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The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Newsletter Number Fourteen

Maggot, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After The Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flint Anchor, The Maze, Some World Far From Ours and 'Stay Corydon, Thou Swain', Elinor Barley, A Moral Ending, The Salutation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cradle Book, A Garland of Straw, The Museum of Cheats, Winter in The Air, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, A Stranger with a Bag, Swans on an Autumn River, Two Conversation Pieces, The Innocent and The Guilty, Kingdoms of Elfin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, Selected Stories, Somerset, Jane Austen, T.H.White, A Biography, Letters, The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King

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The Society's own website is online at
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NEWSLETTER NUMBER FOURTEEN

It's Spring again – or it should be by the time you read this Newsletter. Included in Number Fourteen are details of the forthcoming May weekend (which centres on STW and Music) as well as two accounts of last September's events in Cambridge: the first on the Colloquium by Helen Sutherland and the second on the Sunday outings by Jenny Wildblood. Thanks go to them, and also to the other contributors, Janet Montefiore, Sheila Milton, Judith Bond and Janet Machen Pollock.

Judith Stinton

SUBSCRIPTIONS: a reminder

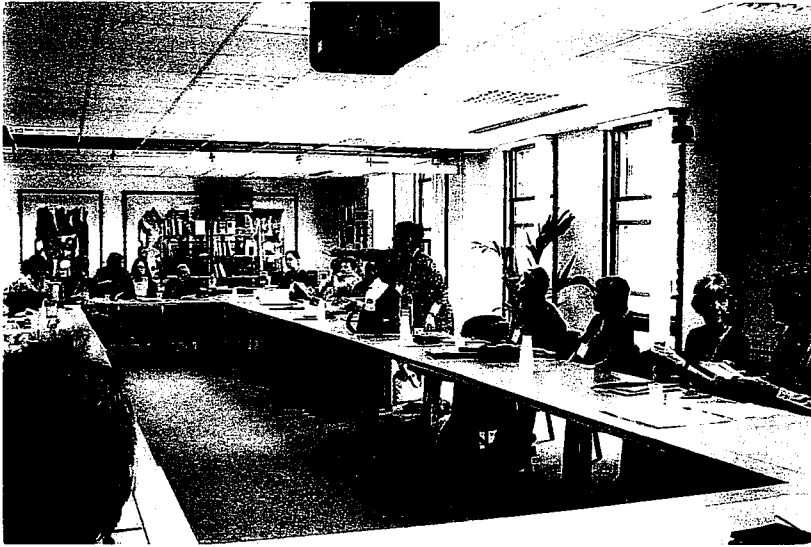
If you haven't yet paid for 2007, please send your subscription to Judith Bond, 26 Portwey Close, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 8RF. UK members £10, overseas members \$20 – this has remained unchanged since the Society started. Cheques should be made payable to the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society.

SEPTEMBER WEEKEND, 2006

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Colloquium

The main business of the weekend was the Sylvia Townsend Warner colloquium convened by Gill Davies and Mary Joannou and held in Anglia Ruskin University. This was an enjoyable occasion, for the organisers divided the day into manageable chunks of two morning sessions, two afternoon sessions and a closing discussion of biography by Claire Harman and Janet Montefiore. As the first afternoon session was a round table discussion of Warner in which everyone could participate, and there was

time for informal discussion between sessions and over lunch, we were spared the sensation of being in a pressurised cabin of the mind that often characterises such events.



The speakers offered a wide range of papers covering Warner's poetry (Jane Dowson), her involvement in the Spanish Civil War (Kristin Ewins), the use of history in the ostensibly non-historical writings (Chris Hopkins) and the possibility of ecocritical readings of Warner's work (Gill Davies). However, two main themes surfaced from these papers, with the first of these being the difficulty in pigeon-holing Warner (something which clearly has implications for her position in – or just outside – the literary canon). For example, Mary Jacobs used 'Elinor Barley' and *The True Heart* to explore Warner's use of the pastoral mode, which she noted has always been claimed by both radical and conservative literary traditions, and thus illuminated the ways in which Warner herself can be viewed both as a

radical and as a conservative writer; one who both works within traditions and subverts them, with consequent difficulties in 'placing' her (for those afflicted with tidy minds at least). The discontinuity implied by the subversion of tradition was picked up in Gill Frith's paper on 'Sylvia Townsend Warner's Magic Modernism' which went so far as to identify discontinuity as a hallmark of this writer. However, she went on to argue that within this discontinuity, a number of continuities such as anticipation, appropriation and bilocation, linked the late *Kingdoms of Elfin* with Warner's earlier work, despite its initial appearance as a radical new departure.

The second major theme to emerge from the wealth of papers offered was the importance of life story in Warner's work, with Frances Bingham exploring 'Life experience and creativity in the work of Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland', and in particular looking at the ways in which Warner transformed the pain created by Ackland's affair with Elizabeth Wade White in her art, with particular reference to *Lost Summer*, a song cycle of poems by Warner set to music by Paul Nordoff. Janet Montefiore, however, concentrated more particularly on Warner's letters in her paper, "I can't say it yet", arguing that love letters create the beloved in their own textual frame, and that notions of formality were a means of deepening intimacy, before going on to identify specific letters in which the dividing line between discretion and dissimulation was particularly blurred.

A slightly different aspect of this problem was highlighted by Claire Harman in the fascinating discussion of biography which closed the colloquium, for she explained how interviews she conducted while researching the Warner biography (particularly that with Elizabeth Wade

White), turned into occasions in which she was interviewed, as a means of finding out what and how much she already knew, and therefore how much could still be concealed.

Overall it was an interesting day, and our thanks are particularly due to Mary Joannou and her postgraduate students who were concerned with the all-important practical details, the speakers for their willingness to participate at the very beginning of the academic year (a busy time for all) and to Anglia Ruskin for hosting the event.

Helen Sutherland

Higher Tourism

Licensed nosiness is a wonderful thing. Being a member of this Society means that you have an excuse for wandering around other people's homes, checking out their bookcases and envying their pictures, just because they have some connection with Sylvia. A member described this to me once as "practicing the Higher Tourism", and this day was a very good example of its joys.

The first half of the day took us to Kettles Yard, the home and gallery combined developed by Jim Ede and his wife. Strictly speaking we were already licensed to be nosy here, as it is already a public space and was always intended to be so. With incredible vision and generosity, the Edes set out to make a home that was also a different sort of gallery space in which to display the collection of modern art put together by Jim from his work at the Tate, and from his wide range of friendships and connections.

Jim Ede and his wife bought and decorated their house as a living gallery, an opportunity for students and members of the public to experience the art Jim loved so much in a new and immediate way. The house has now been joined by a gallery extension where modern art is shown more conventionally, but Jim Ede's creation is still there as he left it, allowing you

to feel you are really living with the works displayed.

Our guide described how the wonderful balance within the house was built up by a gradual process, with each picture, piece of furniture or object brought in one-by-one and allowed to "find its own space". Most of the rooms were tiny, but the overall effect was anything but cluttered. I couldn't help feeling a tiny fluttering of feminine concern about how Jim's wife, cleaning lady and guests coped whilst this painstaking process of decoration took place, but the result was too "right" to be argued with.

One of the most attractive things about the house was the way it found a home for a wide variety of different things, all obviously of value to its guiding spirit. Oak chairs, pebbles, a tiny box, paintings, sculptures, geraniums and a grand piano had all found their best place to be. Pebbles were a theme for the decoration, and I envied the way Jim had managed to preserve their beauty. Pebbles that look so wonderful on the beach so often seem to lose everything when you proudly take them home, but the Kettles Yard pebbles, whether in groups, swirls, piles or magnificent singleness had kept their beauty intact.

The pictures and sculptures were extraordinary, and being able to see them in this setting gave them something I have never experienced before in a gallery. The whole effect was very calm and balanced, but never precious - zen perhaps, but zen with a sense of humour. The paintings, too, had each been enabled by Jim's method to find a particular setting that allowed us to see them properly. Some of these settings were unusual - I have never seen paintings displayed at knee height in a bathroom before - but somehow the effect was right and the effort made you really look at what you were seeing, rather than just drifting past on the way to the next canvas.

Kettles Yard of course also contains a glass candlestick donated by Sylvia. The newsletter inviting us to join the tour was rather deprecating about this, describing it as "not much of a connection". But after seeing how carefully the rest of the decoration of this extraordinary house was put together, I was rather awestruck that Sylvia had had the taste and the confidence to give this gift. I'm quite sure I wouldn't have had the nerve.

We all stood reverently contemplating the candlestick and discussing its placement, then moved away. Thanks to our showing a proper piety towards the candlestick and its donor, we nearly missed seeing what for me was the

most extraordinary and lovely sight in the place, a head of Prometheus by Brancusi balancing on its own perfect shadow on top of the grand piano, just behind us. Luckily the omission was realised in time and we had the chance to retrace our steps. I couldn't help thinking how this incident would have been enjoyed by Sylvia and perhaps used as the basis of a story.

The tour of the house was so enjoyable we didn't have much time left to see the gallery, but we did manage to squeeze in a visit to the tiny neighbouring Church and its extraordinary font.

After lunch, Hilton Hall. Richard Garnett, who took over at Hilton from Sylvia's friend and correspondent, his father David, started our tour by reading from his father's excited, charming and very human letter to Sylvia announcing his discovery of the Hall. In it he confessed that it has "any number of drawbacks. But I'm in love all the same."

After many years of opening their home up to "Higher Tourists" of one sort or another, Richard and Jane have developed a rather clever way of avoiding having to parrot the same information over and over again about the various artworks displayed. They have a set of bright-yellow post-it notes that they use and re-use as a simple way to mark things of interest. There is so much to see and notice, so many things of artistic and literary (and often both) merit to label, that the effect as we walked into the Hall was as if hundreds of tiny yellow bunting flags had been put out to greet us.

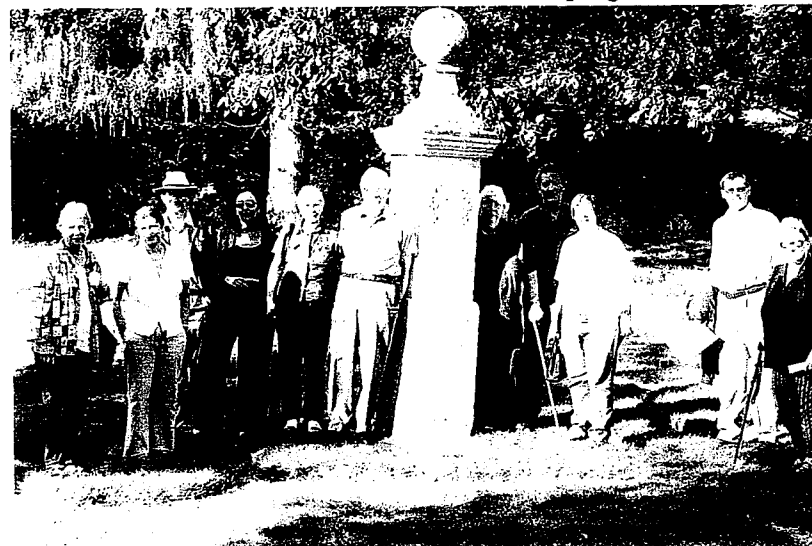
They had kindly also brought out for us several letters and pictures of particular interest from the STW point of view, and let us wander as we wished. Although the yellow stickies were there as the basic guide, Richard also made himself available to answer particular questions and give us more background.

I can't even start to list the treasures we saw. After a while I became a little overwhelmed with recognition and excitement. Richard and Jane of course have inherited so much extraordinary material from the Garnett family, their relations and friends, but one of the best things about this visit was that it wasn't just to a place that is a museum of "Bloomsberries." I have always loved the picture from David and Sylvia's correspondence of Hilton being a house full of people who never stop making and doing, where if you aren't writing you are painting, or editing, or decorating a cabinet, or playing the cello, or arguing about the best way to cook a chicken. It still has this

feeling, and is still a place of active creativity and involvement. Jane is a jeweller, making extraordinary bold and lovely jewellery and fittings for church use. Richard, I assume, is meant to be retired but there was little sign of this having affected him.

After we admired the dignified plain front of the house which is still as "nobly grammatical" as Sylvia described it, we were given tea and biscuits. This was lovely, but a little stressful due to the necessity of trying to find a place for cups to sit in a room where quite a few of the available surfaces bore little yellow notices stating "mosaic by Angelica Garnett" or "painted by Roger Fry".

Richard then took us to see the maze, via a tour of modern Hilton village. Sadly, it isn't quite the place described by his father as being "otherwise excellent" apart from the "four slate cottages newly put up and one dissenting chapel", but the maze has been well-kept and gave members (joined by some of the local children) some fun attempting to walk round it.



Those who didn't have to leave at this point were lucky enough to be able to accompany Richard to the Church, where we learned its connection with Captain Oates of Scott's expedition. Richard was involved in organising a celebration of this connection, which went well apart from the unexpected

and irreverent affect of heat on the corks of some Marks and Spencer fizz.

All in all we are lucky as Society members that Sylvia enjoyed such a range of interesting and creative friendships, and that we now have the chance to retrace her steps and sense the enjoyment she felt in their company.

Jenny Wildblood

A Footnote on the candlestick

Maiden Newton, Dorchester.
24 : iv : 1971

Darling Joy

It was such a kingfisher-flight of pleasure to see you and Barbara yesterday. Bless Barbara for turning you in this direction!

I consulted a friend on the telephone who shops more attentively than I do; and she told me that these stamps are what I owe you for the bread and the chocolate.

You are bound to be pleased to receive them, one never has enough stamps now that they are decimals.

It is a deep pleasure & tranquility to think you will take charge of me on June 6th, and that we shall go to Kettle's Yard together.

I feel Valentine's blessing on the plan. If you bring me back here on the 7th, will you be able to stay the night and be lulled by the river? Do!

Love
Sylvia

Judith Bond has drawn attention to this letter from STW to Joy Finzi held in the archive. Did the glass candlestick which Sylvia gave to Kettle's Yard perhaps formerly belong to Valentine? And was Sylvia and Joy's visit to be the occasion when it was donated?

MAY WEEKEND, 2007

Friday, May 5th. Meet at 7.30pm at La Gondola restaurant in Trinity Street,

Dorchester. Please let Events Secretary Richard Searle (01305 269204) know if you are coming.

Saturday, May 6th.

The morning session will be held in the Library at the Dorset County Museum, High West Street, Dorchester, by kind permission of the Director, Judy Lindsay.

10 am. A.G.M.

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes of the 2006 AGM.
3. Matters arising (including a report by the Chairman on five year memberships).
4. Chairman's report (including Richard Searle's & Peter Tolhurst's places on the Committee).
5. Treasurer's and Membership Officer's reports.
6. Programme for the rest of 2007.
7. Any Other Business.

Minutes of the Sixth Annual General Meeting of the Society held on Saturday April 29th 2006 at the Dorset County Museum

Present: Stephen Mottram, Diane Bithrey, Judith Stinton, Jay Barksdale, Peter Tolhurst, Mary Jacobs, Judith Bond, Ann Torday Gulden, Annie Rhodes, Tess Ormrod, Jan Montefiore, Sally Hirons, Richard Searle, Jenny Wildblood, Kristin Ewins.

1. Apologies were received from Eileen Johnson.
2. The minutes of the last AGM were approved and signed.
3. Chairman's Report: Stephen thanked the Committee members for their continued hard work and said that Richard Searle had been approached – and had agreed – to assist with work to organise Society events. His option on to the Committee was approved by the meeting, Stephen promising to report back next year concerning Richard's continued membership of the Committee.
3. Stephen was anxious that future Committee meetings be held on specific dates, and suggested the first Mondays in June and December, (all meetings to be at the Potter Bistro in Dorchester at 12 noon.) The June meeting would deal with matters arising from the AGM and in constructing a programme for the September Weekend. That in December would deal with the AGM agenda and the programme for the

May Weekend. Fixing dates would also enable ordinary members to approach Committee members to ask that specific items be discussed. Stephen's proposals were agreed. Stephen said the question of a five-year membership would be discussed at the June meeting.

4. Treasurer's Report: Judith's report showed a balance of £2,569.78 in the bank, and her report was adopted. The purchase of a three-set CD of Sylvia's writings in the *New Yorker* was approved, since this would be of much value to the Society's editors.
5. Membership Officer's Report: The list submitted did not include all members' names, to respect anonymity where requested. Advertisements for recruitment to the Society will be placed, as determined by the Committee in June.
6. Programme for the year: Tentative details were given of a September Weekend in Cambridge, including a Symposium on Sylvia, organised by the Anglia Ruskin University, at which members would be very welcome.
7. Jay Barksdale, a Society member who works at the New York Public Library, offered to assist the Society in North America wherever possible. His offer was accepted with considerable thanks, and he was told that he could regard himself as the Society's North American representative.
8. The meeting ended at 11am (having started late at 10.15.)

11 am. Readings and discussion on Sylvia, Valentine and musical matters.

12.30 pm. Lunch at Potters, Durngate Street, Dorchester. Again, please let Richard Searle know if you are coming.

3 pm. Tour of Wimborne Chained Library in Wimborne Minster, given by Mr Tandy, author of the library's guidebook. (Admission £2) This is a very early example of a reference library which was founded in 1686. Its most famous treasure is a volume of Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*, written whilst he was imprisoned in the Tower of London. But it also contains some Tudor Church Music, seen by Sylvia during her researches on the subject,

*Here in the minster tower
I sit alone,
While to mind's ear old books
Mumble and drone:*

*And the warm sun slants in
Over the cold stone...
From 'Tudor Church Music'*

The Minster, too, is well worth exploring, with Jacobean choir-stalls, old Flemish glass and a Quarter Jack clock in the west tower. There's a rather good second-hand bookshop by the minster gate, and several tea-shops in the town.

7.30 pm Party at the home of Eileen Johnson. We thought it would be a good idea if everyone to bring a favourite piece of Sylvia's writing, to read or talk about after the meal.

Sunday, May 7th.

10.30 am. Walk, led by Stephen Mottram, along the ridge above Chaldon to Poxwell stone circle, with the great shoulder of the down on one side and remnants of the heath on the other. This is the landscape of the poem 'Nelly Trim', probably inspired by a walk Sylvia took with Stephen Tomlin during her first visit to the village.

Immediately after an early tea Tommy took me for a walk. We followed the track along the top of the Five Maries ridge, and pointing to the opposite hillside Tommy told me of Nelly Trim, a dairy maid who, it was said, would yield herself to any wanderer who chanced to come to her lonely dwelling. Towering wreaths of mist were following each other along the valley, and I thought how glad the cold traveller would be of a warm woman.'

Somewhere up here too is (or was?) the thorn tree by which Sylvia and Valentine vowed their love to each other.

11.45 am. Gather in the churchyard to commemorate Sylvia's death day of May 1st.

1 pm. Lunch in the Sailor's Return. Again, please let Richard Searle know if you are coming, as the inn is very popular on Sundays.

September Weekend, 28th - 30th

We are planning to explore more of Somerset on the September weekend. A new edition of Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Somerset* will be out this

summer published by Black Dog Books, a reprint of STW's 1949 text with a selection of the best black-and-white images by Edwin Smith, Patrick Sutherland ('Wetlands') and Chris Willoughby ('Photographers Somersct').

Wicked Women of West Chaldon

Amongst the 200 documents released by M15 last September were papers relating to the allegedly suspicious behaviour of Sylvia and Valentine when they were living in The Hut, West Chaldon, in the mid-1930s. Reports on these newly-released papers appeared in both the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Times*.

'Communist Lesbians of West Chaldon under suspicion

The perceived vices of lesbianism and communism being practised in the Dorset countryside were a cause of alarm for M15's veteran director Sir Vernon Kell.

Was there, he asked the local constabulary in 1935, anything abnormal going on at 24 West Chaldon, the farmhouse home of writers Sylvia Warner and Valentine Ackland?

Discreet surveillance by Sgt Arthur Young revealed that the two ladies were reserved in nature, taking no part in village affairs or, indeed, subversive activities. Miss Ackland, then aged 29, was 6ft tall, had an Eton crop haircut, drove a sports car and shot rabbits with a rifle. According to one report, at home she "more often than not wears male clothing in preference to female attire".

Kell may have been aware of the book of erotic poetry the couple had published.

He certainly knew, from intercepting their mail, that they were communists in touch with Tom Wintringham, founder of the *Daily Worker*. Their correspondence showed that Miss Warner, a leading musicologist, and Miss Ackland had tried to recruit writer Hope Muntz and her sister Elizabeth who had worked at the de Havilland aircraft factory. [Joy, not Elizabeth, Muntz worked for de Havillands.]

Daily Telegraph September 4 2006

'"Subversive" women wore men's clothes

M15 was worried that two women writers living in Dorset were potential communist subversives and asked the police to make discreet inquiries into their activities, according to one of the files.

Colonel Sir Vernon Kell, the head of M15, wrote to the Chief Constable of Dorset, asking him to find out whether Sylvia Townsend-Warner and Valentine Ackland appeared to be "in any way abnormal".

Townsend-Warner was a noted writer and Ackland, her partner and a fellow writer, had written to the Communist Party offering her services to distribute literature in Dorset in 1935.

The police constable delegated to carry out the observation reported that they liked to wear men's clothes and shoot rabbits. No action was taken against them.'

Times September 4 2006

It would be interesting to know which M15 found more threatening to national security – lesbianism or Communism. More interesting still would be details of the surveillance activities of Sgt Arthur Young. Did he hang around the lonely lane, providing rich material for Theodore Powys, Sylvia and Valentine's nearest neighbour, on his customary walks? Did he swop his helmet for a deerstalker hat? In such a small village, was he not in danger of being arrested himself for his suspicious behaviour?

Someone should have written a short story about it...

Judith Stinton

Stop Press

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society archive now has its own website at:

www.sylviatownsendwarner.com

with links to Virago; Carcanet Press; Black Dog Books and the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society



Drawing by Paul Bloomfield.

Mr. Humbert Wolfe in Rather a Hurry

With rubber-soled feet
and the verve of Swinburne
I've followed this bus
from the heart of Kilburn;

for I think (though some of
the sculpture's shabby)
there is yet snug lying
in the Abbey.

Members David and Penny Penton contributed this piece, which comes from the *Independent* of March 2nd 2007.

BOOK OF A LIFETIME: *Mr Fortune's Maggot*

Sylvia Townsend Warner describes how she came across a volume of letters by a missionary in Polynesia when looking for something to read in Westbourne Grove Public Library. These letters provided her with a "maggot" ("a whimsical or perverse fancy") that was to drive her invention of Mr Fortune and his paradisal island. It may be this fact alone that ensured the book had a place in my memory: the account of the book's inception and setting concurring magically with the surroundings in which I found myself on first reading it.

In my early twenties, I worked in the library of the department of ethnology and prehistory at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. My knowledge of geography was shameful: I kept a 1940s Faber atlas hidden under the desk against student enquiries. I was better able to comprehend the impulse behind the collection in the museum: the simple hoarding of objects. Here the world's material culture was arranged by type rather than geography - all the baskets together, all the amulets.

To a library assistant whose lot was to watch the student expeditions come and go to Kazakhstan and Tanzania, the chief joy of *Mr Fortune's Maggot* was that its author, on nothing more than a chance encounter with a library book, had blown the bubble of an island from her own head. Mr Fortune is a missionary whose zeal is as much occupied with quelling his (unfortunate) human desires and impulses as it is to converting the islanders. He's terrified of the "bevies" of native women who entrap him "in the centre of a dance wanton enough to inflame a maypole". His painful arrival at self-knowledge is drawn against the dream-world of the island.

The book has had a talismatic influence on me. I wonder if it is the fact that it deals with the slippery question of writing itself: where and how to begin?

Mr Fortune comes to the conclusion that, "everywhere mankind is subject to the same anxious burden of love and loneliness, and must, in self-defence enchant their cares into a story and a dream". The motivation to create and invent is somehow conversely proportionate to the condition of loneliness, and the possibility of finding love and losing it. It seems to me

that Sylvia Townsend Warner pulls off a fine trick: letting us glimpse the frailty of belief while carrying us away on the joyful suspension of our disbelief. The book exemplifies the courage required to jump into thin air. And it is a gentle nudge to do so.

Jane Feather

Jane Feather's first novel, 'According to Ruth' is published by Harvill

Tudor Church Music

ALLELUIA

ANTHEM FOR FIVE VOICES

by

THOMAS WEELKES

c. 1575-1623

Edited by

S. TOWNSEND WARNER

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