

*The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's 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 Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's 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 Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's 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 Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's*

## *The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Newsletter Number Twenty Four*

*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 Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's Maggot, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After The Death*

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**NEWSLETTER NUMBER TWENTY FOUR**

2012 will be an eventful year for the Society, with the Sylvia Townsend Warner Symposium at the end of June (details below), a concert of her music and the publication of Black Dog Books's edition of a selection of Warner's prose writings.

A sad note: two of our members have died during the past year. They are Clive Robbins, associate of Paul Nordoff, and Peter Shorey, actor with the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Thanks go to the contributors to this edition: Denise DiMarzio, Dr Mary Jacobs, Judith Bond, Jay Barksdale, Lynn Mutti and Ruth Williams  
*Judith Stinton*

**SUBSCRIPTIONS: a reminder**

If you haven't yet paid for 2012, please send your subscription to Judith Bond, 26 Portwey Close, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 8RF. The cost for UK members still remains unchanged at £10, while the rate for overseas members is \$25. Cheques should be made payable to the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society.

**ELECTION OF THE SOCIETY'S OFFICERS**

All the Society's officers are due to stand for re-election in 2012. This will be carried out in accordance with the process agreed at the AGM in 2009. Any one wishing to stand for any of the committee posts must contact the Chairman, Eileen Johnson, by March 31st 2012. The current officers are all eligible for re-election and will notify Eileen if they wish to stand again.

**SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER WEEKEND June 29-July 1**

**Friday June 29**

**9.30am – 6pm. Symposium: 'Revisiting Sylvia Townsend Warner'.**

A day of presented papers and discussions on Warner at Dorset County Museum, High West Street, Dorchester.

Cost is £20.00 to Society members (a special price: the Committee has negotiated a substantial discount). This is our chance to have our voice heard in the academic world and we are urging as many of you as possible to attend. For further details and booking form please see enclosed leaflet.

(There will also be a bookstall (wo)manned by two Society members.)

**7.30pm. Buffet supper** at Café Paninis, 11 Weymouth Avenue, Dorchester.

Cost £15, including wine. (It is essential that you let the Events Organiser, Richard Searle, know if you are coming.)

### **Saturday June 30**

**10.30am.** Annual General Meeting in the library of Dorset County Museum.

**11.45am-12.30pm.** Walk around Sylvia Townsend Warner's Dorchester, led by Eileen Johnson and Judith Stinton. Ending up for lunch at the Kings Arms, High East Street, where other members are invited to join us!

**3pm to 5pm.** Concert of music written by or associated with Sylvia Townsend Warner, accompanied by readings from her work by Society members. The concert will include a performance of Warner's poem 'Azrael' set to music by Jonathan David. Refreshments. Tickets are £8, and a booking form is enclosed.

**7.30pm.** Meal at La Gondola, 30 Trinity Street, Dorchester. Again, please let Richard Searle know if you are coming.

### **Sunday July 1**

**11.30am.** Flower-laying and readings at Sylvia & Valentine's grave in Chaldon Herring churchyard.

**12.00.** Lunch in the Sailor's Return, Chaldon Herring. Please let Richard Searle know if you are coming.

### **WITH THE HUNTED: Selected Writings**

**Sylvia Townsend Warner**

**Ed. Peter Tolhurst**

**Black Dog Books**

Together with the letters, diaries and poems published since her death in 1978 this selection of non-fiction confirms Warner as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most important literary figures. From 1929 and the *New York Herald Tribune* to *The Spectator* in the late 1960s she was a highly original critic, contributing to a wide range of periodicals. From biographical essays on female revolutionaries in *Woman Today*, dispatches from the Spanish Civil War in *Left Review* and articles on rural conditions in *The Countryman* 'her heart was with the hunted, always'.

The delightful sense of place, so important to her fiction, is evident here in extracts from her guide to Somerset and, integral to it, her mischievous wit is at work in several articles on social etiquette for women's magazines. These fugitive pieces, brought together for the first time, appear alongside her monograph on Jane Austen, the 'Tristram Shandyan' portrait of the Dorset recluse T.F. Powys and her introduction to *The Portrait of a*

*Tortoise*. Here too are several unpublished pieces, notably 'A Class Distinction' and 'An Edinburgh Childhood' together with Warner's thoughts on the historical novel, women as writers and reflections on her own life in literature.

WITH THE HUNTED will be launched at the June STW conference/weekend in Dorchester and will then be available from Black Dog Books via an order form in the next Newsletter.

### **Palimpsest (Or, Traces Remain)**

This is a bit of a love story about reading and writing and words and coming to know a writer through these braided mediums, and I confess there is a small love note at the end. I perhaps scandalously refer to Sylvia Townsend Warner here as just Sylvia, though I don't know if she would have liked the familiarity. After all, it took the first thirteen years of their forty-plus year friendship for Sylvia and *New Yorker* editor William Maxwell to get to a first-name basis, but love does strange things to a person, and I hope she would forgive me even though we have never met. But I feel she is still out there somewhere and I may come across her at any time, because signs of her quietly bespeak themselves in the places she walked and wrote and thought and loved.

So, how does the idea of palimpsest figure into a literary love note? Palimpsest's first usage appears in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. Its etymology is comprised of "palin," meaning "again" (think palindrome) and "psen," to scrape or rub smooth. Although the word traditionally refers to paper or some like surface that has been erased and written over again in the same space, I've come to look at the word in a broader sense. In fact, I've come to think of virtually everything as a palimpsest—the air that we all breathe and rebreathe, the objects that pass from our family members' hands to our hands, the sky that hangs above us, the words that are spoken and cross between us, the rich ground on which we step, handwriting on a page.

Another crucial aspect of palimpsest is the idea that, though something may be erased, traces always remain. This latter aspect figures most prominently in my recent visit to Sylvia's world in July 2011.

But first, a brief personal history. I came across Sylvia Townsend Warner's work by blessed good fortune in 1994. I was at a used book sale in a small library in Connecticut, randomly browsing heaped piles of books when I spotted (or perhaps it spotted me) *Lolly Willowses*, a 1979 paperback edition published by Academy Chicago Limited. It has a light mustard-yellow cover with three images in dark green of a witch flying on a broomstick diagonally across the cover. The text font on the pages is rather large, perhaps sixteen point, though I don't know the style. It looks old-fashioned, with an extra weight to the capital letters. I don't know what drew me to the book, which is another kind of palimpsest in itself. Who had it before me? Whose fingerprints smudge the pages? Sylvia wrote the words, someone typed them on the page, someone's eyes moved over the page, and then someone else's and someone else's, and mine. The thoughts the readers were thinking while reading are still there, invisible but present.

Five years passed. During that time, I held in my mind a favourite line from *Lolly Willowses*: "It is best as one grows older to strip oneself of possessions, to shed oneself downward like a tree, to be almost wholly earth before one dies" (107-108). Then I found Sylvia again (or she found me). *The Element of Lavishness*, Sylvia's correspondence with William Maxwell, those two glorious suns, heroes to words, to centredness and connectedness and loyal, abiding friendship, was reviewed in a library magazine I came across at my job at the time. Again, blessed good fortune arose. I remembered the line from *Lolly Willowses* and knew exactly where the book silently waited on my bookshelf. I remembered Sylvia's name. I liked the title. I bought the book. I began to read. I bought and read and re-read more of her books, one after another opening. I fell, headlong and joyful, off a cliff for Sylvia and her words, her deep sentiment and intelligent observations. I am still falling.

Which led me recently, after twelve years of solitary pining for someone with whom to speak about Sylvia, to England. Thanks to the generosity of Judith Stinton, Richard Searle, and especially Judith Bond, I was given the great gift of talking with them about Sylvia and visiting many places associated with her life: the site where Miss Green's Cottage used to stand, Beth Car, the Powys home where Sylvia and Valentine Ackland first cast speculative glances at one another, the last house at Frome Vauchurch, the graveyard with its shared stone, and the archive in the Dorset County Museum. For me, palimpsests all.

I walk in the grassy pasture dotted with sheep beside Sylvia and Valentine's last house, and think of these woolly animals—is not this herd of sheep the offspring, several generations removed, the living palimpsest of their ghosted ancestor sheep walking again in rewritten forms? For that matter, even, the lush green blades of thick grass themselves, grown from the same root, cut or cropped down and come again, palimpsests all. Or the living flow of the Frome, that water somewhere still holding the reflections of Sylvia and Valentine in its surface. In some ways, these are the echoes of what Sylvia and Valentine sensed in the natural world around them—the sheep and grass and water and sky of their time. Sylvia's appreciation of the ordinary natural world around her draws me like a magnet. In her hands, the ordinary becomes extraordinary, a word painting. One small sample from Sylvia's tens of thousands of marvellous words – comes from the recent *Cousin and Friend*, written in 1951, about the death of the little budgerigar named Pearl:

I shall always remember him very lovingly, his bursts of singing, and the feel of his little claws on my finger, and particularly, how beautiful he looked one spring morning when he perched on a bough of pear blossom I had brought in to the house. His blue and silver among the white blossom was one of the most exquisite things I have ever seen (29).

Somewhere little Pearl sings on, luminous, the white of the pear blossom giving off a sweet scent across time and space.

When I wend my way through the graveyard of St. Nicholas's Church where Sylvia and Valentine's ashes are buried together under a single quiet stone, I see a holly tree standing guard nearby, casting its cooling shade over them. One source lists the holly as a bringer of domestic happiness and enchantment, two aspects that perhaps Sylvia might have used to describe her early life with Valentine. In *I'll Stand by You*, a book that knocked me to my knees upon my first reading, Sylvia writes to Valentine:

I hope you are asleep, my long lorn one. Only I (and I say this baring my teeth with assurance at any others) can know how beautiful you are as you lie asleep. Often, often, for all I am so drowsy a cat, I have roused to look at you—to stare and stare, holding my breath, feeling almost impious to be staring at such beauty lying unguarded by consciousness (118).

Somewhere, Valentine still lies sleeping with Sylvia watching over her, casting her love as a talisman against time moving on. In her words the moment continues.

At the archive, stepping through that smallish door into Sylvia's wide world I run my grateful hands over Sylvia's diaries and see the slant of her handwriting, the pressure of her pen, the life of her mind and heart on the living pages. Sylvia, during her "ancient solitary reign" records in her diary: "Sorrow comes over me like a mist, and I feel myself lost and fading, and at a touch or a word, the mist thins: but then it comes on again." In the *Diaries* on my bookshelf at home, this entry appears on page 147. In the archive room reading the 1949 diary, my hand crosses where hers did, the ink pulsing, the mist thickening and letting up. Palimpsest. Again and again, and once more, again.

A love letter: Dear Sylvia, I know you never in a hundred lifetimes would have left Valentine for me. I am too short, for one, I look terrible in pleated-front trousers, I have never strode purposefully across a field while holding a rifle in search of rabbit for dinner, and am dreadfully allergic to cats. You may have liked my love of words and etymology, my gardening ability, and my enjoyment of a good cup of tea. But I can't hold a candle to you as a writer, as my paltry few published poems and essays will attest. But despite my faults, I am loyal and think often in image and metaphor and look for the connections between, as I think you do. Maybe you would have seen me as a friend. Sylvia, you have written and rewritten ideas in me, for which I am grateful. When I think of the bridge, the road, the fields around the Frome Vauchurch house, I think I must have just missed you. I walk on, looking for traces of you, looking to step where you have been.

**Denise DiMarzio**

Warwick, RI  
United States  
December 2011

#### A New Discovery

Member Dr Mary Jacobs has uncovered a poem by STW, which is previously unpublished, and which she found in a notebook in the Archive. She has managed to make sense of it with the crossings-out and bits stuck in here and there. Notes in square brackets are by Mary, or by Judith Bond.

#### Untitled and unfinished satirical poem on the arrival of the evacuees, located in the STW/VA Archive under 'Diary 15, July 1942, Box C'

When Hitler's boys attained maturity  
The Ministry of Home Security  
Attending to the sacred claims  
Of five year olds and breeding Dames,  
Recalling too, the nasty shocks  
Transmitted by the Hand that rocks  
Civil Defence, began to feel  
Concern for *bouches inutiles*  
And so with due official stealth  
Contacted the Ministry of Health.  
The Ministry of Health decides  
To send them all for country rides,  
And summoning the L.C.C.,  
The Railways and L.P.T.B. [London Passenger Transport Board]  
Together with the Constabulary  
Bids them to see that nothing's undone  
To get the pets away from London.

Meanwhile, throughout the Kingdom sprawls  
A tocsin of long distance calls  
'This is the Ministry of Health,  
Get ready for the nation's wealth  
Of motherhood & infancy  
Due to arrive at half past three.'  
Unable to put up resistance  
~~Depts~~-All of Public Assistance  
Order Rest Centre Leaders to  
Stand by against the great stand to.  
Briskly distribute bins [?] and beds [I wonder if this should read 'Begin to  
reckon buns and beds' - STW had crossed out 'Briskly distribute' and inserted  
'Begin to reckon'. Can't determine whether it is 'buns' or 'bins' - I suppose  
either makes sense? - JB]  
And ointment for infected heads,  
Blankets and bath and frying pans  
And out-door boilers [?] and Elsans [I think 'boilers' must be right - JB]  
They summon up their chivalry  
Of W.V.S. and W.I.  
(To steam, to stew, to boil, to bake,

To fry ten thousand fillets of hake)  
To act as Universal Aunts  
And call on British Restaurants

And as the Nation's wealth arrives  
(The husbands who have come with wives  
We may assume to represent  
An interest of five per cent).  
Public Assistance views the scene  
Breathless, but inwardly serene,  
Reflecting that with any luck  
By the week's end they'll pass the buck  
On to the Rural District Council.

Like reverend [---?] footing slow [simply cannot read this word – maybe it's a name - JB]

The rural district, weighed with woe  
Enquires around its cottages  
If anyone wants evacuees;  
But shudders with humane repulsion  
At any mention of compulsion –  
For if the poor should be constrained  
It's more than likely they'll demand  
That Squire Booby and Lord Brute  
Should be compelled to follow suit.  
Then should we requisition? Um,  
It may be we shall have to come  
To that, but mindful of the Rates,  
Let us not rush upon our fates.  
At Little Gumption there are two  
Condemned cottages, they might do.  
But even so, we'll have to patch  
The kitchen floor and mend the thatch.

The Bloodshot Vicarage – it's haunted,  
It's a long time since it's been wanted,  
Would hold a dozen, maybe, or more  
If they're not too particular:  
But even so we'll have to patch  
The rat holes up, and mend the thatch.

~~And now we are so busy too ...~~ [STW crossed this out so should probably be omitted - JB]

~~I think we'll leave it all to you~~  
~~I really don't know what we'd do~~  
I think the best thing we can do  
Is to leave the billeting to you.  
You voluntary ladies can  
Manage much better than a man.  
This England never did nor shall  
Encourage officials to do it all.

[This transcription follows STW's spelling and punctuation faithfully. The parenthesis on 'ten thousand fillets of hake' is inserted marginally and the mss, is unclear as to whether it was to be included or not – MJ]

## BOOK NEWS

1. Julia Blackburn, Costa short-listed author, is working on a new book of 'imagined biography' entitled *Threads*, based on the life and pictures of John Craske.
2. Virago Modern Classics are bringing out a new paperback edition of STW's *The Corner that Held Them* in March 2012, with an intro by Philip Hensher.
3. Dr Kate Macdonald of Ghent University has brought out an episode in her podcast series on *Lolly Willowes*. You can find the podcasts on [www.reallylikethisbook.com](http://www.reallylikethisbook.com) or by looking on iTunes or in the Blackberry podcast page, under Why I Really Like This Book. On the Society's website there is now a short story by STW, 'A Forgotten Conclusion', chosen and introduced by Mary Jacobs.

### 'Her Father's Cinderella'

*The New York Times Book Review*, March 24, 1996

To the Editor:

In Claire Tomalin's on the whole very sympathetic review of "The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner" (Feb. 18), there are a number of inferences that strike me as unwarranted. I was Miss Warner's editor at *The New Yorker* for roughly 40 years, stayed in her house in Dorset and after her death edited a volume of her correspondence, and I feel that I knew her.

On the surface," the review begins, "she must have seemed a quiet, eccentric, highbrow, animal-loving, country-dwelling English lady." Actually, Miss Warner was not a type; there was no one even remotely like her, and I don't see how there ever could be again. If by "quiet" the reviewer means habitually silent and preferring to remain unnoticed, she is on the wrong track. Miss Warner's personality was not strident, but, because of her erudition and the liveliness of her mind, she was certainly formidable and I never knew her to remain on the edge of any conversation. If the word "lady" is intended to convey a slight derogation, she does not deserve it. She was totally unconventional, her beliefs and opinions were passionately held, her humor was delightful, her casual remarks pyrotechnic.

As for her being "the daughter of a brilliant teacher at a boys' school who allowed her no formal education at all" (which suggests a deliberate deprivation), the reviewer must be thinking of a passage in the story "A Spirit Rises". At a cocktail party a middle-aged woman encounters a man who had been a pupil of her father: "He had been . . . one of those special pupils who came thronging between her and her birthright, whose voices rose and fell behind the study door, who learned, who profited, who demanded, who endeared themselves by their demands, who were arrayed for the ball, while she, her father's Cinderella, went barefoot like the cobbler's child in the adage."

The woman in the story can safely be taken for Miss Warner herself. What she longed for was not a formal education but to have been all day long, with those Harrow schoolboys, in the hollow of George Townsend Warner's innately educating hand. Because of her sex, this was not possible. Her mother taught her to read from the Bible. She was sent to a kindergarten at the age of 7 and was so irrepressible -- that is to say, she mimicked the mistresses and disrupted discipline -- that her parents were asked to withdraw her from the school. Her father decided that she would be better educated at home. Her mother gave her lessons for two hours every morning, and when they were on vacation her father taught her history. Eventually she had a French governess, whom she disliked, and tutors. Like Virginia Woolf, she had the run of her father's library. Neither woman could be called uneducated. Sylvia Townsend Warner was steeped in poetry and music, and meant to study composing in Vienna with Arnold Schoenberg but was prevented from doing this by the outbreak of the First World War. There is no reason to think that she could not have gone to a university if she had wanted to.

Her lover, Valentine Ackland, clearly had a man's nature in a woman's slender body. She wore trousers when this was highly unusual for a woman

to do, was handy with an ax and drove their car with panache. The reviewer says she had "literary ambitions of her own but little talent." She had enough, however, that New Directions published a volume of her poetry. It is not my impression that she had a "difficult temper," though she was melancholy. Their life together over a long span of time was full of shared pleasures.

Sylvia Townsend Warner, the reviewer says, "was one of the many writers, painters and musicians who settled in damp and comfortless country cottages, often at loggerheads with the locals, pursuing their art under conditions that might be idyllic for a month in summer but were mostly hellish." Miss Warner was a very fine cook and a learned gardener. Her house, being beside a little river, could hardly escape being damp, but there was no smell of mildew and it was not comfortless. Like a great many if not most English houses, it had no central heating, but my wife and I were made comfortable with heaters and grate fires. Wherever we looked, our eyes fell on beautiful old furniture, wonderful pictures and books, and charming Victorian porcelain objets. Except for those rare times when the river overflowed its banks, I would not have considered it a hardship to live there.

*William Maxwell*

New York

### *A Good Cook's Simplifications*

Here are some simplifications practised for many years B.L.W. (before Lord Woolton): Abolish the early morning cup of tea and the bacon and egg breakfast in favour of the Continental breakfast. Pleasant variants of this are *café au lait* and buttered scones, or chocolate and brown bread, or porridge, but let this be made of cheap honest oatmeal rather than from patent mushes. (In very cold weather oatcake is more warming than bread.) Water-cress, lettuces, fruits in season, are pleasant additions. I don't speak of stewed figs, and stewed prunes -- such old standbys are now ill to obtain; and the shortage of lemons puts muesli out of the question, which is a pity, since muesli was perhaps the nicest breakfast of all. Such a breakfast enables one to get straight on to the morning without that clouding of facilities which accompanies serious digesting.

A Continental breakfast tilts one towards a Continental luncheon: that is to say, a lunch of comfortable proportions eaten not long after midday. If one is going to eat meat, this is the time for it. Not much, not often, but good.

Those long stewings so earnestly recommended as a *moyen de parvenir* with

cheap cuts don't give the same nourished feeling as a small bit of good grilled steak, or a cutlet with all its juices conserved by a paper-bag cookery. But for such things as the rabbit or the elderly wood-pigeon the stew is the proper consummation. Many stews are spoiled because of having too many ingredients. Carrots, turnips, onions, potatoes, haricot beans, barley and or rice are cast in with a mechanical hand, and the result tastes like the rag-bag. A good cook never wastes a flavour.

It is at lunch that breakfast bacon comes into its own. Small snippets or even bacon-fat dripping add depth and richness to cooked greens, to cole-cannon, to potato-cake, to the thrifty nettle-top. But bacon marries best of all with the pulses and beans. Our traditional beans and bacon uses the broad bean, fresh or dried. The *cassoulet* of France uses haricot beans. Boston baked beans are a classic; the Brazilian *feijau*, made with little black beans, is a rich and rampageous variant of the same theme. All these concoctions of bean and pig are admirably economical and satisfying.

Except for hard cooking pears, unripe gooseberries, and rhubarb (which is really, I suppose, a vegetable) it seems a waste of time and sugar to cook fruit. The main luncheon dish, substantial and adequately flavoured, and some small extras of the *hors d'oeuvres* kind (excellent *hors d'oeuvres* can be contrived from left-over vegetables served in a sharp sauce or a home-made mayonnaise), with a salad or fresh fruit should be enough. If there is a craving for something sugary a cup of black coffee, sweetened, is more invigorating than slabs of pudding and pie.

After a well-constructed lunch a cup of tea 'in the hand' is all grown-ups need in the afternoon, except perhaps in mid-winter. By cutting out puddings there should always be enough sugar for home-made cakes and cookies. In summer a home-made fruit drink is a pleasant and wholesome alternative to tea.

And in the evening – 'soup of the evening, beautiful soup'. I mean, real soup. Not a refined spoonful or two, made by pouring hot water on a soup square, but a real solid soup, served amply in a bowl. A soup that employs the vegetable stock of the day or the day before, that has gathered up the left-over bits in the larder, the outer leaves of vegetables, the bacon rinds (removed before serving), the oddments whose waste should so grieve Lord Woolton, but which Lord Woolton's Ministry's advertisements so seldom tell one what to do with. Such soups may cost as little as threepence; at the cost of eightpence they can be superlative. And there is no end to their variety. Fish soup, for instance can be delicious, apple-soup is a pleasant change, and the remains of the salad bowl will be the makings of an excellent *bonne-femme*.

As a change from soups, there are many traditional supper dishes worth attention. Fish and chips, as Sir Daniel Hall reminds us, is 'a well-balanced meal'. Winkles and a pin is a pleasant supper too. Sandwich suppers, another good method for utilizing left-overs, have the great merit of being compatible with reading at meals.

*Sylvia Townsend Warner*

*The Countryman*, Vol. XXIII no. 2, 1941

This article was an entry for a competition to suggest ways of simplifying life-style and diet in wartime. (STW was a runner-up.) Lord Woolton was in charge of the Ministry of Food, and Sir Daniel Hall was a renowned agriculturalist.

### Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

#### Minutes of the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting 14<sup>th</sup> May 2011, The Guildhall, Bath

**Present:** Eileen Johnson, Helen Sutherland, Judith Bond, Judith Stinton, Lynn Mutti, Tess Ormrod, Ruth Williams, Jay Barksdale, Ren Draya, Karina Taubert, Ailsa Granne, Jenny Wildblood, Stephen Mottram, Claire Harman & Guest

**1) Apologies:** Apologies were received from Winifred Johnson, Annie Rhodes, Richard Searle

#### **2) Matters Arising**

The Minutes of the 2010 AGM were agreed as true and signed by the Chairman. Judith Bond spoke briefly regarding the Constitution of the Society which conforms to the template set out by the Charity Commissioners for small societies: the Committee are happy with this and no further discussion or action is required.

Tess Ormrod enquired whether there was any further information regarding the completed film of *Mr Fortune's Maggot*. Judith Bond replied that Morinne Krissdottir would have advised the Society if there had been news.

#### **3) Treasurer's Report**

Judith Bond discussed the Balance Sheet available to all attendees. There has been a surge of interest in back copies of the journal and several complete sets have been sold, the income for which is £249.69.



She reminded everyone of the Amazon Reward scheme from which the Society benefitted financially if members, when purchasing books, used the link from the Society's website.

Karina Taubert, the Society's Webmaster, offered to check that all links available from Amazon can be accessed via the website. Judith Bond thanked Karina on behalf of the Society, for the time and effort that she gave to the website.

Judith spoke about the use of email and its cost-effectiveness for the Society, particularly as postal charges have risen again. The hope is that more members will elect to receive information using email.

### 3) Treasurer's Report continued

The Literature Alliance offers societies assistance and advice regarding tax issues.

Membership could be cost-effective, particularly as Society funds are high and ways need to be found to satisfactorily lower the sum whilst benefitting the membership.

Karina agreed to see if a link can be made from this organisation to the Society's website.

### 4) Membership

Judith Bond reported that membership numbers were steady at 139.

Tess Ormrod suggested that email addresses on the membership list be made available to members subject to consent. Stephen Mottram said this was a complex area of Data Protection and was best left alone. Further discussion ensued with Jenny Wildblood expounding the problems surrounding the Data Protection Act and its interpretation. Section 23 allows an exemption for literary societies but the issue is probably more trouble than it's worth.

General discussion of topics related to STW began with Lynn Mutti asking Claire Harman about academics writing papers for the journal. Claire Harman mentioned the course taught at Columbia last year by Richard Howard, but doubted that seminar notes were available. Ren Draya suggested that one of his students might write a paper.

Claire Harman offered to contact Ali Smith regarding her writing a paper on STW for the journal.

Ailsa Granne told the meeting that a study day on the writing of STW is being planned by Kings College, University of London. It is currently in early-stage planning but Ailsa will follow developments for the Society.

Judith Bond said that the University of Exeter is engaged on a project to map where information on STW is stored.

Ren Draya offered to check university abstracts in the United States and ask for articles, reviews etc.

An unfinished story, *Snow Guest*, is in the archive in typescript. Karina asked whether short-stories could be put on the website to attract more interest. Members could submit their favourites. Judith Bond said that the copyright holder, Tanya Stobbs, should be approached about this.

[Post-meeting: Helen Sutherland has undertaken to do this.]

A link with the Jane Austen Society was suggested by Claire Harman. A reciprocal Chawton House day would be good for the Society and might widen membership.

An STW Facebook site was mooted and Judith Bond explained that a 'renegade' site had been established. Jenny Wildblood offered to set up a Facebook site for the Society. This offer was gratefully accepted and Tanya Stobbs would be contacted for relevant permissions.

Claire Harman suggested buying friends a subscription to the Society as a gift.

Jay Barksdale asked about the processing of overseas membership subscription cheques.

Judith Bond said that these were free to the value of £50 and that the Society has a Community Account.

### 5) Journal

Helen Sutherland said that a 'Call for Papers' had had a good response and there was a balance of academic and general interest. She was 'trawling across all aspects of STW's writing, including translations'. All papers were adjudicated by Glen Cavaliero of Cambridge whom she thought very good. 5,000 words were average for each paper and pieces by STW were also to be included. The copy deadline for the 2011 journal was 15<sup>th</sup> August 2011.

The printers of the journal were proving to be excellent.

### 6) A.O.B.

Eileen Johnson reported a Japanese translation of *Mr Fortune's Maggot* and that she had requested translation of the reviews. She believed that mention of the book had also been on a radio arts programme in Japan.

Lynn Mutti spoke about Jay Barksdale's gift of a musical setting of the STW poem *Azrael* to the Society and the organising of a performance of it and music-related work by STW in Dorchester, in collaboration with Dr Richard Hall, Director of the Dorset Rural Music School and Chairman of the Dorset Music Society.

Jay explained the work's inception and that it is in the 'Pasagcalia style' – where the vocal line is independent of the music. A first performance of the work is scheduled in the United States this autumn 2011.

Jay reported that Peter Judd, the nephew of Elizabeth Wade White, had gifted her Papers to the New York Public Library. They contain letters of both STW and VA.

Helen Sutherland spoke about 'The Rachel Papers' and showed a published booklet that was for sale and asked that a note about the publication should be in the next Newsletter.

Rachel Monckton-How is a cousin of STW's. She is still alive but ill, and her husband gave permission for the editing of the letters. The original letters of STW to her have been given to the archive. There were other papers still to organise.

Claire Harman reported that the Harvard Rare Book Library had acquired the 111 letters between Roy Huddleston (Executor of Robert Huddleston) and STW: they are largely about STW's mother Nora and family matters.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 11.45am

## Two Reviews

Our Time, October 1947, Vol. 7, no 2 and February 1949, Vol. 8, no 2

*The Museum of Cheats* by Sylvia Townsend Warner,  
Chatto & Windus, 8s.6d

The countryside of Southern England has become a place of refuge for numberless decayed gentry, retired colonials, aged daughters of the clergy, and livers on independent means in search of the cheap and simple life. These types provide Sylvia Townsend Warner with subjects for her stories. Socially they are the lineal descendants of Jane Austen's people, and accordingly Miss Townsend Warner portrays them on Jane's inch of ivory. Country society, once organised systematically around the big house, now vegetates in remodelled cottages and brick bungalows. The lives of their inhabitants are normally so fantastic that when Miss Warner's lucid vision trembles and collapses into fantasy, one is never quite sure if it is because things really happen like that, or whether the transformation scene is intended to mitigate an unbearable reality. In either event, these stories are fantastically well written. (unsigned)

*The Corner That Held Them* by Sylvia Townsend Warner,  
Chatto & Windus, 1948

Finally, we come with very great pleasure to Sylvia Townsend Warner. Her irony and her spare undecorated prose give us an assurance of great reserves of power, which I think only once, in her novel *Summer Will Show* did she fully display. In this new historical novel, *The Corner That Held Them*, her capacities are, as it were, kept well banked down, deliberately subdued to the same key as the flat, silvery waterlands which are the scene of the story. She tells the history of a nunnery during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and traces with something of the pure exact colours of a piece of embroidery the lives of the nuns who make up this small community.

This is the story of the "ordinary nun", and the skill and scholarship of the author shows us the exact place of the religious house in feudal society: both its good and useful aspects as a refuge where the minor arts and crafts were nurtured and (in the period) its growing reactionary role as a greedy and incompetent landlord.

In the same way the lives of the inhabitants respond to this dualism; the nun often had more opportunity to develop and use her gifts than her lay sister, and she presumably attained more independence in community life than she would have done in marriage, yet the limitations of this carefully guarded freedom made her susceptible to nervous disorders and superstitious terrors. The perfectly happy nun, we feel, must always have been the rich, clever and irreligious woman.

If we dare to be so ungenerous as to criticise this interesting work, it is on the grounds that in scrupulously tracing the events of her chronicle Miss Townsend Warner allows the individuality of her characters to be submerged. Figures in a tapestry are repetitions, they exist only in relation to the general pattern and it has to be admitted that the various prioresses of Oby tend to vanish in this fashion. Isobel, Alicia, Johanna, Matilda... names which tantalise us with their evocation of a vanished life. But the candle blows out, the cloisters are dark and the record dust.

*Iris Morley*