

## Review

*Threnos for T.E. Lawrence and other writings* by Henry Williamson, together with 'A Criticism of Henry Williamson's *Tarka the Otter*' by T.E. Lawrence. Introduction by J.W. Blench. Edited by John Gregory. Paperback, 144pp., Illus. The Henry Williamson Society, 1994, £7.50

This is possibly the most important book of HW's writing that the Society has published to date, for in gathering together this collection of critical pieces, an important and neglected aspect of HW's work is revealed.

All those areas of his life and work with which we are familiar, the themes of war, natural history, social history and the visionary aspects are all here encapsulated in a different concentrated essence. Within the discipline of this more factual genre of writing, where his imagination had to be curbed and his attention and gifts are directed on very particular paths, HW reveals more of the reality of himself in many ways than he does in his more imaginative work. But that singular aura which pervades his imaginative writing can still be found, so that even in what might be termed 'sheer plod' writing there is 'plough down sillion shine'.

The collation presented here might well have been entitled 'The Genius of Friendship' for within the covers we find many of Henry Williamson's friends in ancient sunlight: among them, Richard Jefferies, W.H. Hudson and Francis Thompson, who first fed his spirit, and sustained him spiritually throughout his life; T.E. Lawrence whom he considered a 'twin psyche'; Richard Aldington with whom he shared an 'old soldier' comradeship and whose robust honesty was much appreciated; John Heygate, 'Piers Tofield' of the *Chronicle*, with whom HW shared many pranks and confidences in the course of a long friendship; and those 'sons of Colfe's' who shared experiences of the first world war and whose books HW helped to establish – Douglas Bell and poor sick Victor Yeates, whose writing life was so desperately brief; and James Farrar, whom HW never knew, but whose genius he immediately recognised.

In his Introduction to Farrar's *Unreturning Spring* HW states

*'Men of genius know one another, even when they are of differing wavelengths. 'Lawrence', Yeates, Farrar – all with a 'mort of experience' in war, were of the same quality under their different powers of will. Each man in his individual way thrust through that which obscured the simplicity of life; and revealed the truth?'*

I think we can assume by inference that HW would be included within such a phrase.

The book also contains two important prefaces that HW wrote for his own work which have up until now only been available to those lucky enough to own the very limited editions in which they appear. Whilst the last item is the reprinting of the very important letter written by T.E. Lawrence to Edward Garnett on the subject of *Tarka* which had left him 'sizzling with joy for three weeks'. Again this has not previously been easily available. John Gregory has done well to procure this important letter for a Society publication.

In his Introduction Dr. Wheatley Blench provides much valuable background information which sets the pieces in context. Thus the book provides a most interesting collection for us as members of the HW Society and an important reference for students interested in the development of HW's life and work. AW