

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

Patron: Janet Machen Pollock

Chair: Stephen Mottram

4 Merryleas Drive

Barnstaple EX32 9DQ

01271 379402/mobile: 07891282922

Hon. Secretary: Eileen Johnson

2 Vicarage Lane, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1LH

01305 266028

Hon. Treasurer & Membership Secretary: Judith Bond

26 Portwey Close, Weymouth

Dorset DT4 8RF

Newsletter Editor: Judith Stinton

21 Cattistock Road, Maiden Newton,

Dorset DT2 0AG

Events Organiser: Richard Searle

8 Furbers Paddock, Stratton,

Dorset DT2 9TR

01305 269204

Journal Editor: Peter Tolhurst

Black Dog Books,

104 Trinity Street, Norwich,

Norfolk NR2 2BJ

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Sylvia Townsend Warner @ Susanna Pimney

The Society's own website is online at

<http://www.townsendwarner.com>

NEWSLETTER NUMBER FIFTEEN

Welcome to a bumper issue of the Newsletter! The issue contains reports on the two Society events of the year so far, and news of the plans for the September weekend. These are followed by pieces on a notable Somerset worthy whose trail we will be following, and on STW's Somerset guide (which has just been republished), set in the context of other county guides of the period.

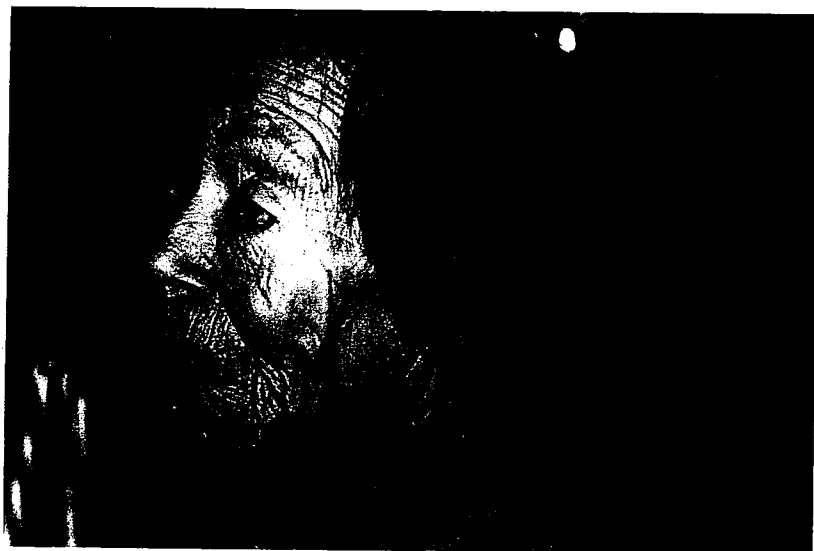
There are also two items concerning STW and Tudor Church Music: an little-explored aspect of her life. Valentine Ackland is represented by one of her essays on 'Country Dealings' describing conditions in Chaldon Herring in the mid-1930s, and there's an article by Sylvia, musing on contemporary approaches to *Hamlet*.

Finally, Judith Bond has asked me to inform members that she will use email where necessary to contact any member for whom she has an email address, unless they specifically say that they do not wish to receive them.

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. The cost for UK members remains unchanged at £10, while the rate for overseas members is now \$25, due to increases in the postal rate. Cheques should be made payable to the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society.



Many Happy Returns!

The Society's President, Janet Machen Pollock attained her 90th birthday earlier this year and we all send her our heartiest congratulations and very best wishes.

To celebrate such an important occasion, on 3rd March Judith Stinton laid on a splendid buffet lunch party at her cottage in Maiden Newton where Janet was guest of honour. We gave Janet a colourful basket of flowers of predominantly red and yellow blooms. Outside, between the frequent rain showers, the sun shone through intermittently lighting the spring day and filling Judith's cottage with a brightness suiting the moment.

About twenty Society members and personal friends came to wish Janet many happy returns, not all at once, people drifted in and out, but Janet made certain to talk with us all. She was simply radiant throughout and bright as a newly minted penny. Nobody could have failed to be impressed by her agile mind and sparkling intelligence as she circulated back and forth from sitting room to kitchen meeting everyone. She has too a phenomenal memory which served her well to introduce illuminating anecdotes and reminiscences from the recent and distant past enlivening her conversations.

By the time her car came to return her home to Somerset, Janet must have been exhausted from standing, circulating and talking, but she didn't show it. To the end she beamed and before departing produced from her bag photocopies of short stories by STW from the New Yorker which she generously distributed to everyone.

It had been a wonderfully memorable birthday party and our warmest thanks go to Judith who invited us all to her cottage to share Janet's day and to enjoy her appetising spread of delicious food and wine.

Richard Searle

May Weekend, 2007

I enjoy eating, especially in congenial company and we had a very pleasant evening at the start of our May week-end at the La Gondola restaurant in Trinity Street. A huge pizza for me, served by a Kate Winslett lookalike, accompanied by our own chatter. They do things properly here and our orders were taken by the old man proprietor, the head of the family - solemnly and patiently taking his work very seriously indeed.

As usual, the AGM next morning was in the library of the Museum, thanks to its Director - and I hope that we will always have the use of that splendid room. And using it reminds the Museum that the Society is very much alive. Our meeting was unusually long (50 minutes) and we were able to discuss a wide range of important issues in our usual cordial way.

Lunch was in the familiar surroundings of Potters in Durngate Street where we freely extended the use of tables so as to take over a corner of the room. The afternoon was spent in Wimborne Minster - both the town and the church. The town has that now rare facility of two good second-hand bookshops. The www and Abe have not yet found rural Dorset, thankfully.

But the Minster was what we had come to see; not primarily for its Saxon origins, but for the chained library. Sylvia had recorded being here in her poem 'Tudor Church Music'. Here in the minster tower we stood - not alone - but with the curator, listening to his oft-repeated talk on the books in his charge. And we read the poem and decided that Sylvia really would have heard the clock preaching to its empty church.

But where were the music sheets of 'Gibbons in F' ? At first he found only one. Satisfied, we went on a tour of the lovely church. But then news from the library was of more Gibbons ; and almost everyone rushed back up the stairs. The old man minster guide did not seem to mind that all but one of his flock had left him. Perhaps the Church of England is used to that sort of thing. But how we should visit these grand buildings and protect their treasures? The England of Sylvia's time is ours too.

In the evening there were readings of Sylvia's work in the home of Society Secretary with Eileen and her cat Hattie as hosts. And - as is always the case - Eileen provided us with the most splendid food. This is what the Society is about; Sylvia, readings, good surroundings - and ourselves. Unlike me, many members sight read brilliantly; how I envy them that ability.

Next morning was spent by the energetic in walking the ridge above Chaldon Herring, with the men looking for signs of Nelly Trim and all of us seeking out the tiny stone circle which sits overlooking Poxwell Manor. With searching, we found the circle and performed some hastily-improvised ceremonies, as seemed fitting to the occasion.



On a reconnoitre for the walk, there was a herd of 30 or 40 young cattle which took a great interest in following humans very closely. They did not appear for the Society walk, but it made me think that Sylvia did not record

this sort of behaviour - either when walking with Tomlin or otherwise. Do today's cattle have Attitude, or did the people of Sylvia's day ignore them better than we do?

We ended the week-end with our usual visit to the grave and lunch at the Sailor's Return where our Society Patron was waiting for us, having generously ordered the wine beforehand. Our thanks to her and my thanks to everyone who took part in organising these days together.

And now, dear Reader, go and search your bookshelves for Sylvia's Collected Poems (ed Harman) and look at pages 82 and 99 and read the poems that helped to make our week-end. If all members do that, the week-end really will have been worthwhile.

Stephen Mottram

Autumn Weekend, September 28th-30th 2007

To coincide with the new edition of STW's *Somerset*, we have decided to base our September weekend in Wells.

An accommodation list is available from our Events Organiser, Richard Searle (01305 269204)

Friday, September 28th

7.30pm. Meal at the Fountain Inn and Boxer's Restaurant, 1 St Thomas Street in Wells. Please let Richard know if you are coming.

Saturday, September 29th

10am. Meet at the ticket office in the entrance to **Glastonbury Abbey Ruins**, eight miles south of Wells. *'If this was to be a history of Somerset', Sylvia wrote, 'Glastonbury would be the place to begin it'.* There's plenty to see - the famous Tor, with its tower *'like a flag on the tip of a sand-castle'*; the Museum of Rural Life and not least the town itself, with the shops selling crystals, incense and Tarot cards, and the harlequin inhabitants.

12.30pm. Make our way to **Priddy**, five miles north of Wells, via Wookey Hole. Above the village of Priddy is a vantage point with *'the most startling view in Somerset - a sickle-shaped view sweeping from the Wiltshire downs*

to the mountains in Wales and containing all the central level to the line of the Quantocks. Everything is there...' Followed by lunch at the Queen Victoria pub in Priddy and a stroll around the unspoilt village (which possesses a swallow-hole and four mysterious circles) and up to the church.

Proceed to **Wrington** in search of Miss Hannah More (1745-1833), bluestocking, spinster and author of religious tracts - '*philanthropy boiled in the veins of Hannah More*' - to whom STW devotes a generous chunk of her guide. In the church porch, her bust '*with a wonderful cap*' confronts that of the rather greater John Locke, who was born in Wrington. A lengthy memorial to Miss More and her four sisters dominates the south wall, and they are buried under a commodious table in the churchyard. Beyond the village is Barley Wood, once Hannah's More's home, now much extended and (rather fittingly) a treatment centre for drug and alcohol abuse. Barley Wood's walled garden, on the other side of the road, now contains a restaurant which serves tea and cakes.

(Serious More researchers may like to go on to Cowslip Green off the Bristol-Bridgewater Road, where her earlier, delightfully rustic and Gothicky cottage can still be seen.)

7.30pm. Supper in the Crown, Market Place, Wells. Please let Richard know if you are coming.

Sunday, September 30th

10.30am. A visit to **Wells Cathedral**, starting at the medieval West Front, facing the Green. '*Wells is the gentlest of all our cathedrals. There is not a frown in its architecture.*' The Cathedral has many glories, including the 'scissor arches' erected in the 14thC to support the tower - '*as if some mild local giant had come in to lend his shoulders*' - the Quarter Jack clock; the misericords in the Quire and the Chapter House. Nearby is the medieval Vicars' Close, the oldest continuously inhabited street in Europe.

(For anyone interested in attending a service, there is Holy Communion at 8am, Sung Eucharist at 9.45am and Matins at 11.30am, as well as Evensong at 3pm.)

1.00pm. sharp! Lunch in the Cloister Restaurant, Wells Cathedral.

Afternoon. A walk around the rest of the city of Wells - or perhaps a visit to nearby Croscombe church, one of the most complete survivals of Jacobean church furnishings.

More about Miss More

Hannah More was born in 1745, at Bristol, the fourth of five children of Jacob More, headmaster of a free school in Fishponds. She received her later education from her elder sisters, who had opened their own school at College Green, also in Bristol. Then Hannah joined them as a teacher.

She was described as an attractive young woman with 'pretty, delicately refined features, rather sharply cut, [and] beautiful keen dark eyes which were enhanced by the whiteness of her powdered hair'. Men were charmed by her, but a six year engagement came to nothing and she then rejected the marriage proposal of a second suitor. Hannah never married; and neither did any of her sisters.

She began to write plays, including a tragedy called *The Inflexible Captive* for the Theatre Royal, Bath. David Garrick wrote the epilogue for this play, and the contact with Garrick led to her first visit to London. Here she met Samuel Johnson who - severe critic though he was - read and admired two ballads Hannah had written, called 'Sir Eldred and the Bower' and 'The Ballad of the Bleeding Rock'. But perhaps her greatest literary triumph came in 1777 when Garrick produced her play *Percy* at Covent Garden Theatre. It was also performed in Bath and Bristol, starring the notable actress Mrs Sarah Siddons.

After Garrick's sudden death in 1779 she gave up writing plays, but was by then a member of the Blue Stockings, a group of eminent English gentlewomen who gathered to discuss literature and the arts. Hannah wrote a poem, *Bas Bleu*, about the group which, according to Margaret Drabble, 'vividly describes the charm of that society'.

Around 1785, she returned to Somerset, where she had a cottage built at Cowslip Green. There she was visited by William Wilberforce, who had a great influence on her thinking. Hannah was very active in the campaign for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (which had, ironically, had brought great riches to Bristol). With Wilberforce, she also became concerned about the conditions in which the poor were living, and in 1787 she wrote 'Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society' a tract which (unusually for the time) sought to begin moral reform at the top of

society rather than the bottom.

With Wilberforce, she toured the nearby parts of Somerset, and the two were shocked by the appalling conditions in Cheddar. This discovery was the starting-point for 'The Mendip Schools', the first one being established in that town. Although the schools were not intended to raise the poor above their allotted station in life ('I allow of no writing', Miss More declared) they were a new development, and some of them became National Schools after her death.

In 1804 the sisters moved to the house they had had built at Barley Wood in Wrington. By now worried about the possible effects of the French revolution on the English countryside, Hannah wrote a series of cheap Repository Tracts to counter any disturbing radical thinking. These included 'Village Politics by Will Chip, a country carpenter' and 'The Story of Sinful Sally' and were very successful. They sold two million copies in four years and led to the establishment of the Religious Tract Society in 1799.

Prolific writer, intellectual and spinster, practical and energetic woman; all these qualities in More must have chimed with Sylvia Townsend Warner. While More's philanthropy has to be taken in the context of her age - it 'ragged at that date' - foreign revolution was to make her increasingly reactionary. Sylvia's full sympathies could never lie with a woman who once declared 'From liberty, equality and the rights of man, Good Lord deliver us'.

Judith Stinton

Setting Somerset

When, in 1946, the Portmerion architect Clough Williams-Ellis and his wife Amabel asked Sylvia to write a guide to Somerset, she was already an established poet and novelist. With Valentine at the wheel the fieldwork for this new project was a pleasurable diversion from the more demanding task of finishing her sixth novel, *The Corner That Held Them*. The 30,000 word MS. duly arrived on Paul Elek's desk and appeared three years later in the *Vision of England* series. *Somerset* was dedicated to Steven Clark, the young man Sylvia and Valentine had first met in Barcelona in 1936 and helped nurse through a bout of Spanish flu. Clark's Somerset credentials were also impeccable: he had inherited the family shoe business in Street.

The Vision series occupied a brief but important space between its two more enduring rivals, John Betjeman's *Shell Guides* launched in 1934 with his own volume on Cornwall, and Pevsner's monumental *Buildings of England* begun in 1951. They were the latest and most illustrious in a long line of guide books celebrating the English countryside. The handful of pre-war Shell Guides, with notable contributions in 1936 from the Nash brothers (John's *Bucks.* and Paul's *Dorset*) and John Piper's *Oxon* (1938) were atmospheric and evocative reminders of an irreplaceable heritage threatened by war, while the Pevsners became a detailed chronicle of what, at least for the moment, had survived.

Interrupted by the war and ambushed by Paul Elek's new county guides, the Shell series was not resumed until 1951 with Betjeman and Piper's *Shropshire*. In the intervening years the Vision editors moved quickly and assembled a team of writers, now all but forgotten except perhaps for Geoffrey Grigson (*The Scilly Isles*) to cover the country. Each volume was a highly individual collaboration between author and artist, several of whom like Sven Berlin (*Cornwall*), Michael Rothenstein (*Sussex*) and Barbara Jones (*Dorset*) had just been working on the wartime *Recording Britain* project. The series, which had begun inauspiciously with a slim volume on the Black Country, soon ran to 30 volumes until the lack of a major sponsor rather than lack of enthusiasm to complete the task led to its demise in 1950. (The Penguin/Pevsner partnership had the backing of Guinness and the Leverhulme Trust).

On Sylvia's reading list was the *Somerset Shell Guide* (1936) by Peter Quennell and his father. Quennell junior was a minor poet who shared Sylvia's publisher and a double page with an extract from Sylvia's *Life of Theodore Powys* in the 1928 *Chatto & Windus Miscellany*. Spurred on by the Quennells' lack-lustre performance and unconstrained by its gazeteer format, Sylvia was free to follow her nose. This was her first attempt at non-fiction and she clearly enjoyed the experience. While adopting the geographical imperatives of the county with chapters on Exmoor and the Quantocks, the Mendips and Sedgmoor, she dutifully pays homage at Somerset's architectural shrines like Wells Cathedral, Glastonbury Abbey and the great stone houses, but this is no dry architectural survey but rather, in her own words, an '*err-and-stray-book*' full of sensory delights. She is alert to the '*wild poetry*' of rock formations, the '*melodious oddity*' of Somerset place-names and old apple varieties, the colours of Ham stone after rain and the hidden treasures of country lanes. But above all it is the smell of apples, especially in summer when '*a pervasive tipsiness fills the*

air'. *Somerset* is, as Claire Harman concludes, 'full of recondite information and surprising digressions ... a sensualist's book, written in a style which conveys the intimate quality of conversation.' Its publication in 1949 was, however, soured by Valentine's renewed affair with Elizabeth Wade White when Sylvia's painful exile brought her back to Somerset, to a hotel on the outskirts of Yeovil, while Elizabeth installed herself at Frome Vauchurch for a month.

Somerset has been unavailable for many years but, keeping faith with the original text, the handsome new edition from Black Dog Books is very much in the spirit of the Vision series with 60 stunning black and white photographs. Many are by Sylvia's contemporary Edwin Smith whose beautiful photogravure prints for Thames and Hudson's quarto-size series on English architecture, especially *English Parish Churches* and *English Cottages and Farmhouses* remain a unique record of landscape and buildings in the 1950s.

Peter Tolhurst

BOOK NEWS

Literary lectures at the Dorset County Museum

2nd October – Dorset County Museum – 6.30pm

£6 on the door. (Tea and coffee served from 6.00pm)

Peter Tolhurst of Black Dog Books is bringing out a new edition of Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Somerset* and will talk about the book and the Shell and Elek guides of the 1940s. Copies of the book will be on sale.

9th October – Dorset County Museum – 6.30pm

£6 on the door. (Tea and coffee served from 6.00pm) **Morine Krissdóttir**, Neil Curry and Roger Peers will give a reading of John Cowper Powys's 1939 diary 'Ghosts on the Roof': A Threnody for a Lost World' This will be followed by a glass of wine and the launch of *Descents of Memory*, Morine Krissdóttir's biography of John Cowper Powys.

For details of the four other lectures and booking information,
phone 01305 262735

CORRECTION

In the last Newsletter it was stated that the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Archive has its own website. This is, of course, incorrect. The Sylvia Townsend Warner Archive does not belong to the Society and is completely separate from it. The sentence should have read:

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Archive now has its own website @ www.sylviatownsendwarner.com with links to Virago; Carcanet Press; Black Dog Books and the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society.

Apologies for any confusion caused by this slip.

Judith Stinton

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Peter Tolhurst has compiled an index of articles in the Society's twice-yearly Newsletter and annual Journal. This is now available on the Society's website.

In Search of Tudor Church Music

The following letter, to the Editor of the *Musical Times* (December 1st 1923) was discovered by our American representative, Jay Barksdale. It gives an impression of the immense practical difficulties involved in this enormous project.

'Sir, - We shall be very grateful if you will kindly find space in your columns for a request in connection with the edition of *Tudor Church Music* which is in the process of publication by Oxford University Press for the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. This edition has been described as the re-writing of a century of English musical history, and may fitly be considered a work of national importance. We, as the editors, would appeal to owners of private libraries to help us if they can.

'It is probably well-known that most of the music of the 16th and 17th century exists only in MS., written not in score but in part-books, one voice to a book; and our work is constantly hampered by the want of one or more books in a set of voice-parts, for lack of which the music recorded remains incomplete. Notable examples of imperfect sets are the large folio books in Durham Cathedral Library, originally a set of ten, now only eight, the 1st Contratenor Decani and Bass Decani having disappeared; the Latin set in Peterhouse, Cambridge, lacking the tenor, as also the set in Christ Church, Oxford, MSS. 979-983. Peterhouse possesses two sets of English books, but of one set, originally ten, only four remain, of the other only seven.

'In English work, it is true, a missing part can generally be supplied from another collection, but not always; for of Byrd's Great Service, while the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* are also found elsewhere, the Morning portions are extant only in the incomplete Durham books, with the result that one of the four contratenor parts had to be supplied almost entirely for our second volume. In music for the Latin Rite it frequently happens that a Mass or Motet exists in only one set of books, and when this is defective we have to choose between publishing it incomplete and surmising the missing part or parts – a choice not always easy to make.

'We hoped that the advertisement of the edition and the publication of a Byrd volume in December last might elicit offers of help from those who possess old part-books, but hitherto those brought to our notice have contained music of a later date than the period covered by our edition. That such books exist is proved by the fact that Dr. Fellowes, on a visit to the Bodleian, found out by chance that his neighbour possessed a tenor part of a set of books written for Southwell Minster in 1607. This book we were kindly allowed to photograph.

'This incident and the existence of isolated part-books in the British Museum and elsewhere, e.g., Brit. Mus. Add. MS. 29,289 and Bodl. MS. Mus. Sch.e.423, lead us to hope that more of the missing books may still be in existence in private libraries, and we appeal through you to their possible owners to allow us of their generosity to examine and, if necessary, make use of them. Such action on their part might enable us to carry out in full our intention of producing a complete corpus of Tudor Church Music, and so establishing the claim of our country to a foremost place in musical achievement in the great days of Palestrina and Di Lasso.

Yours etc.
P.C. Buck,
E. H. Fellowes,
A. Ramsbotham,
Sylvia Townsend Warner.'

*

Member Ruth Williams has come across an article by Sylvia which may also be of interest to anyone wanting to find out more about her early career in musicology. It is to be found in the Introductory Volume of the *Oxford History of Music*, published in a total of seven or eight volumes by the Oxford University Press in 1929. These replaced an earlier Oxford History of Music which appeared from 1901-5.

Percy C. Buck is the editor of the 1929 Introductory Volume, and Ruth comments: 'no doubt that is how Sylvia came to be a contributor to it, especially since it is of a date when she was generally concentrating on writing rather than musicology'.

Sylvia's article is entitled 'Notation: The Growth of a System'.

'All in all', Ruth writes, 'the book is a fascinating introduction to ancient and mediæval music; but it does demand some prior knowledge from its readers and is clearly aimed at University level students.'

The Townsend Warner Family Tree

Paul Spiring has contacted the Society to say that he has been researching the life of Bertram Fletcher Robinson (who assisted Conan Doyle with the plot of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*). Robinson was a pupil at Newton College Proprietary School between 1882 and 1890, and his headmaster there was the Revd George Townsend Warner, STW's paternal grandfather.

Paul has 'trawled through many historical archives and accumulated many biographical details' about both STW's father (who examined Robinson for his history degree) and her grandfather. He features this connection in two books and on his website: <http://www.bfrombiz/index.php?>

'Footsteps on the Battlements'

Member Janet Montefiore discovered this essay in a 'Theatre Now' miscellany edited by Montagu Slater and Arnold Rattenbury and published by the Saturn Press [1948].

Expressing a divided personality by being A and B on alternate evenings, a ruthless egotist full of moral sensibility wandered through neo-Byzantine halls, suffering from an Oedipus complex, wearing peg-top trousers and unable to make up his mind though relieved of the obligation to say what is expected of him... Yes, it is Hamlet; and these are some of the latest bulletins on his condition, drawn from Dr. Ernest Jones, Mr. Roy Walker, Senor Madariaga, and reviews of two stage productions and a film. Of course it is Hamlet. Who but Hamlet calls out so much ingenuity, solicitude, insight, explaining, explaining away, coddling, swaddling and twaddling? For professors of English literature, psychologists, moralists, and producers, are all men of action. Murder comes to them as naturally as sneezing. You conceive an impulse to do away with a gentleman older than yourself who has done your family an injury; you put it into effect. Nothing could be easier or more straightforward. And that anyone can conceive such an impulse in Act One and hang till Act Five before acting on it fills them with such concern and understanding sympathy for a maladjusted character that there is next to nothing they won't do to show this unfortunate person in a more favourable light.

"Had Hamlet gone naturally to work, there would have been an end of our play." This observation, made in 1730, shows how even at that date Hamlet was recognised as a special case. A stage, and an actor, might be enough for Macbeth or Othello, and no doubt some actors claimed, might be enough for Hamlet. The better sort of thinkers knew otherwise; if Hamlet is to be got out of his difficulties, such rude horse-surgery is not enough.

"For Hamlet a lovely voice is essential." This prescription comes from Dr. Harold Hobson. But a lovely voice is not enough, for Hamlet's hair is also a matter of great importance. "Mr. Eddison possesses an excellent *mezzo voce* but has few vocal reserves on which to draw. Also the dressing of his hair over-feminises his appearance. Despite these defects..."

That is Dr. Beverley Baxter, M.P. Dr. Ivor Brown makes a similar diagnosis. "He impressed me as needing aspirin and a hair-cut." While not actually called in to prescribe for a different Hamlet, Dr. Brown cannot pass the bedside without a warning word. "Leaving the new film's criticism to

my colleague, I only venture to suggest that the dashing and brilliant Olivier's platinum pow..." and Dr. Lejeune also shakes her head over this vital deficiency..."bleached hair that adds no Scandinavian tincture to the piece, and ages him unnecessarily." *Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother.* But the Faculty seem to find an inky frock-coat more satisfying. I have not noticed any regrets about Hamlet's hair in the Stratford production, unless Dr. Brown's statement that Helpmann's performance "is as an electric candle to Scofield's quivering torch," is to be read as indicating that Mr. Helpmann's hair is smooth and Mr. Scofield's curly.

In writing of the Stratford *victoriana* Dr. Alan Dent has a more breezy bedside manner. "My own view is that *Hamlet* would continue to be a great and exciting play if it were set in the West Indies with the men wearing nothing but loin-cloths and the women sarongs." This is a courageous affirmation of faith in the patient's constitution; but I fear it is dangerous. That *if* might so easily be read as a *provided that*, and just as experts on child-welfare toss away blankets and cot-curtains, experts in Hamlet-welfare will produce him in a loin-cloth – though the setting will probably be Mexican baroque.

It is left to Dr. Richard Winnington to make the most pregnant suggestion, and the one which, in my opinion, is likely to give the most interesting clinical results. In his notice of the Hamlet film, Dr Winnington says nothing about Hamlet's hair – mere palliative allopathy, I daresay, to him. He is all for plastic surgery. "It is not," says he, "until Eileen Herlie (Queen Gertrude) drinks the poisoned cup, that this great drama fuses and reaches out at us from the screen. That one small scene, wherein for the first time in any version of *Hamlet* Gertrude knowingly poisons herself, points the admirable failure of all the rest of the film."

Now I consider this very interesting, for it moves the diagnosis into an entirely new field. What is wrong with *Hamlet*, is not, as we have so mistakenly supposed, Hamlet himself. What is wrong with *Hamlet* is Shakespeare. Re-shape Shakespeare's action and characterisation, and the great drama of *Hamlet* will fuse and reach out at us – whatever that may mean; but obviously it means something highly pleasurable. Here, in parenthesis, I must remark that Dr. Winnington's methods were favoured by other eminent practitioners in the past: Dr. Cibber, for instance, was all for plastic surgery. But leaving this on one side, let us speculate on the possibilities now opened to us; and though it is tempting to think what plastic surgery might do for other Shakespearean problem plays, *Timon of Athens*, for instance with his face lifted, *Titus Andronicus* with a new heart, let us keep to *Hamlet*. By poisoning herself deliberately instead of taking

poison by accident, Queen Gertrude is transformed from Shakespeare's kind-hearted, easy-going and enigmatically stupid matron to a sympathetic and contemporary character. She leaps in one bound from the first folio to News of the World.

Other grafts of contemporary tissue should be tried, and especially, I think, non-theatrical grafts. One of the past troubles with Hamlet has been the selfish conservatism of actors, who will insist on acting him – ranting about on a stage, as if the rendering of the part were no more than a matter between themselves and Shakespeare, and slighting the preferred co-operation of Shakespearean interpreters. Here is Mr. Walker, for instance, interpreting the play of Hamlet, line by line, with a devotional expositiveness that used in other days to be reserved for the Book of Daniel. "Hamlet's acquiescence is significant. He leans suddenly towards his mother – 'I shall in all my best obey you, madam.' The words have an inner meaning he does not intend. Too often he will obey his mother's nature in him when struggling to give of his best." Here is Dr. Ernest Jones, proving that Hamlet hangs back from killing Claudius, because in killing Hamlet's father and bedding the Queen, Claudius has done what Hamlet wished to do, and that "the relationship with Ophelia never flowers" because she is "in part felt to be a permitted substitute for the desired relationship with Laertes." But carried away by the gross raptures of acting the part of Hamlet, players fail to convey these fine inner meanings. Hamlet's acquiescence signifies little more than half it should. Dr. Ernest Jones's relationship with the drama never flowers.

If plastic surgery, as advocated by Dr. Winnington, be applied, all this can be put right. The Queen has been brought up-to-date; but that is only a beginning. There is Horatio. Horatio's function is in the main to listen to what Hamlet says. Why not replace him by Mr. Walker, who will explain what Hamlet means? I do not see plainly, just at this moment, what should be done about Claudius, but I am clear how the uses of plastic surgery can improve the Ghost.

"What look'd he, frowningly!"

"A countenance more in sorrow than in anger."

The figure seen haunting the battlements of Elsinore is that of Dr. Ernest Jones, and during the subsequent action his researches into Hamlet's subconscious mind bring new life and meaning to the old play. For home consumption, that is. For a dollar-earning film, the part of Dr. Jones should be given to Ophelia.

Sylvia Townsend Warner

Country Dealings

This is the second of three articles which Valentine Ackland wrote on the lives of the agricultural workers for *Left Review*. They were to form the basis of her book *Country Conditions*, published by Lawrence & Wishart in 1936. The article has something of the same tone as Sylvia Townsend Warner's essay, 'Love Green' (1932), although Ackland draws different conclusions.

Yesterday I went over a row of three thatched cottages. These have been empty for over a year and are now being repaired: at least, renovated inside, with a lick of whitewash and some putty stuffed into the worst cracks of the window-sills. In one of these cottages, I remembered, had lived the X's, a family of six children, mother, father and mother's brother. I went into that cottage and up the stairs. 'Look out!' called a workman urgently, 'Thik house be all buggy all up walls.'

The thatch was scattered over the bedroom floors. In the larger room (about 10 x 14) the chimney of the kitchen took a large piece from the west wall. There were two narrow dust-traps on either side of the chimney projection, but no fireplace and only a very tiny window, of which one half would slide open. The cottages face north.

The smaller bedroom was almost square, with room for one double bed and possibly a single one, but no room for any other furniture. Downstairs there was a kitchen, the size of the larger bedroom, with a large open fireplace. Evidently the fire smoked, for the ceiling and walls were blackened. There was a small pantry, stone-floored like the kitchen, and very damp. No fireplace, no shelves. Everywhere was very dark because the windows were tiny, and each window would open only to half its width. In this house Lucy X. had lived and had died. She got T.B. when she was about fifteen, and after a while she was sent to a sanatorium. There she stayed for about three months, and then returned to this cottage. From here she used to make the journey into hospital twice a week, in the village 'bus. It was autumn, and the weather was damp and chill. The 'bus went at nine in the morning and returned at four in the afternoon. Lucy paid 2s a time, and made this journey twice weekly for two months or more, then she got much worse and was put to bed in the pantry – that damp, fireless room, which measures just 10 foot by 7, and is barely five and a half feet high. She was

put away with the stores, to keep rather longer than they did in that dank closet.

In due course Lucy died, and everyone was glad. They had been troubled to hear her coughing when they passed the house. Mrs. X. wept, but she was glad too; there were still five children, and only 30s. coming in from Mr. X. (of which 3s. was docked for rent and 9d. for insurance) and whatever her brother chose to give her from his 30s., which wasn't much usually.

A woman I talked to about this family said thoughtfully: 'The queer thing is how ever Lucy came to get it. It's not as though she was one of the younger ones. Most of them aren't Mr. X.'s at all, you know – they're Y.'s kids, her brother's, and you'd expect it then.'

'What these houses need,' said a man who had lived in one of them, 'is a red jacket.' The phrase comes to us straight from the more glorious days of our county. The days of rick-burning. But what these houses are getting is a white jacket. They are being re-dressed for the next-comers. They are being made into smartest possible whited sepulchres.

Every day the children of this village walk to school. Some of them walk two miles and some walk three and a half. Even the very small ones have to make this journey, summer and winter. The question of asking for a 'bus to take them was brought up at the Parish Council meeting recently. It was turned down because the two leading members of the Council have bought their children bicycles. They don't see the need for a 'bus.

The walking children cannot return for dinner, so they take it with them and eat it in the class-room, without any kind of supervision. Every day there are fierce battles, and the younger or the timid ones lose their food to the strong. 'Good training!' said a man grimly. But it isn't. All the men of this place have been trained in the same way, and it has done them precious little good. Not a man dares to raise his voice in protest, even against such a thing as the dismissal of Mr. A.

Mr. A. worked for a farmer here. He injured his foot and went on insurance pay, £1.1s.6d. a week, and 3s. off for rent. When he could return to work he was told that he was not wanted, but that he could keep his cottage if his son liked to stay on with the farmer. The boy is under fifteen, and earns 9s.6d. a week. Mr. A. agreed, for there are too many unemployed around here as it is. His wife, his daughter, his son, his baby son and himself had to live on 9s.6d. a week. Now his wife has got a job in the village, working for two days a week. Another 10s., and that is all they have; that – and the prospect of being shifted on in April.

In April, when changes are made, the farmer may want Mr. A.'s cottage, although there are great holes in the bedroom floors. But one of his other

houses has just fallen down, and the Estate won't build it up, for they have had a lot of expense lately in putting in a bathroom and drainage to a newly-let farmhouse further down the village. No tenant would take it otherwise. That is the first bath and the first tap in the village.

Here, every man's hand is against every man. There is no comradeship. 'United Front' would mean nothing at all to most of them, and sheer folly and 'asking for it' to the few alert ones. Each man hates his fellows, and each man, separately, hates the farmers. The women drag about their cottages, rarely going out, except when they go to the communal well to draw up water each in her own bucket, clean or dirty as it may be. This well serves fifteen cottages, and is a good five minutes' walk from most of them. The town is ten miles off, there is no shop here except the tiny post-office. No club, a dead-alive pub, a dead-alive church, only one wireless set in the whole village. There is not one cottage that is not damp and very few that are not verminous. That lick of whitewash will not kill the lice in those derelict cottages, but the new tenants are expected daily. No one knows where they hope to find work. The new farmer brought his own labour – one man. The whole farm, fine ploughed land, will be put down to grass, and that spells unemployment for at least six families.

I have said the village is 'dead-alive' and so it is. But the workers here are the direct descendants of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, of the rick-burners, of the deputation of peasants who, in the next village to ours, raised Cain when the Enclosures Act came too near to them. There is good blood here, as there is over the whole of agricultural Britain; tenacity and sense. The labourers have been exploited often enough, – their endurance, their patience, their capacity for work, – but no one, until now, has thought of using these other qualities; which is fortunate, for now they will be used not to better the masters and the masters' land, but the labourers themselves, on their own land.

Collective farming, culture, productive labour under modern conditions instead of ceaseless, hopeless toil with primitive tools to produce goods which bring them no gain – already the farm-labourers feel that something's in the wind – hope somewhere, something about to happen. If you came down here and saw Eddie the village drunkard and Bob the day labourer you might turn away in despair – but you would be wrong, even in these extreme cases. Eddie reads: 'Any book on country subjects, and politics most' and expounds to his two young sons who are in the Forces. Bob made that remark about the 'red-jacket' – and his glance as he said it was not a backward but a forward one.

Valentine Ackland

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Among the fiction writers who contribute regularly to the magazine, we have Sylvia Townsend Warner, who is surely close to eighty and who writes with the zest of a twenty-year-old. (A recent story began, "She planted a high Spanish comb in her pubic hair and resumed her horn-rimmed spectacles." Who could resist reading the next sentence of such a story?)

Brendan Gill, *Here at the New Yorker*, Michael Joseph, 1975

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