what is engendered by the letters between these two men, and not from deep scholarship of historical records – which Prof. Crawford will explore – is that Aldington boiled over at the point that the TEL book was actually published and forever after the real bitterness was foremost. He had started out to write what he thought would be a fairly straightforward biography. He had put much into that book and although he knew fairly early on that he would probably be made a scape-goat, his personal integrity made him doggedly continue; but he hadn't realised the extent that he would be reviled until the actual publication. ALL that work, and no recognition for it – not only that, but totally vilified. He was not a well man and it was obviously a real blow. He wrote that book under very difficult conditions and with no access to the official papers nor to many of the personal papers that would have helped clarify his premises. It may be that he made some mistakes, drew some wrong conclusions, was biased about some aspects, but he did strive to tell the truth, and he did open the way for a re-examination of the many myths that have surrounded TEL. Future scholars have had to take his thesis into account and take great care to justify their own work on true facts. Aldington hoped that one day his stance would be justified. With his centenary now celebrated it would be nice to think that this was so. But like the mistral that blows so fiercely and regularly around the Rhône valley near his chosen home, it is obvious that cold and piercing debate still blow around Richard Aldington's 'Biographical Enquiry' of Lawrence of Arabia.

Notes:

1. The source for this and the following details about Richard Aldington's life is *Richard Aldington; a biography* by Charles Doyle (Macmillan, 1989).
2. Letters from Henry Williamson to Richard Aldington are the Copyright of the HW Literary Estate but are owned by the Morris Library Special Collections Department, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA. Letters from

Richard Aldington to Henry Williamson are the Copyright of the Richard Aldington Literary Estate, but are owned by the HW Literary Estate.

3. It is planned to reprint 'Threnos for T.E. Lawrence' in a forthcoming HW Society book, as it is somewhat lengthy to include in this issue of the *Journal*. Details will be available in due course.
4. *The Home Letters of T.E. Lawrence and his brothers*, ed. by M.R. Lawrence (Blackwell, 1954.)
5. RA had written to HW at an early stage that David Garnett considered HW an unreliable source of information but without giving any details. It obviously rankled as HW refers to this several times in ensuing letters.
6. *Richard Aldington: An Intimate Portrait*, ed. Alister Kershaw and F.J. Temple, (Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1965).
7. *T.E. Notes* is a TEL Newsletter published in the USA, edited by Denis and Mary McDonnell, 653 Park St. Honesdale, PA 18431 USA. The Editors are planning an issue featuring HW this autumn, which is splendid news for us.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for permission from the HW Literary Estate to use passages from *Genius of Friendship*, and to quote from HW's unpublished letters, copies of which were kindly provided by the staff of the Morris Library Special Collections, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale USA.

Alister Kershaw, as Executor of the Richard Aldington Literary Estate, generously gave permission to use passages from unpublished letters of RA; and of course, to use a passage from one of his own letters.

I am also grateful to Stephen Francis Clarke for his help in supplying me with photocopies of connected material of which I had no prior knowledge; and to Brian Fullagar for originally guiding me to the source of the Shakespearian lines which preface 'Threnos for T.E. Lawrence', viz. 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' (See Editorial), and for providing me with the *T.E. Notes* referred to above.

I am also grateful for help received from the american historian, Prof. Fred Crawford, who clarified some points and corrected some errors and misapprehensions and who is currently writing a book which will examine in detail the background to Richard Aldington's biography of TEL. Details will be made available when known.

* * * * *

Erratum

'The Genius of Friendship – Part I: T.E. Lawrence'. (HW Soc. *Journal*, No. 27, P.18)

I must apologise for stupidly adding throughout the article the 'The' from my own title onto H.W's book which should be plain *Genius of Friendship*. Further, on p. 26 I have inadvertently put H.V. Morton although I was perfectly aware that the initials should be J.B. and to really clarify things, it is 'D.B.' (Dominic Bevan) Wyndham Lewis.