

NEWSLETTER NUMBER THIRTEEN

This is the thirteenth Newsletter of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society (and I am typing on a Friday...). It contains details both of September's events and of the May weekend, which most members seemed to think was the best yet.. Thanks go to Judith Bond, Jerome de Groot, Richard Searle and Morine Krissdottir for their help with this issue.

Judith Stinton

SUBSCRIPTIONS: a reminder

If you haven't yet paid for 2006, please send your subscription to Judith Bond, 26 Portwey Close, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 8RF. UK members £10, overseas members \$20. Cheques should be made payable to the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society.

May Weekend (well, nearly) April 28-30 2006

On the Friday evening, thirteen members gathered at Taste, a newish Dorchester restaurant. Among them were Anne Torday Gulden, who'd once again made the journey from Oslo, and Jay Barksdale from New York, as well as members from Edinburgh, East Anglia and Herefordshire. There was much animated conversation and everyone seemed to enjoy their evening (though I wouldn't necessarily recommend the fishcakes).

The AGM was the first event on Saturday morning, held in the library of the Dorset County Museum, and attended by sixteen people. Members contributed their ideas on such matters as possible activities at the September weekend, a new membership drive - and the whereabouts of the manuscript of the opera of *Mr Fortune's Maggot*.

Members also had the opportunity to buy books. This was the weekend when Peter Tolhurst's selection of STW's *Dorset Stories* was published. (The plan had been to promote the book as a part of Dorchester Festival, with readings in the Museum on Saturday evening. However, due to the exorbitant amount the Festival organisers decided to charge for admission, Peter reluctantly decided to cancel the event.) The book was enthusiastically received that morning, and later in the weekend Peter read us two separate stories from it.

The book sale was followed by Mary Jacobs' engrossing talk, 'Sylvia

Townsend Warner, Political Disclosure and the Fable', about the possibilities of the fable form and Sylvia's use of it, with particular reference to *The Cat's Cradle Book*. The talk was much enjoyed, and we look forward to its publication in this year's Journal. Members then had the opportunity to visit the Sylvia Townsend Warner room with our Treasurer Judith Bond, who has been cataloguing the archive.

Lunch was in the garden of Potters (Inn), then everyone went their separate ways for the afternoon. Some climbed up from Chaldon Herring to the cliffs, others walked more sedately round Maiden Newton, for the usual tantalising glimpses of Sylvia and Valentine's house. (one day, perhaps, we will be allowed inside). This group then went on to Toller Fratrum, that small hill settlement so loved by STW and VA (and also by John Piper and John Betjeman).

In the evening there was a party at Shepherd's House on Chaldon Green, where Annie Rhodes and her husband Kingsley were staying. It's a big and comfortable house, and some of us stayed there with them. Downstairs there's a long kitchen and two lofty living-rooms: large enough to accommodate the party easily.

Annie provided some delicious food, and afterwards Peter read 'Early One Morning', one of the Chaldon stories included in his selection. Then we fell to talking about ghosts and witches, and about our favourites amongst Sylvia's short stories. Since everyone seemed to enjoy this game, we may well try it again at some future date.

Sunday began bright, and a large group, led by Stephen Mottram, walked in procession along the Winfrith road and back across the Five Marys - of which there are at least six, one of them somewhat flattened by a Second World War bomb. We listened to readings from Sylvia's diaries about the Marys, a special place for her and Valentine. (Jay meanwhile had collected a souvenir flint.) Along the Drove there were some early purple orchids.

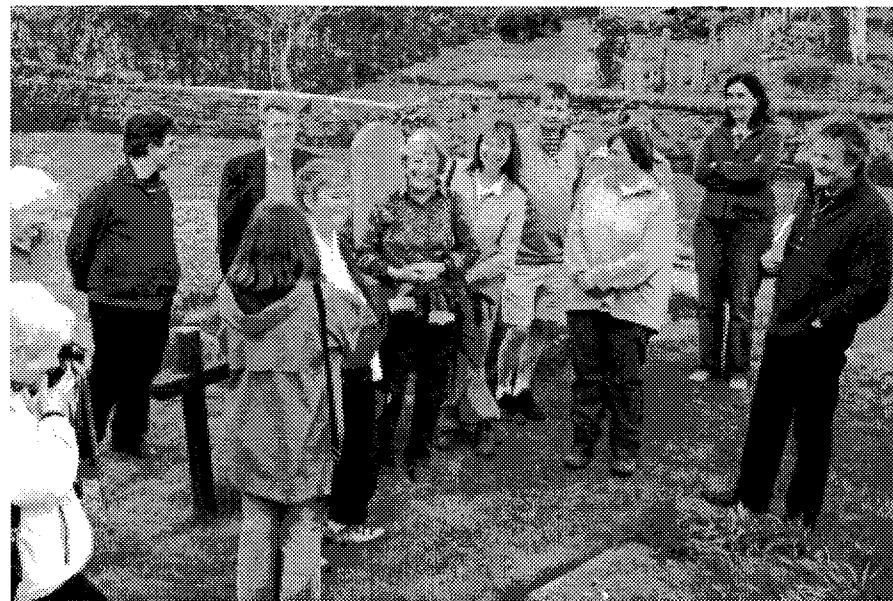
We made our customary May visit to Sylvia and Valentine's grave, for the laying of flowers and a reading. And, inside the church, Peter read another Chaldon story 'Two Minutes Silence' from the pulpit.

Lunch was - again as usual - in the Sailor's Return, where we were joined by our patron, Janet Machen Pollock, for yet another chatty meal.

This was a highly successful weekend, enjoyed, I'm sure, by everyone.

Especial thanks go to Annie Rhodes, whose Chaldon let became a house of hospitalities.

Judith Stinton



Members in Chaldon churchyard

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE AGM

The AGM adopted the suggestion that committee meetings be held on fixed dates, and the first such meeting has been held. Not only will these enable committee members to put the dates in their diaries at the beginning of each year, it will also enable Society members to raise queries for discussion in committee. If you have any such questions, please contact a committee member before the first Monday in June or December.

At the AGM Richard Searle was co-opted onto the committee as Events Organiser, and we would like to welcome him in his new role.

(The full minutes of the AGM will be published in the next Newsletter.)

AUTUMN WEEKEND, 22TH-24TH SEPTEMBER 2006

Friday, September 22nd

7.30pm. Meet at CB2 Bistro, 5-7 Norfolk Street (quite close to Parker's Piece). Richard Searle has booked a table, please let him know if you are coming, so that he can confirm with the restaurant.

Saturday, 23 September, 2006 from 9.30am – 6.00pm

Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893–1978)

A Colloquium to be held in Cambridge

Conference Fee

£30 waged and £18 students, invited contributors, unwaged and concessions

The fee includes coffee, lunch and a glass of wine at the end of the day.

A programme, receipt, map of Cambridge, map of the campus and information about parking, transport and bed and breakfast will be sent on registration. Mary Joannou is Cambridge-based and is happy to answer practical enquiries on 01223 321957 or 0845 196 2049.

E-mail m.joannou@anglia.ac.uk

Please cut out and complete the booking slip below and send it in an envelope marked

'Townsend Warner colloquium' to

Helen Humphrys, The Secretary, Department of English,

Communication, Film and Media,

Anglia Ruskin University, East Road, Cambridge CB1 IPT.

E-Mail: h.p.humphrys@apu.ac.uk Tel: 0845 196 2080 Fax: 01223 417707

I wish to attend the Sylvia Townsend Warner symposium

Name:

Prof/Dr/Mr/Miss/Mrs/Ms.....

.....

Address:.....

.....

E-mail:.....

Tel.....

Status: waged / unwaged / student / invited speaker / other concessionary

[delete as applicable]

(Please enclose proof of status if claiming a concessionary rate)

Institutional

affiliation.....

.....

Disabilities, special needs, dietary requirements (please explain what assistance you would like to receive from the organisers)

.....

.....

I enclose a cheque for £..... (amount) made out to Anglia Ruskin University



**Anglia Ruskin
University**

(Room HEL 201)

Sylvia Townsend Warner: a Colloquium, September 23, 2006

09.30am. - 10.15am.

REGISTRATION, COFFEE AND WELCOME

10.15am. - 11.30 am.

Round Table One: Writing Lives (Chair, Gill Davies)

Janet Montefiore (University of Kent)

'The letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner'

Frances Bingham (freelance writer, London)

'Life, experience and creativity in the work of Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland'

(The presentations will be followed by a general discussion of auto/biography)

11.30 am. - 1.00pm.

Round Table Two: Approaches (Chair, Mary Joannou)

Rosemary Sykes (Independent scholar, Cambridge)

'Death by Warner: the strange case of Amanda Cross'

Gill Frith (University of Warwick)

'Modernism, magic and Sylvia Townsend Warner'

Jane Dowson (De Montfort University)

'The Poetry of Sylvia Townsend Warner'

1.00pm. - 2.00pm.

LUNCH

2.00pm - 3.00pm.

Open Discussion (Chairs, Gill Davies and Mary Joannou)

(Anyone working on Sylvia Townsend Warner is invited to talk about their research)

3.00pm. - 3.20pm.

TEA

3. 20pm. - 5. 00pm.

Round Table Three: Times and Places (Chair, Gill Frith)

Mary Jacobs (University of Plymouth)

'Sylvia Townsend Warner and the uses of pastoral'

Chris Hopkins (Sheffield Hallam University)

'Time on Time': Some uses of history in the work of Sylvia Townsend Warner'

Gill Davies (Edge Hill University)

'Reading Sylvia Townsend Warner ecocritically'

5 00. pm. – 5. 45pm. 'Who is Sylvia?' (Chair, Janet Montefiore)

Claire Harman (Columbia University, New York)

WINE RECEPTION

Sunday September 24

Morning: A visit of Kettle's Yard in Castle Street. Formerly the home of Jim Ede, a curator at the Tate Gallery, and his wife Helen, the house contains paintings by Ben & Winifred Nicholson, Alfred Wallis, Christopher Wood, David Jones and Joan Miro. There are sculptures by Gaudier-Brzeska, Brancusi, Moore and Hepworth, as well as furniture, glass, ceramics – and a candlestick donated by Sylvia Townsend Warner. Not much of a connection you might think, but several members have expressed a wish to see this enchanting place. The house is usually closed on Sunday mornings, but is open for parties, so please ensure that you let Richard Searle know if you are coming. The cost will be £3-£5.

Afternoon: 2.30pm. A visit to Hilton Hall, by kind permission of member, Richard Garnett. (Richard's edition of the Warner/Garnett letters, *Sylvia and David*, published by Sinclair-Stevenson in 1994 says quite a lot about Hilton, and is highly recommended.) Again, please ensure that you let Richard Searle know if you are coming.

Richard Searle's number is 01305 269204, and, for booking accommodation, the Tourist Information Centre's number is: 0871 226 8006.

* * * * *



[78] There are two turf mazes still well preserved in the eastern counties, the photograph here illustrating the one at Hilton, Huntingdonshire. The message on the central obelisk states that it was laid out in 1660 by 19-year-old William Sparrow; but maybe he only recut a neglected maze.

STORIES OF HILTON
Go She Must and The Maze

The writer David Garnett bought Hilton Hall, Huntingdonshire, in 1924. In *The Familiar Faces*, the third part of his autobiography, he describes his first glimpse of the house, an old brick building 'washed in two shades of reddish and yellow ochre'. Behind the house was a sunken garden, with dovecot and sundial and an orchard of old pear trees. Inside, too, the place was pleasing: 'the proportions of the rooms were lovely and they were full of peaceful dignity'. The staircase was of Jacobean oak, with oak beams and wooden floors. The whole was harmonious.

On Plough Monday, the second Monday in 1925, much to Garnett's surprise the village boys came to the door to sing their ploughman's song. He used the event in the opening scenes of his novel *Go She Must* (1927) which is set in 'Dry Coulter', a fictional version of Hilton. The boys, their faces blackened, bring plough and horses right up to the snowy doorstep, singing:

*Please can you spare a halfpenny
For an old ploughboy?
A bit of bread and cheese
Is better than nothing.*

All the bread however (and probably the cheese) has been fed by the house's owner, the Reverend Charles Dunnock, to the wild birds who flock to vicarage garden. So 'nothing' is what the boys receive, and they take their revenge by ploughing up their vicar's doorstep.

Despite their physical proximity, the lives of the villagers and the lives of Dunnock and his daughter Anne are poles apart. Unsentimental, calmly observant, Garnett records these two ways of life (both of which have now more or less vanished) and the dilemma of Anne, who is caught between them - able to appreciate the beauties of village life, but wanting more than it has to offer her, an educated stranger. Anne makes her decision - Go she must.

Garnett found the book hard to write. He was working on it during his first Christmas at Hilton Hall, an occasion to which he invited his friend Sylvia

Townsend Warner to join his family party. Although Sylvia wrote to say that she could not come because of the problem of 'bestowing the dog', she must have relented, as her visit is referred to in Garnett's autobiography and confirmed in subsequent letters between the two households.

Sylvia enjoyed Hilton. She was particularly attracted by the turf maze on the village green (see picture facing), cut to commemorate the Restoration of the monarchy in 1666 and encircling a rather stately monument. This was a memorial to the turf's cutter, William Sparrow (1649-1729) and she made the most of it in her short story *The Maze*, published in a limited edition in 1928 'with a lovely god's eye frontispiece by Ceri Richards' (as she noted in her diary) and collected in *The Salutation* in 1932.

Mr Lubin, a newcomer to the village of Wootton, stumbles across the maze while he (being a bit of an antiquarian) is deciphering the monument's inscription AB HOC, PER HOC, AD HOC. The maze is overgrown and has been forgotten; the villagers have their own theories about their new neighbour's wild weavings and trippings as he traces the obscure patterns on the turf. Only Mr Slumber (an endearing portrait of Garnett) remains apart, reading Herodotus - but even Mr Slumber is forced to join the thunderstruck villagers at the story's ending...

'...to show you how much I love you I send you my story about Hilton. I hope you will be pleased with your likeness, my dear Mr Slumber', Sylvia wrote to David in February 1926. Few people can have ever had such an eccentric tribute paid to them.

Judith Stinton

(The photograph of Hilton maze is taken from *Mazes and Labyrinths of the World* by Janet Bord, published by Latimer in 1976.)

BOOK NEWS

1. Edgar Mellon Press have published a book of critical essays on STW. The details are given below - and the book will be reviewed in this year's Journal.

Table of Contents

Preface

Acknowledgements

Introduction: Gill Davies: The Corners That Held Her: The Importance of Place in Sylvia Townsend Warner's Writing

1. Margaretta Jolly – A Word is a Bridge: Death and Epistolary Form in the Correspondence of Sylvia Townsend Warner and David Garnett

2. Frances Bingham – The Practice of the Presence of Valentine: Ackland in Warner's Work

3. John Simons – On the Compositional Genetics of the *Kingdom of Elfin* together with a Note on Tortoises

4. Mary Jacobs – Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Politics of the English Pastoral 1925-1934

5. Emily M. Hinnov – A Counter-Reading to Conquest: "Primitivism" and Utopian Longing in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*

6. Rosemary Sykes – "This was a Lesson in History": Sylvia Townsend Warner, George Townsend Warner and the Matter of History

7. Chris Hopkins – Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Historical Novel 1936-1948

8. David Malcolm - *The Flint Anchor* and the Conventions of Historical Fiction

Notes on Contributors

Index

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2. '1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die', includes pieces on *After the Death of Don Juan* and *Summer Will Show*, edited by Peter Boxall and published by Cassell at £20. ISBN 1844034178.

3. According to an article in the *Guardian* by Wendy Lesser (29.10.05) the *New York Review of Books* has over the last

six years republished about two hundred out-of-print titles, including *Lolly Willowes*.

Forgotten Classics: Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willowes*, or *The Loving Huntsman* (1926)

Sylvia Townsend Warner was a true polymath – *New Yorker* short-story writer, scholar of Tudor Church Music, biographer, poet translator of Proust and writer of guide books. She was an ardent Communist and openly lived with the poet Valentine Ackland for nearly 40 years. She is a great English writer and one that should be remembered far more than she is. Her writing is clear and sharp, and her novels are immensely distinctive. *Lolly Willowes* is her first book, a subversive fantasia in which women are urged to take power and resist 'an existence doled out to you by others'. It is magical in a kind of faerie way, celebrating the sometimes mundane reality of the supernatural and its ability to transform the everyday.

Laura Willowes, from a good if unexciting county family, comes to live in London after the death of her father. Lolly is the name given to her by her various nieces and nephews, the children she spends her time looking after on behalf of her brothers. The real Laura Willowes, with all her thoughts and ideas, is lost in family duty. She spends some twenty years in London being virtuous and slowly having her natural verve dulled and diminished. Finally Lolly has a revelation and sees her family household in London for what it really is: 'half hidden under their accumulations – accumulations of prosperity, authority, daily experience. They were carpeted with experience. No new event could set jarring feet on them but they would absorb and muffle the impact'. Her new resolve and distress at the way that London has sapped her leads her to take lodgings in the Buckinghamshire village of Great Mop. Lolly reverts to her real name of Laura in the countryside (Lolly is what she is when an aunt and therefore defined by others). She finds a quiet independence and mounting self-definition in the sleepy village. She throws away her map of the countryside, rejecting masculine defining knowledge for a countrified understanding of the local area, an empathy with the place she lives in. She is alone on the hillside in

the dark when she comes closest to understanding the great sadness and horror in her soul; the experience leaves her 'changed, and knew it. She was humbler, and more simple'.

Yet she is not left to herself, and her nephew Titus soon comes to live in Great Mop in order to write a book on Vasari. He is nice but boorish, a man who loves 'the country as if it were a body'. His unacknowledged assumption of such ownership contrasts clearly with Laura's unconditional love: 'Most of all she hated him for imposing his kind of love on her. Since he had come to Great Mop she had not been allowed to love in her own way'. Yet she is not meek any longer; soon after this she rather innocently makes what she thinks is a compact with the devil to maintain the quiet solitude she loves (the devil's form is initially a kitten who bites her). Satan agrees to rid her of Titus (he sends bees and a fiancé from London) in exchange for her soul. Her choice to become unsocial, to reject London and the masculine city is evoked in her turn to the devil ('But in the moment of election, under the stress and turmoil of the hunted Lolly as under a covering of darkness, the true Laura had settled in all unerringly. She had known where to turn').

The devil is a rather pleasant character, more protective than anything else – he is the 'loving huntsman' of the title. Indeed, for all that he is referred to as Satan he is much more like a pagan figure such as Pan, a shepherd of lost souls. Laura considers herself to have become a witch, and attends a midnight pagan Sabbath with the other villagers. The social freedom at this ceremony leads to a number of new relationships (not least the wonder of dancing with Emily, the 'pasty-faced and anaemic young slattern' who dances 'with a fervour that annihilated every misgiving'; she and Laura become 'fused together [...] the contact made her tingle from head to foot'). This energises and liberates Laura, and she escapes the strictures of duty, family, order and civilisation. She tells Satan how much need women have of him: 'Women have such vivid imaginations, and lead such dull lives. Their pleasure in life is so soon over; they are so dependent upon others, and their dependence soon becomes a nuisance'. Warner uses the figure of Laura to suggest that women are controlled through their relationships with men, that they have no liberty to express themselves. Making her central character a witch, and a witch who is quite happy to be one, undermines centuries of male caricaturing of the unfettered desires of women as devilish. Laura cries 'Nothing for them except subjection and plaiting their hair'. The dullness of everyday life for women 'settles down on one like a fine dust, and by and by the dust is age, settling down [...] there is a dreadful kind of dreary immortality about being settled down on by one day after another'.

Laura creates a life for herself by forsaking the things that male society would have her love: children; family; home; ancestry. She finds happiness in the countryside, in becoming a witch: 'to show our scorn of pretending life's a safe business, to satisfy our passion for adventure'. The whole experience is 'to have a life of one's own, not an existence doled out to you by others'. This liberation is all the more shattering in the novel due to Warner's careful setting of the scene. Over half the book outlines the cloying dullness of Lolly's life before she becomes Laura again; the 'settling down' experienced by other women is clearly shown to us before being joyously shed. Warner celebrates the ability of the English countryside to effect a revelation in one's self-definition. She writes in a tradition, stretching back to Rabelais, of the revolutionary spirit of carnival, but also adds to a very English way of thinking about the pagan spirit of the land. *Lolly Willowes* is a piece of English whimsy much like Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* or the Piper at the Gates of Dawn section of *The Wind in the Willows*; celebrating the raw, slightly frightening power of the country spirit. It is a deeply satisfying, sweet book, which has extremely important things to say; it is also a stylistic gem, a gentle, great novel.

Jerome de Groot

www.forgotten-classics.blogspot.com

This essay previously appeared in *Time Out* magazine, June 2006, and is reprinted by kind permission of the author.

Cat Characteristics

Is it possible to know the temperament of a cat by the colour and type of its fur? I believe it is, and here is a list to illustrate my theory.

Short-furred grey cats are thoughtful, gentle, a little slow to mature but capable of developing a considerable degree of intelligence. They are especially good at understanding human conversation. *Long-furred greys* tend to be melancholy, but they have bouts of gaiety, and even elderly cats of this type are very ready to become kittens again. They like to be admired and often show a strong dramatic sense.

Golden tabbies are soft, amorous and usually very trusting. They tend to remain childish, however long they live. *Grey tabbies* are sedate and usually

taciturn; some females are spiteful. *Tweed-coated cats with harsh fur* are invariably sharp-tempered and often complacent, but they are independent and upright. *Dark tabbies* are majestic, rather formal and grave. They love very deeply and most have a good deal of wisdom; they often show great concern for the people they love.

Black cats with short thick fur are passionate and often wild; temperamental but not at all hysterical. They usually develop strong personalities but remain shy. *Blacks with long coats* are invariably loving; not particularly selective about their love, but lavish and generous and not at all self-regarding.

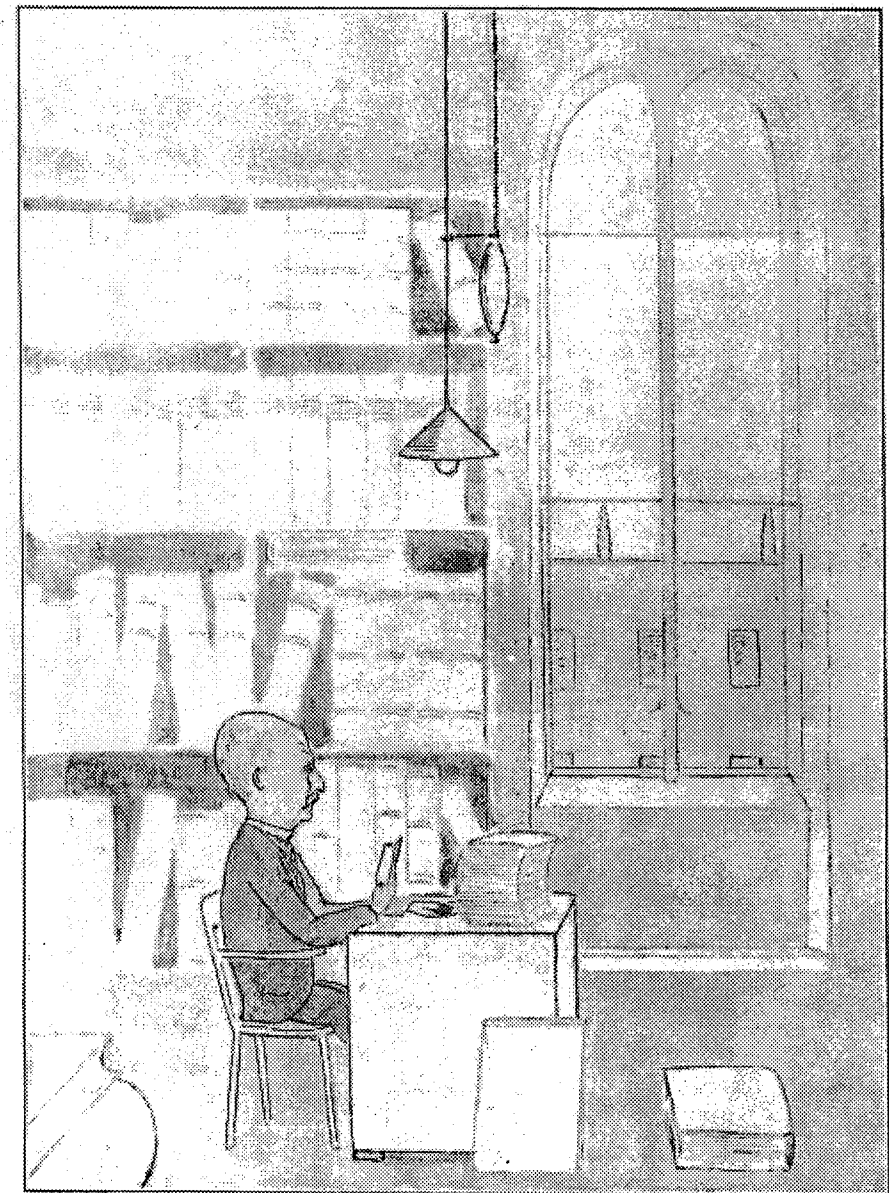
Black-and whites are always markedly intellectual and sometimes possessed of devils (as are some black cats). Most of them are very inquisitive and learn, often invent, tricks. They are always highly strung and sometimes hysterical; bold yet easily frightened. *Marmalade cats* tend to be lumpish and are almost always particularly domesticated; tender-hearted and rather conceited. They are often intelligent but use their intelligence to please their friends or better themselves. *Tortoiseshells* are Gretchen-like and good mousers, but only affect to be domesticated.

Long-furred whites, luxurious and bland, are mostly quite kind but have a great sense of their own value and improve by being indulged and flattered. *Short-furred whites* have a quality of strangeness, usually of great beauty. They have fine manners and will be sufficiently gentle and kind to strangers; with their own people they flower charmingly and become tender or playful or melancholy, as opportunity offers. They love deeply but with great discrimination.

This is as far as I got with my list. Checking it against later experience I still think it accurate, although I could enlarge it to include variants: the many 'blends' of Siamese, for instance, with one or another type of 'ordinary' cat. But the main categories are sufficient to illustrate the theory. It is brave, even foolhardy, to commit this to paper: already the owner of a grey Persian is composing her letter about their modesty, and all the people who have Orlandos are banding together to take me to law about the word 'lumpish'. But what does it matter? Each cat is a Cat. Say that, say all.

Valentine Ackland

From *The Countryman*, Vol LV No 4 Winter 1958



Drawing by Paul Bloomfield.

Mr. A. E. Housman reads his Collected Poems

Unpleas'd and unencumbered
Far roams the youth and fast,
Till Time and Fame way-lay him,
Their brazen honours cast,
And weigh him down at last.

But one, such gifts danaan
Spurn'd, though they might be had,
And bears on stooping shoulders
The baggage of a lad—
Songs, for the most part sad.

And finally, a poem written in 1925 on the pigeons David Garnett had 'rather ambitiously' (as his son Richard put it) installed in the Hilton dovecote.

*Lines on Four Fantail Pigeons
Which were Kept Six Days in Captivity*

My brother died young;
My lovely sisters died
Young too, but I abide
These solid shades among.

He o'er this roof and they
O'er that now take a swing,
Or preen a supple wing
In voluntary stay;

But like a spectre I
Haunt my own dark, my own
Whiteness start at, and am grown
Afraid, now, to fly.

Sylvia Townsend Warner