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Sanford Sternlicht. *All Things Herriot: James Herriot and His Peaceable Kingdom.* Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995. xii + 174 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8156-0322-1.

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James Herriot–Master of Nostalgia?

Sanford Sternlicht explores the success of James Alfred Wight, writing as James Herriot, in his recently published book, *All Things Herriot: James Herriot and His Peaceable Kingdom.* Sternlicht recognizes that Wight's phenomenal success makes him worthy of study; *All Creatures Great and Small* alone has sold more than "ten million hardcover and paperback copies worldwide" (p. 56). Sternlicht takes comfort from the success: "It is good to be reminded from time to time how satisfying an ordinary life can be" (p. 56). Both this focus on the "ordinary life" and his overwhelming popular success make Wight interesting to those studying popular culture.

Sternlicht, for the most part, approaches Wight using two lines of inquiry. The first explores why the works of Wight are so successful; what is the appeal of his works? The second line of questioning stems from the effective use of various media (TV, children's books, gift books, calendars, feature-length films, and memoirs) and their interrelationships. Wight, who died in 1995, was (and is) a revenue-generating machine. What are the implications of the multiple media approach? when is such an approach successful? what is the relationship among the various media?

Sternlicht divides the book into three parts. The first chapter is devoted primarily to discussing the life history of James Alfred Wight (a short chronology is provided as an appendix). The brief second chapter and the last chapter discuss the Herriot mystique; Sternlicht provides his insights regarding Wight's success. The other seven chapters, the bulk of the manuscript, dissect the written works of Wight with references to the TV series and at times to other critical works on Herriot. The noticeable lack of critical work suggests that more needs to be done by future scholars.

The strength of *All Things Herriot* is Sternlicht's dissection of the five memoirs beginning with *All Creatures Great and Small.* Sternlicht provides a comprehensive catalog of the plots and themes along with interesting observations. For instance, he recognizes that the true subject of *All Creatures Great and Small* (Wight's first memoir) is Yorkshire, "the beautiful, rugged, challenging country from the Pennines in the west, to the farm and grazing land in the dells" (p. 54). Sternlicht continues, Yorkshire "is a place with great character, that changes little with time; a place where a young man from an industrial Scottish city could be captivated by a natural beauty never fully tamed by centuries of human labor; a place where any visitors today, and in the years to come, may roam about and believe that they are in Herriotland, and it would be quite true" (p. 55).

While discussing Wight's last memoir, *Every Living Thing* , Sternlicht suggests that "Herriot has been a pilgrim from a great city to an ancient place of ingrained pantheism, where he has found a personal nirvana. He hears and transmits the lost voices of a landed people who cared for and respected their ancient land, their way of life, and most of all, each other" (p. 136). Wight captures the wonder of rural Yorkshire and, most important, the delicate humor of human interactions. Wight, Sternlicht suggests, recognizes that "the farmer, the pet owner, the veterinarian, together must exercise humane stewardship. In the suffering that Herriot sees and spends his life attempting to assuage, is the great, perennial challenge to all our humanity. Our response to suffering is ultimately how, as societies and individuals, we are to be judged" (p. 76). Wight, according to Sternlicht's high standards, is successful.

One strength of this study–yet, ultimately one of its weaknesses–is Sternlicht's obvious affection for Wight's writings. At times the scholar/fan uses too light a brush when discussing valid and interesting points. The only time Sternlicht criticizes Wight outright is when discussing *James Herriot's Dog Stories* (1986). Sternlicht disapproves of Wight's inclusion of "a slight, five-page piece about an injured dog.... It is a disappointing filler, a reject brought back" (pp. 149-50).

Sternlicht has contributed a useful book to the study of Alfred Wight/James Herriot. Wight's success as a writer was cued to nostalgia; ironically, the memories of Yorkshire may have an even more popular future. As we push forward toward the next millennium, with increasing urbanization and increasing dependence on technology, there will clearly be great interest in a "romantic" period when technology was imperfect and the parameters of life seemed simpler.

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