

## Letters

Until recently I never knew HW existed. Coming across a copy of Tarka, maybe a childhood gift, I opened the book wondering if I had read it long ago, and forgotten.

I am now convinced of two things. One is that HW's limited readership is a crime. I have never been so affected as by Tarka – only some poems have come close. The writing takes over the mind; at times one is almost hallucinating.

Secondly: the tragedy of Tarka is its enduring image as a children's book. I'm sure children find it spellbinding, but how many must read it at nine, enjoy it, and then forget, and never realize how much they missed? For myself, three readings haven't caught everything. Why must people belittle works about animals? That is what makes the book so special. It is a model of Joyce's 'metampsychosis' – being suddenly something else.

Nick Green,  
164 Abbots Road, Abbots Langley,  
Herts. WD5 0BL

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Just before I recently retired, my son set out some ground rules for me. Particularly, he implored, 'do not start writing to papers, magazines, journals'.

I have a good reason for breaking that one. I want to say 'thank you' for the Journal.

A year or more ago (time flies), our editor anxiously asked for feedback about the Journal. Little was forthcoming, so it was reasonable to assume that no views was good news.

Once again, for reasons dull and domestic, we are unable to get to the Spring Meeting in Norfolk. It is on such occasions that we suddenly realise something that we take for granted, but that should be recalled, and that is what an effective and important link the Journal provides with the bulk of the membership

who can never make the meetings.

For many then, the Journal is the Society. It is reassuring proof that the Society is in good heart even if it feels a bit stressed at times. The Journal, together with John Gregory's excellent publications represents a treasure trove of material in which the Society can feel proud.

SO, team, to adapt a saying from another hero of mine, if you can keep talking' to us, you cannot go far wrong!

Eric Starr  
15 Hawthorn Way, Nailsea,  
Bristol, BS19 1QQ

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Congratulations to John Gregory in pulling together in such a coherent manner the correspondence in the BBC Written Archive between Henry and various BBC staff.

This is a valuable insight into an aspect of HW's work that tends to be forgotten. Far from being a shy, retiring sort of author, it seems HW was not slow in pushing his ideas for radio broadcasts or getting Ann Thomas to fly a few kites for him with her ex-colleagues.

Members will be interested to learn that Ann Thomas recorded her experiences of working in radio and of acting as secretary to HW in her only novel, published under the pseudonym Julia Hart Lyon. The book was called *Women Must Love* and was published by Faber (HW's publisher at the time) in March, 1937.

The novel tells the story of Susanna Fair (Ann Thomas) who works at the radio station and meets Richard Scotforth, a very thinly disguised characterisation of Henry Williamson, who has been invited in to discuss the reading of a play.

Susanna and Richard are attracted to each other and Susanna is invited to Richard's home in 'Cumberland', where she meets his wife Alethea, obviously Loetitia.

*In due course, Susanna leaves the radio station to become Richard's secretary, just as Ann quit the BBC to do the same.*

*The book went through five impressions, the last being December 1945 and is available through the library interloan services.*

Peter K. Robins  
Pembroke Cottage,  
10 Strawberry Hill Road, Twickenham  
TW1 4T

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*Few of our members will have noticed the obituaries of Evelyn Nightingale who died on March 11th 1994 aged 90. However she was one of the most beautiful ladies to have graced the pages of A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight appearing in The Power of the Dead as Virginia, wife of Anthony Cruft.*

*'Anthony Cruft is going to make a name for himself, I fancy' said Piers. 'He and Virginia have a flat in a little known part of London'. 'Has he published anything yet?' said Phillip. 'Yes a novel of Oxford, a very funny one' (Power of the Dead, p. 189).*

*Thus we are introduced to Evelyn Waugh and his young bride, the daughter of Lord Burghclere. Her mother's brother was the famous egyptologist the Earl of Camaron.*

*When Piers Tofield took Phillip to dinner he found the Crufts delightful but 'it must be hell for Tony knowing his wife wants to go off with someone else'. Slowly we are introduced to the break up of the marriage and to the fact that Virginia and Piers are in love.*

*Evelyn Nightingale had had a lonely*

*and strict upbringing so rejoiced at the liberation which came with the mid-twenties. She had shared a flat with Lady Pansy Pakenham and had a wide range of interesting friends including Nancy Mitford, Anthony Powell and Evelyn Waugh who she married in 1928. Barely a year later she fell in love with John Heygate, the writer and B.B.C. producer, who was a great friend of Henry Williamson.*

*The love affair left Evelyn Waugh very bitter and he is said to have based his character Brenda Last in 'A Handful of Dust' upon his first wife which according to her Times obituary was a particularly bizarre travesty of her character. 'Those whose opinions had been formed by certain of Waugh's biographers were invariably taken aback by the kindly gentle humourous person they actually met.*

*On his novel Henry Williamson has Archie Plugge whispering at Channerson's Bottle party, surely you know about the bogus marriage?' When interviewed late in life on B.B.C. television Waugh remained bitter about John Heygate's conduct and regarded him as an absolute bounder! Hopefully these sad incidents did not damage Waugh's relationships with Henry.*

*After her short marriage to John Heygate Evelyn married Ronald Nightingale and enjoyed a long and happy life in rural Kent and Sussex but is said to have never read the novel in which Waugh took his revenge.*

Fred Shepherd  
Old Corner House, 6 Poplar Road,  
Wittersham, Kent TN30 7PG