And the term went on, preparing us for 'the conflict of a mature life', stealing the wind and the sun which make the genius of man. On the tower of the school floated the national flag, frayed and bleached in the white air passing over all lands with the secret gifts of heaven, the white wind fraying and bleaching all flags. And the term went on in the shadowed classrooms, the last term for me and Jack, Bony and Rupert, Fitzaucher and Burrell, all the friends who had swotted and played together — the summer of 1914, which was to see the apotheosis of ideas and methods which everywhere had crushed the imaginative tissues of childhood, as the leaves of dandelions on the Gadarene slopes.[71]

To the pride of rulers throughout history and their self-seeking prayers to their Gods he opposes spontaneous and unselfish prayer to the 'Great Earth Spirit', echoing Jefferies's belief that 'Truth pours down in the sunlight'.[72] The writing of his book is in fact a necessary mental therapy for Willie; it is a way of coming to terms with life after the traumatic shocks and deprivations of the War. Most of his schoolfriends have been killed, and he feels more kinship with the dead than with the living. At times Jack seems to be with him, at other times Richard Jefferies, inspiring and helping him.[73] He is unsure about the insights of *The Policy of Reconstruction*, which helps the reader to assent to what he feels to be true in it, and reject what seems to him to be false, more easily than if the ideas were given in direct authorial intrusion. The technique is similar to that of D. H. Lawrence in *Women in Love* when he gives some of his own ideas to Birkin.

Willie is not, however, fully content with communion with the dead and with Nature; Williamson portrays convincingly his craving for human love as well. Eveline recognizes the emotional difficulties of the war-generation; it is a summer of drought, and she tells Willie: 'You are like those fields, you are parched, nervously exhausted. All you boys who went to the war from school are the same . . .[74] To such unfortunates she can, she declares, offer friendship, but regrettably they want more. In fact, however, she is a virtual nymphomaniac, and Willie becomes disastrously entangled with her, as have been his cousin Phillip, Julian Warbeck, an ex-RFC pilot, and the pathetic cadet Sandy White, who is ultimately led to suicide by her inconstancy. Williamson presents Willie's love affair with Eveline with great power, insight and convincingness, while at the same time making clear its essentially destructive nature.

At first all goes well; Willie's love, which is soon consummated physically, seems to strengthen him. He is able to discuss his ideas eagerly with her; how he wants to bring back to men the simplicity and clarity of the child-heart, corrupted by bad education, and how sometimes he feels mystically absorbed into the core of life.[75] She tries to disengage herself, but he follows her to Folkestone where he arrives on 'Peace Day' [a Victory Celebration], 19 July 1919. The frenzy of this occasion, rendered with great vividness by Williamson, seems to release much of the pent-up neurosis of the war years, and we feel that it is Eveline's true milieu and an image of her way of life.

Although he tries to enter into the spirit of the day, Willie finds that he is not fully able to do so, and withdraws for a time to kindle a bonfire on the Downs above the town and to commune with the dead:

He sat by the fire, celebrating Peace Night in the hills of the dead, alone with the field crickets that sang to the heat, a straying moth, and the timid steers snuffling and peering at the edge of the fire glow . . . Northwards, eastwards, westwards, whithersoever he looked, the beacons were burning — tokens of joy at England's ended darkness. He pitched the unburnt ends on his own fire, which flamed immediately, and the sudden emotion choked his throat and sight; he felt that the spirits of the dead soldiers were with him. Sheep and cattle shuffled in the darkness beyond the fire, and from the grass came a million sighs that stirred the flames, and passed into darkness again.[76]

Willie continues to pursue Eveline until the autumn, hoping to get her to leave Lionel, her patient, courteous, unloved, older husband, in spite of being told by Mr and Mrs Norman of her humble origin and questionable past.[77] Eveline is, however, unwilling to make the sacrifice of leaving Lionel for Willie; her essentially mundane nature is revealed when in due course she does leave him, but for the rich, socially acceptable, yet essentially empty Naps Spreycombe, thus becoming Lady Slepe.[78] Willie's idea of her has proved to be an illusion; she is no more what he thought she was than is Pat Colyer, the man she was with when she first met Willie, who turns out to be an impostor, the real Captain Colyer's batman.[79]

The Folkestone scenes in this novel are not, however, sombre or mordant. There is some excellent comic relief. The scenes portraying Lionel's father's household are very amusing. He himself is a silly retired parson who vainly tries to interest Willie in the notions of the British Israelites, while his sisters, although kindly, are essentially ridiculous; both Miss Fairfax, middle-aged but with 'a girlish manner entirely unassumed', and Mrs Beayne, dignified in manner, but insinuatingly bantering in speech.[80] Again, the foolish review *What's Next Dearie* to which Willie goes with the Fairfaxes is described with great gusto. The song of the evening *Your Eyes Tell me a Story Dearie* is a very shallow ditty, but to Miss Fairfax it is 'very beautiful and haunting'.[81] Still Willie does not realize Mary Ogilvie's devotion and worth, but once more the future development of their love is anticipated in a fine scene on the Downs in which Mary shows that she has a sensitive appreciation of Nature akin to Willie's, when she tells him that she often comes there to 'listen to the wind music', although he is so obsessed by Eveline that he does not listen to her words.[82]

Nevertheless, *The Dream of Fair Women* ends on a solemn note. Willie, who has been saved from suicide by drowning only by the anguished barking of his spaniel Billjohn, finally has to accept that Eveline will never take him as her husband, and feels that he can now turn his desires only towards spiritual ideals. In a beautifully imagined and deeply moving scene, he learns from Quillie, Eveline's little daughter, that she has gone off with Naps. His face betrays his agony, which Quillie is quick to notice:

> . . . *'O Will'um dear, why do you look like that?*
>
> *She put her arms round his knees and stared up at him. He bent down and kissed the little face. The love of the linnet-frail child gave him a poignant longing to fade with her into the sun. How well could he understand now Francis Thompson, the most homeless of poets, whose tiercel spirit for so long having ranged unmated the starry wilderness, evermore was haggard of love.*
>
> *Eve does not want me, even as a friend, he thought in his immense sadness.*
>
> *From the mortal world of banished hopes his dream must fly up in the blue-stained air, a white bird that all men should see, and seeing be comforted. If the haggard tiercel cried its pain, it should fly through the flames of hell until nothing of the mortal hoping frame was left, until the haggard was the phoenix of heaven.*[83]

He feels that his task must now be to 'create the new world whose prophet he is'.

This prepares the reader for the portrayal of Willie as the prophet of a new order in *The Pathway*, the last novel of the sequence. This novel, which blends Willie's unsuccessful prophetic role with the tragic story of his love for Mary Ogilvie, is the finest and most mature of the group, and it was in the light of his achievement in it that Williamson revised the earlier volumes. It is a powerful and haunting book, which if it falls short of absolute greatness, does nevertheless, I believe, closely approach it. The setting is once more the real countryside of North Devon, close to that of the first section of *The*

Dream of Fair Women, but not just a repetition of it. Now it is the area near Braunton, with its Great Field and Burrows, Baggy Point and Georgeham (the village where Williamson lived in the 1920s) — all rendered with magical attractiveness throughout the succeeding seasons of Winter, Spring, Summer and Autumn which are parallel to the rise and fall of the story of the love between Willie and Mary.

At the end of *The Dream of Fair Women* the reader has learnt that Willie has indeed tried to live a more spiritual life by working as a labourer with the War Graves Commission in France. Now however he has returned, and the book opens in January 1923, when Willie has been asked to call on Mary's household by her sister Jean, who has met Willie in Appledore, with Julian Warbeck.

Before Willie appears, Williamson describes Mary's home and family, so that the reader is well aware of the 'world' he is now to enter.[84] Mary lives in the ancient manor house of Wildernesse at Santon (drawn from Saunton Court in situation, but not in architecture) opposite the sand-dunes of Branton (i.e. Braunton) Burrows. The whole household depends very much on the imaginative yet practical Mary, whose great worth Willie comes to realize during the course of the novel, and with whom, after so many years, he falls in love. Williamson presents the growing relationship between the two with deep insight and inwardness. In their first scene together in this novel, Willie is impressed by Mary's kindness to a robin, which finding half-frozen to death on a window-sill, she has taken and shelters in her bosom.[85] She would like to shelter Willie also, whom she thinks of as her 'little boy', who needs to be cherished and looked after.[86] Feeling the healing power of her love and the recreative atmosphere of Wildernesse, Willie agrees to stay for a time, although he was on his way to his cottage. He becomes more aware of how her enthusiasms are like his own; she too is enthusiastic about the writings of Richard Jefferies and Francis Thompson,[87] but their love truly begins to blossom as they walk together over the Burrows and on the sands, surrounded by the benign spirit of Nature, to which they are both sensitive. The descriptions of the Burrows have been rightly praised by several critics,[88] but I do not think that it has been sufficiently noticed how well they are blended with the human story. Willie and Mary first walk over the Burrows in winter, when snow lies upon them, but his sympathy for her is growing: 'As they were trudging over a drift filling a hollow in the sandhills with white brilliance', he says, ' ''Mary, you are the only person who makes me feel that I need not explain anything I say''.'[89] When a girl before the War, she had been laughed at by her now dead brother Michael for speaking to the timbers of the old ship 'Dutchman's Wreck', but now she is glad when Willie echoes her thought: 'There are tree-spirits here, spirits that are lost in the sand. Do they remember the forest where their seeds swelled and split?'[90] In Spring, it is in seclusion in the Valley of the Winds in the Burrows that Willie first begins to declare his love and to realize why he is attracted to her: 'He saw that nothing had changed since her childhood, that her spirit was simple as water, sky, grass and wandering air, whose product she was. Therein lay the life of the future, for her mind was the essence of these things stored in the young consciousness'.[91] On the way back to Wildernesse they share their delight in the wild-flowers in the lane:

> *. . . the white double-petalled flowers of the stitchwort; the red of campion, that was to be found, said Mary, blooming somewhere in the lane all the year round; the yellow of charlock, which the wild bees were bending for its rich honey prizes; ground ivy, celandine, the thick trumpet leaves of pennywort stored with water; the sun-beloved dandelion, the red marsh orchid with its spotted leaves.*[92]

In his joy, Willie reflects that: 'wild flowers are the more beautiful . . . seen through the

eyes of love, for they mingle and return the thoughts given to them'. Mary shows Willie 'many friends of her inner life' amongst the flowers and birds, 'and when the sun was sinking over the sea, the loveliest thing of all — a golden plover flying over the marsh, and pausing high in the air, vibrating its wings while it secretly moved, then resting in a glide with its wings held downwards as it cried the love-notes of a ravishing sweetness.'[93] We recall here Willie's feeling for the plovers in the spring-time of his boyhood in *The Beautiful Years*.[94] In summer, it is while sheltering from rain during a walk near Branton Pill [i.e. creek] that Willie makes a full declaration of his love for Mary, and she reveals to him that she had loved him since childhood.[95] In the exaltation of their happy love they bathe in the sea off Santon Sands and walk in harmony of spirit by its margin:

> *. . . the sun was a silver flower, the flower of all beauty, shining on the wet sand whence a long wave had drawn back after its green curve and fall . . . He followed in her footsteps, treading the silver prints shed by a glistening water-wraith. A dark blue line of mirage wavered on the flat expanse before them: the white lines on the distant bar were crinkled by the glassy flames of air.*[96]

It is on the Sharshook ridge in the estuary that Mary and Willie become secretly engaged, after they have left an Otter Hunt Hall.[97] In autumn, it is by the estuary that Julian Warbeck burns upon a funeral pyre the body of the faithful spaniel Billjohn, while the body of the dead Willie, drowned the night before, rests in a boat nearby.[98]

The central love story is handled with great sensitiveness and skill, and does, I think, engage the reader's interest and feelings very powerfully. It is set among other, subsidiary love stories, which form a contrast in that they portray unhappy and unrequited love. Mary's sister Jean vainly loves Howard de Wychehalse, while he in turn vainly love Diana Shelley, who feels herself attracted to Willie.[99] However, although they are obviously eminently well suited to each other, Willie and Mary do not achieve married happiness. Mary's mother disapproves of Willie, considering him to be of unbalanced mind,[100] and Miss Goff, a conventional and censorious neighbour, believes him to be morally and spiritually dangerous.[101] Although he is popular with Mary's young brother and sister, with her great uncle and aunt and with Ben, a poor relation, nevertheless he comes to feel that he cannot bring Mary lasting happiness, and breaks off their engagement.[102] He feels that he must reject human happiness to be true to his reforming mission, not only by writing, but also by political action in 'rousing the ex-soldiers' in England as has been done in Germany by 'an ex-corporal with the truest eyes' he has 'ever seen in any man' [i.e. Hitler].[103] Willie's death is not, however, heroic; like Jim Holloman's, it is caused accidentally — Mrs Ogilvie prevents him from seeing Mary to bid farewell, and he tries to cross the estuary by boat not realizing, as Mary would have told him, that the salmon season is over, and that no boats will be available. He is drowned on the ridge by the incoming tide.[104] At the end of the novel, in a scene of great dramatic and emotional power, Mary sees him as a Lightbringer whom she has failed, and in reply to Howard's attempted consolation that 'nobody has failed anybody', and that Willie 'would never have changed', Mary speaks the last words of the sequence, endorsing Willie's message: ' ''He did not need to change . . . it is we who must change'', and she ran down to Phillip at the edge of the sea, weeping, thinking of the darkness of men's minds, pierced in vain by the shining light of Kristos, and of the agony of Christ, at the end of the Pathway'.[105]

While we feel the tragedy of the occasion, and admire Mary's devotion, we nevertheless are bound to ask ourselves if Willie's message is in fact so unanswerable.

Williamson himself felt in later years that he had been too much on Willie's side,[106] and in *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight* he tried to be much more objective in his portrayal of the life, career and ideas of Phillip Maddison.[107] Certainly at times we feel that Willie overrates his ideas, and that the response of his friends who see him as another Shelley, is excessive. His ideas in *The Pathway* are of course, as in *The Dream of Fair Women*, presented in a finely realized fictional context, but they are given a weighting by Williamson which I think they will not bear. They are still in essence those of *The Policy of Reconstruction*, although Willie is now presenting them, not only in conversation, but in an allegory, *The Starborn*, which he is writing. After dinner on his first night at Wildernesse, he opposes Mrs Ogilvie's view that the distress in post-war Germany is a just retribution, realizing that war can come again out of such partizanship and un-understanding of neighbours.[108] On Easter Sunday, when up the local church tower with Mary, he recalls his distress at the contrast between the beautiful Allied war cemeteries, the product of love, and the hideous 'concentration graveyard' for the Germans at the Labyrinthe, the product of continuing French hatred for the defeated enemy.[109] To Diana Shelley he recounts his experiences at the Christmas Truce of 1914, which are like those of Williamson himself,[110] and to the Vicar, Mr Garside, he deplores the support which was given by the clergy of the various nations to extreme nationalistic feeling.[111] There is a supreme need, he believes, for a change in outlook, which can come only from better education. The old narrow ideas must be supplanted by new broader ones: 'Change thought and you change the world', he declares.[112] The hope is with the new generation; 'You will have to build a better world', he tells Ronnie, Pam and Ben, 'than the one which kills men like myself or drives them to become fanatics'.[113] As he leaves to start his journey at the end of the novel he tells Diana Shelley that his aim is to make children happy and help avoid another European war.[114] At times he expresses himself with excessive vehemence; as Williamson himself recognized in later years, Willie has become somewhat of a ranter.[115] At times he experiences a spiritual afflatus which seems to give sanction to his message. He feels 'rapt with the Kristos' after listening to Diana Shelley playing the piano;[116] walking to Wildernesse with Mary after a visit to Appledore he feels that the poet Shelley is near him, and that like Shelley he is living in and for a future age.[117] As he leaves on his last journey, he feels that Shelley, Jefferies, Blake, Francis Thompson and Jesus are with him, and that he is 'of the everlasting light and life of the world'.[118] The reader can accept these things as a description of how the fictional character, Willie Maddison, feels, but I do not think that he can literally accept Willie as Julian Warbeck does, after a reading from *The Starborn*, as 'another Shelley' or indeed as 'more than Shelley'.[119] When *The Starborn* was published, it was found, as John Middleton Murry pointed out, to be of limited value both spiritually and artistically.[120] In fact Willie's message comes out very much better from *The Flax of Dream*. We cannot, I think, accept that Willie, or indeed Williamson, in these novels, has given us a message of supreme importance. What we have been given is a human wisdom, which is real but limited. Certainly it was desirable to introduce a less rigid and forceful system of education than that which prevailed in Williamson's boyhood, and it is always beneficial to foster understanding between men and nations. But as John Middleton Murry and Fr Brocard Sewell recognize, the cause of war lies deeper than in faulty education and family tensions; it lies in man's impulse to dominate, proceeding from Original Sin.[121] The Christian religion, properly understood and practised, is, I believe, the only fully effective cure for this. Furthermore, while it is true that Nature and country life provide a wholesome environment in which to grow up, and it is possible by imagination to have an intuition of the immanence of God in Nature,[122] the articulation of the message which Nature gives depends in fact upon a philosophy or theology

drawn in large part from other sources. While I do not think that the *Church Times*'s reviewer of *The Pathway* was at all justified in finding that the purpose of the novel was 'wrong' or that one could 'wish it had never been written',[123] Nevertheless it does seem to me that in the conversations between Willie and the Vicar, the dice is loaded by the novelist too much against Mr Garside.[124] Of course Mr Garside accepts dogma too much on obedience, without, it seems, a creative entering into its meaning, but there is surely much more to orthodox Christianity than he is allowed by Williamson to express. Willie's views are, I think, not opposed to the inner spiritual essence of Christianity, although they are undoubtedly seriously vitiated by Modernism. It is a vain hope to try to 'co-ordinate the teaching of Christ with that of Lenin'. He has no real perception of the difference between Nature and Grace, and his notion of 'redemption' is too naturalistic. Then again, the political activity he proposes to engage in is likely to be contaminated by contact with the world, as Williamson himself realized after he had witnessed Hitler's appalling deterioration from what he took to be his original state. The notorious remark in the 'Foreword' to the 1936 edition of *The Flax of Dream*: 'I salute the great man across the Rhine, whose life symbol is the happy child',[125] which so deeply upset some readers, must of course be understood in terms of Williamson's *idea* of Hitler at that time as 'a very wise and steadfast and truth-piercing father of his people: a man like T.E. Lawrence, without personal ambitions, a vegetarian, non-smoker, non-drinker, without even a bank-balance'.[126] We must always bear in mind that Williamson never praised Hitler for what are almost universally regarded as his evil qualities. On the contrary, he deplored Hitler's descent into the virtually demonic figure which be became; the 'Lightbringer' as he had believed him to be, became, he fully realized, the 'Prince of Darkness'.[127]

It is, however, a critical mistake to judge a writer too much by his overt philosophy of life, as T.S. Eliot did in the cases of Hardy and D.H. Lawrence in *After Strange Gods* (1934). Although creative writers, as Martin Turnell pointed out in *Poetry and Crisis* (1938), often *do* want to impart a 'message' in their work, nevertheless this 'human wisdom' certainly need not prevent us from experiencing the imaginative power and beauty of their artistic achievement. After all, we can accept what we believe to be true, and reject what seems to us to be false at the level of extractable ideas, without failing to respond to the image of life which the writer gives us. I think that we must recognize that in *The Flax of Dream* Henry Williamson has given us a fiction of unusual power and appeal. The story is absorbing and the characters are varied, convincing and memorable. In particular, Willie is a worthy protagonist; flawed, it is true, but essentially good and attractive, in whose fortunes we become very deeply involved. Mary is a delightful heroine; drawn in womanhood from Loetitia, Williamson's first wife,[128] her gentleness, nobility of heart, compassion and loyalty cannot fail to engage our deepest sympathies. There is, in the sequence, a rich tapestry woven of romance, comedy, tragedy and the varied moods of Nature. In it, Williamson, who saw a parallel between his work and that of D.H. Lawrence,[129] is concerned to celebrate and attract us to what he believes makes for life and fulfilment, and to deplore and repel us from what makes against them. He has, I believe, very largely succeeded in this aim. *The Flax of Dream* is, of course, the work of a young man; its strengths and weaknesses are in many ways those of youth itself, and within it we can surely recognize the promise of greater achievements to follow.

Acknowledgement. I should like to thank the Henry Williamson Literary Estate for the kind permission granted to quote from the writings of Henry Williamson in this article.

NOTES

1. The textual history of *The Flax of Dream* is quite complex, but it may be summarized as follows: *The Beautiful Years* (Collins 1921, revised Faber 1929); *Dandelion Days* (Collins 1922, revised Faber 1930); *The Dream of Fair Women* (Collins 1924, revised Faber 1931; further revised, Faber Library, 1933); *The Pathway* (Cape 1928, revised Cape 1929). The collected 'omnibus' edition issued in one volume by Faber in 1936 contains Williamson's final revisions, and is the text which the student of literature will want to use. The Faber paperback edition (4 volumes, 1967–9) follows the most recently revised versions before that of 1936, although Penguin Books in 1950 issued reprints of *The Beautiful Years* and *Dandelion Days* which follow the 1936 edition. The Zenith Books reprint (4 volumes, 1983) follows the Faber paperback edition. (See Alan Hancox: *Henry Williamson: a Catalogue of a Collection made by Alan Hancox Fine Books*, 1973, and Stephen Francis Clarke: *Clearwater Books: the Henry Williamson Catalogue*, 1983.)
2. See I. Waveney Girvan: *A Bibliography and Critical Survey of the Works of Henry Williamson* (Chipping Campden, 1931) pp. 9–15; Herbert Faulkner West: *The Dreamer of Devon: an Essay on Henry Williamson* (1932) pp. 10–21; 27–34; Malcolm Elwin: 'Henry Williamson' in Denys Val Baker (ed.): *Little Reviews Anthology 1946* (1946) pp. 193–202; Brocard Sewell: 'Editorial' in 'Henry Williamson: a Symposium and Tribute', *The Aylesford Review*, vol. ii, no. 2, Winter 1957–8, pp. 33–7; 'Some Thoughts on Henry Williamson's *The Flax of Dream*, ibid., vol. vii, no. 2, Summer 1965, pp. 102–10; John Middleton Murry: 'The Novels of Henry Williamson' in *Katherine Mansfield and other Literary Studies* (1959) pp. 97–162; Colin Wilson: 'Henry Williamson', *The Aylesford Review*, vol. iv, no. 4, Autumn 1961, pp. 131–43, reprinted in *Eagle and Earwig* (1967) pp. 225–38; David Hoyle: 'The Flax of Dream' in Brocard Sewell (ed.): *Henry Williamson: the Man, the Writings. A Symposium* (Padstow, 1980) pp. 106–117.
3. See *The Aylesford Review*, vol. ii, no. 2, Winter 1957–8, pp. 56–61, reprinted in Brocard Sewell: *Henry Williamson, the Man, the Writings. A Symposium*, pp. 145–54.
4. See, in Williamson's autobiographical writings: *Goodbye West Country* (1937) p. 9; *The Children of Shallowford* (1939) pp. 74–5; *The Story of a Norfolk Farm* (1941) pp. 221–5; 'Quest', *Woman's Illustrated*, 6 April 1946, p. 13; 'The Christmas Truce', *Purnell's History of the First World War*, vol. ii, no. 4, pp. 552–9. See further, in Williamson's fiction: *The Pathway*, chapter 10, 1936 edn of *The Flax of Dream*, pp. 1215–18; *A Fox Under My Cloak* (1955; the 5th volume in the 15-volume sequence *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*, 1951–69) chapters 3 and 4, pp. 34–61. See also Williamson's critical essay 'Reality in War Literature', *The Linhay on the Downs* (repr. 1938) pp. 246–7.
5. See Henry Williamson, *As the Sun Shines* (1941) p. 9.
6. Foreword to the 1936 edn of *The Flax of Dream*, p. 7.
7. 'Quest', *Woman's Illustrated*, 6 April 1946, p. 13. See also *The Children of Shallowford* p. 72: 'The town mind had lost touch with the truths of sky, grass and sunshine. Only from nature could the truth arise. Richard Jefferies, the poor farmer's son, slain before his time by hateful nineteenth-century industrialism, was the prophet of a new world waiting to be born: I his disciple'.
8. Foreword to the 1936 edition of *The Flax of Dream*, p. 7.
9. Ibid., p. 10.
10. The quotation is taken from pp. 12–13 of *The Incalculable Hour*. I have given an account of this book and its relevance to *The Flax of Dream* in an article 'The

Incalculable Hour' in *The Henry Williamson Society Journal*, no. 8, October 1983, pp. 18–21.

11. *Katherine Mansfield and Other Literary Studies*, p. 101.
12. *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Penguin Books edn, 1971) chapter 1, p. 8.
13. The context of this quotation may be read in Samuel J. Looker's edition of *Field and Hedgerow* (1948) p. 360.
14. *The Radio Times*, 7 November 1968, p. 39.
15. In his article 'The Last Summer', *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 2 August 1964, pp. 5–11, which deals with the summer of 1914, Williamson tells us that he was 'a dreaming youth', whose 'dream lay in the countryside of north-west kent which began four miles from London Bridge'. He would visit the 'Seven Fields of Shrofton' [Shroffield] which 'sloped to the grey Bromley road'. Partridges were still to be seen there, and there were roach 'in the little cattle-drinking ponds, each inhabited by its pair of moorhens'. In 'the watercress beds by Perry's Mill' trout were to be found, although after Southend Pond the river Ravensbourne was dying as it flowed towards the Thames. These places were by 1914 under the threat of urban development, but Williamson's 'own woods or preserves', further into the country, were safe. He had permission from the landowners to visit Holmwood Park at Keston, Squire Norman's woods at the Rookery and Shooting Common, High Elms near Downe, Dunstall Priory near Sevenoaks and Squerryes Park at Westerham. For the Bedfordshire places he knew in boyhood, see Tom and Joan Skipper: 'Henry Williamson's Bedfordshire Roots', *The Henry Williamson Society Journal*, no. 6, October 1982, pp. 26–31; 'A Gaultshire Guide', ibid., no. 7, May, 1983, pp. 23–9. See further the fictional treatment of the writing of *The Beautiful Years* in *A Test to Destruction* (1960; the 8th novel in *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*) chapter 21, p. 389, and *The Innocent Moon* (1961; the 9th novel in the *Chronicle*) chapter 5, p. 98.
16. *The Beautiful Years*, chapter 6, *Flax*, 1936 edn, p. 56.
17. Ibid., chapter 26, *Flax*, p. 189.
18. Ibid., chapter 20, *Flax*, pp. 135–6.
18. Ibid., chapter 29, *Flax*, pp. 211–22.
20. Ibid., 'Paternity', *Flax*, pp. 243–5.
21. 'Some Notes on ''The Flax of Dream'' and ''A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight'''; Sewell, *Henry Williamson, the Man, the Writings*, p. 148.
22. *The Beautiful Years*, chapter 30, *Flax*, p. 232.
23. Ibid., chapter 5, *Flax*, pp. 46–53; Chapter 13, *Flax*, p. 99.
24. Ibid., chapter 30, *Flax*, p. 235.
25. Ibid., p. 226.
26. Ibid., pp. 237–8.
27. Ibid., chapter 6, *Flax*, p. 57.
28. Ibid., chapter 30, *Flax*, p. 241.
29. Ibid., chapter 3, pp. 36–8.
30. Ibid., chapter 25, pp. 181–8. The boys continue this pursuit in *Dandelion Days*, chapters 1 and 6, *Flax*, pp. 253–60; 306–15.
31. *The Beautiful Years*, chapter 1, *Flax*, pp. 19–24.
32. Ibid., chapter 11, *Flax*, pp. 85–8.
33. Ibid., chapter 19, *Flax*, p. 125.
34. Ibid., chapter 6, *Flax*, pp. 60–4. The boys continue these visits in *Dandelion Days*, chapters 8 and 9, *Flax*, pp. 321–9 , 424–6.
35. *The Beautiful Years*, chapters 4 and 21, *Flax*, pp. 42–4, 149–52.
36. Ibid., chapter 2, *Flax*, p. 30.

37. Ibid., chapter 18, *Flax*, pp. 121–2.
38. Ibid., chapters 11, 14, 15, 19, 30.
39. Ibid., chapter 30, *Flax*, p. 241.
40. See P.S. Keyte, 'Memories of Rod and Lines', *The Colfeian*, no. 36, July 1969, pp. 67–70, where the following identifications are made: Mr Kenneth ('Bunny') drawn from Frank Bennett, Mr Beach from Sam Creech, Mr Worley from Bill Morley, Mr Worth from 'Dad' Worthy, Mr Waugh from S.W. Kelland, Mr Croodrane (Croodbrane in 1st edn) from 'Taffy' Simons, Mr Rapson ('Rattlethrough') from R.A. Fitzaucher, Mr Rore (Headmaster) from Frank W. Lucas. Williamson himself wrote about his schooldays as he remembered them in 'Out of the Prisoning Tower', in Brian Inglis (ed.) *John Bull's Schooldays* (1961) pp. 144–9. See also Fred Shepherd: 'From *Dandelion Days*', *The Henry Williamson Society Journal*, no. 6, October 1982, pp. 32–5.
41. *The Beautiful Years*, chapter 23, *Flax*, p. 168.
42. *Dandelion Days*, chapter 12, *Flax*, pp. 363–4.
43. Ibid., chapter 22, *Flax*, pp. 453–4; *The Pathway*, chapter 3, *Flax*, p. 1047.
44. *Dandelion Days*, chapter 10, *Flax*, p. 347.
45. Ibid., *Flax*, pp. 344–6.
46. For the context of these quotations see Richard Jefferies, 'Nature and Books', *Field and Hedgerow*, ed. Samuel J. Looker (1948) pp. 43, 50. For similar thought, see Jefferies, 'The Pigeons at the British Museum', *The Life of the Fields*, ed. Samuel J. Looker (1947) p. 283: 'In the sunshine, by the shady verge of woods, by the sweet waters where the wild dove sips, there alone will thought be found', used by Williamson as the epigraph to 'The Seed Loosening', the last section of *Dandelion Days*.
47. *Dandelion Days*, chapter 10, *Flax*, p. 348.
48. Ibid., pp. 348–9.
49. Ibid., chapter 3, *Flax*, pp. 270–8.
50. Ibid., chapter 4, *Flax*, pp. 279–90.
51. Ibid., chapters 5, 15, *Flax*, pp. 291–8, 382–4.
52. Ibid., chapter 12, pp. 361–3.
53. Ibid., chapter 14, pp. 374–9.
54. *The Beautiful Years*, chapter 24, *Flax*, pp. 173–8.
55. *Dandelion Days*, chapter 22, *Flax*, p. 455.
56. Ibid., p. 456.
57. Ibid., chapter 18, *Flax*, pp. 407–10. Another richly comic set-piece is the account of Speech Day, ibid., chapter 24, *Flax*, pp. 468–79.
58. Ibid., chapters 16, 24, *Flax*, pp. 389, 478.
59. Ibid., chapters 19, 30, *Flax*, pp. 411–13, 529–31.
60. *The Beautiful Years*, chapter 11, *Flax*, p. 85; *Dandelion Days*, chapters 11, 21, 27, *Flax*, pp. 353–6, 437–9, 503–8.
61. *Dandelion Days*, chapters 30, 31, *Flax*, pp. 531–2.
62. Ibid., chapter 31, *Flax*, pp. 537–40.
63. Ibid., chapter 28, *Flax*, pp. 512–17.
64. Ibid., chapter 9, *Flax*, pp. 338–9.
65. Ibid., chapter 20, *Flax*, pp. 427–9.
66. Ibid., chapter 19, *Flax*, p. 420.
67. Ibid., chapter 8, *Flax*, pp. 316–17.
68. Ibid., chapter 23, *Flax*, pp. 466–7.
69. Ibid., chapter 32, *Flax*, pp. 545–6.
70. Ibid., 'The Alien Corn', *Flax*, pp. 549–60.
71. *The Dream of Fair Women*, 'June 1919', *Flax*, p. 558.

72. Ibid., *Flax*, pp. 561–2.
73. Ibid., chapter 4, *Flax*, pp. 595–6, 603; chapter 7, *Flax*, p. 630; *The Pathway*, chapter 10, p. 1219.
74. *The Dream of Fair Women*, chapter 7, *Flax*, p. 629.
75. Ibid., chapter 11, *Flax*, pp. 667–9.
76. Ibid., chapter 17, *Flax*, p. 750. See further, the detailed, penetrating and sensitive analysis in Ronald Walker, 'The ''Victory Day'' Chapters of *The Dream of Fair Women*', *The Henry Williamson Society Journal*, no. 7, May 1983, pp. 10–16.
77. Ibid., chapter 35, *Flax*, pp. 932–6.
78. Ibid., 'Post-War', *Flax*, pp. 985–6.
79. Ibid., chapter 34, *Flax*, pp. 919–24.
80. Ibid., chapters 16, 21, 27, *Flax*, pp. 740–3, 781–2, 789–96, 861–5.
81. Ibid., chapter 24, p. 822–35.
82. Ibid., chapter 25, *Flax*, pp. 843–4.
83. Ibid., chapter 41, *Flax*, p. 980.
84. *The Pathway*, chapter 1, *Flax*, pp. 993–1012.
85. Ibid., chapter 2, *Flax*, pp. 1013–29.
86. Ibid., chapter 1, *Flax*, p. 1012.
87. Ibid., chapters 2, 3, *Flax*, pp. 1033, 1043–4.
88. See Herbert Faulkner West, *The Dreamer of Devon*, p. 33; John Middleton Murry, 'The Novels of Henry Williamson', *Katherine Mansfield and other Literary Studies*, pp. 105–8; George D. Painter, 'The Two Maddisons', *The Aylesford Review*, vol. ii, no. 6, Spring 1959, p. 214.
89. *The Pathway*, chapter 4, *Flax*, p. 1065.
90. Ibid., p. 1074.
91. Ibid., chapter 8, *Flax*, p. 1178. In this description of Mary, Williamson was probably influenced by Richard Jefferies's words about Felise, the heroine of his novel *The Dewy Morn* (1884): 'Her natural body had been . . . perfected by a purely natural life. The wind, the sun, the fields, the hills — freedom, and the spirit which dwells among these, had made a natural woman: such a woman as Earth meant to live upon her surface, and as Earth intended in the first origin of things: beauty and strength — strength and beauty' (chapter ii. pp. 10–11).
92. Ibid., pp. 1180–1.
93. Ibid., p. 1181.
94. See *ante*, p. 86.
95. *The Pathway*, chapter 11, *Flax*, pp. 1247–54.
96. Ibid., chapter 12, *Flax*, p. 1270.
97. Ibid., chapter 14, *Flax*, pp. 1304–14.
98. Ibid., 'Last Chapter', *Flax*,pp. 1412–16.
99. Ibid., chapters 7, 8, 13, 16, *Flax*, pp. 1145–9, 1163, 1285–6, 1366–9.
100. Ibid., chapters 15, 16, 17, *Flax*, pp. 1327–30, 1365, 1371–7.
101. Ibid., chapters 15, 17, *Flax*, pp. 1337–8, 1364.
102. Ibid., chapter 15, *Flax*, pp. 1332, 1342.
103. Ibid., chapters 15, 2, *Flax*, pp. 1332, 1029–30.
104. Ibid., chapter 17 and 'Last Chapter', *Flax*, pp. 1370–1416.
105. Ibid., 'Last Chapter', *Flax*, pp. 1416–6. Williamson had originally intended to give the sequence a happy ending with the survival of Willie, his realization of his shortcomings, the expectation of his marriage to Mary and the general acceptance of his message, but I think that the tragic ending which he actually wrote is more in accordance both with the inner logic of the story and with the realities of life

as we know them. (See Henry Williamson: *The Sun in the Sands*, 1945, chapter 7, pp. 53–4; 'Some Notes on ''The Flax of Dream'' and ''A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight'', Sewell: *Henry Williamson: the Man, the Writings*, p. 150.)

106. See the transcript of Henry Williamson's Broadcast: 'I remember', BBC Home Service, 10 April 1961, in Lewisham Local History Library, the Old Manor House, Lee.
107. See Henry Williamson: 'Some Notes on ''The Flax of Dream'' and ''A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight'', Sewell: *Henry Williamson, the Man, the Writings*, p. 148. By this time of writing *The Labouring Life*, (1932) Williamson had recognised that 'Truth is not so much a vision of reformation as an understanding of things as they are.' His aim as a man and writer had become 'to be as the sun, which divines the true or inner nature of living things', and thus 'to see all things plain, and to draw all life to oneself' (Preface to the U.S.A. edn of *The Labouring Life*, quoted in Williamson's own selection from his writings, *As the Sun Shines*, 1941, pp. 100–1).
108. *The Pathway*, chapter 2, *Flax*, p. 1030.
109. Ibid., chapter 5, p. 1098.
110. Ibid., chapter 10, *Flax*, p. 1215. See *ante*, pp. 81–2.
111. Ibid., chapter 6, *Flax*, p. 1136.
112. Ibid., chapter 10, p. 1219.
113. Ibid., chapter 15, p. 1329.
114. Ibid., chapter 16, p. 1358.
115. 'Some Notes on ''The Flax of Dream'' and ''A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight'': Sewell, *Henry Williamson: the Man, the Writings*, pp. 147–51.
116. *The Pathway*, chapter 4, *Flax*, pp. 1077–80.
117. Ibid., chapter 11, *Flax*, p. 1239.
118. Ibid., chapter 16, pp. 1357–8.
119. Ibid., p. 1354. Williamson wanted the reader to see a parallel in the developments of Willie and Shelley; he points him in this direction by using a quotation from Francis Thompson's essay on Shelley as the epigraph to the section 'Nine Years Old' in *The Beautiful Years*: 'So beset, the child fled into the tower of his own soul, and raised the drawbridge'. (See *The Works of Francis Thompson*, 3 vols., 1913; vol. iii, p. 10.) Williamson believed that childhood experiences which drove the child in upon itself tended to produce the poetic temperament. He believed that his own unhappiness at home and at school had similarly contributed to the formation of his creative gifts as a writer.
120. 'The Novels of Henry Williamson', *Katherine Mansfield and other Literary Studies*, pp. 115–19.
121. Ibid., p. 127; Brocard Sewell: 'Editorial', *The Aylesford Review*, vol. ii, no. 2, Winter 1957–8, p. 34.
122. Pope Pius XII is eloquent in his praise of the wholesomeness of country life: 'It cannot be too often repeated', he writes, 'how much the work of the land generates physical and moral health, for nothing does more to brace the system than this beneficent contact with nature which proceeds directly from the hand of the Creator. The land is not a betrayer; it is not subject to the fickleness, the false appearances, the artificial and unhealthy attractions of the grasping city. Its stability, its wise and regular course, the enduring majesty of the rhythm of the seasons are so many reflections of the Divine attributes . . .' (Letter to the Revd J.P. Archambault, S.J., President fo the Social Week, Rimouski, Canada, 31 August 1947; quoted in the Revd Denis Fahey, C.S.Sp., *The Church and Farming*, Cork 1953, p. 5.) The Church teaches that not only did Almighty God make the world out of nothing, but that

He sustains it in every moment of its being by the Divine Power; see Ludwig Ott: *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, edited in English by James Canon Bastible . . . translated from the German by Patrick Lynch . . . (4th edn, Cork 1960), Book II, God the Creator, Section 1, The Divine Act of Creation, pp. 79–91; *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests*, translated by John A. McHugh . . . and Charles J. Callan . . . (New York and London, 1923) on the words 'Creator of Heaven and Earth; of all Things Visible and Invisible', pp. 26–30.

123. *The Church Times*, vol. c, no. 3,439, 21 December 1928, p. 738.
124. *The Pathway*, chapters 6, 7, 15, 16, *Flax*, pp. 1134–44, 1333–42, 1349–56. See also the account of the vicar's Easter Sunday morning sermon, ibid., chapter 5, *Flax*, pp. 1107–11.
125. Foreword, *Flax*, p. 7.
126. See Williamson's letter to *Time and Tide*, vol. xviii, no. 22, 30 May 1936, p. 784.
127. See *Lucifer Before Sunrise* (1967: the 4th novel in *A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*) pp. 213, 329, 457–8, 511–12; *The Adelphi*, October-December 1943, p. 19.
128. See Henry Williamson, *The Story of a Norfolk Farm*, chapter 4, p. 52; 'Some Notes on ''The Flax of Dream'' and ''A Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight'' ', Sewell, *Henry Williamson: the Man, the Writings*, p. 149.
129. *The Dream of Fair Women*, revised edn, 1931, 'Valediction', pp. 443–4; not in the 1936 edn.

Illustration: Brian Fullager