

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 Three

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
<http://freepages.pavilion.net/users/tartarus/warner1.htm>

NEWSLETTER NEWS...

I have now taken over as Newsletter editor from Frank Kibblewhite, who produced the first two numbers. I would welcome all contributions from members in the form of letters, articles, ideas, reminiscences, etc. Particularly welcome would be discoveries of references to STW in unlikely places!

I'd like to thank Eileen Johnson and Ray Russell for their help, and also of course Frank Kibblewhite, who had the difficult task of starting the Newsletter.

The Society is expanding, and members' contributions will be needed if the Newsletter is to expand too...

Judith Stinton

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Reminders have gone out about subscriptions. If you still haven't paid for 2001, please send your subscription to Judith Bond, 26 Portwey Close, Weymouth, Dorset, DT4 8RF. UK members £10, overseas members \$20. Cheques should be made payable to the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of the AGM held at the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, on March 24th, 2001.

Present: Judith Bond, Richard Burleigh, Eileen Johnson, Stephen Mottram, Janet Pollock, Judith Stinton and Rosemary Sykes.

1 Apologies were received from Ray and Ros Russell, Pat Brown, Sally Draper, Chris Gostick, Winifred Johnson, David Miller, Sheila Milton and Kathleen Turner.

2 The Minutes of the inaugural meeting held on January 14th 2000 were signed by Judith Stinton in the absence of the Chairman.

3 Matters Arising

Judith Stinton has recently taken over as Editor of the Newsletter from Frank Kibblewhite. Newsletters will be published in February and July each year, with the Journal being published in November.

4 Chairman's Report

The Chairman was unable to be present at the meeting, but had expressed satisfaction at the success of the Society in its first year. The Committee had met twice, and there had been one event: at Chaldon on May 1st, 2000. It had been very much a 'settling-in' year.

5 Treasurer's Report

Judith Bond presented the balance sheet for 2000-2001. It showed that the Society's bank balance, as at 12/3/01, was £377.22. Subscriptions for the current year were coming in, but she asked for a reminder to members to be included in the next mailing. Membership stands at 83: an encouraging start. A suggestion was made that the Society might introduce payment of subscriptions by Direct Debit, and Stephen Mottram, who is Treasurer of the Thomas Hardy Society, is to send Judith Bond information on this. It was emphasised that information held on the Society database would not be used for any other purposes. Judith Bond was thanked for her work over the past year.

6 Programme for the year

a) Arrangements have been made to meet at East Chaldon on May 1st.

b) A study day was eventually agreed on. It was hoped that this would take place on August 17th at the Dorset County Museum. Judith Stinton to seek permission from Richard de Peyer for this. Rosemary Sykes' offer to lecture on *Lolly Willows* was immediately and gratefully accepted. She also agreed to chair a seminar/discussion afterwards.

The afternoon would be taken up by a visit to Maiden Newton, possibly to Sylvia's house. Total cost would be £3.00, not including lunch.

Eileen Johnson to write to members about the proposed events.

7 Any other business

Chairman has offered to write to Frank Kibblewhite, thanking him for his two Newsletters.

Meeting ended at 3.05pm.

VISIT TO EAST CHALDON, May 1st, 2001

This year's Society visit to East Chaldon took place on a wild and rainy day - so it was somewhat gratifying to see even nine people turn up at the Sailor's Return! We were very pleased to meet two newer members: Bridget Vaughan (who, as Bridget Warner, lived with her parents Dorothy and Oliver in the Warnerium in Inverness Terrace, W2, with Sylvia); and also Richard Garnett, son of David Garnett. He had brought with him a framed collage of photographs and memorabilia concerning his father's book *The Sailor's Return*, which he presented to the landlord. This was much appreciated, as the landlord is trying to build up a collection of pictures etc. detailing the connexions that the village had during the twenties and thirties with such literary and artistic figures as the Powys family, Hope and Elizabeth Muntz, David Garnett, Stephen Tomlin - and Sylvia and Valentine.

After a very satisfying and convivial lunch, we fought our way through the still treacherous elements round to the church. It was too wet to stay more than a few moments in the churchyard, to have some hasty photographs taken, then we adjourned inside the church where Judith Stinton and Eileen Johnson read Sylvia's description of churchyard and vicarage from *Animae Effigies*, and the poem 'Through All the Meadows'.

Our last port of call was Beth Car, where we were greeted by Mrs Cobb. Taking pity on our bedraggled state, she invited us in to her parlour. There we stood, dripping gently, and I know that I was not the only one to be reminded of Sylvia's first visit to Theodore Powys in March 1922! (See the biography, page 49). Despite the weather, everyone enjoyed the occasion.

Eileen Johnson



A windswept afternoon in a country churchyard.
From left: Bridget Vaughan, Stephen Mottram, Judith Bond, Reg Vaughan, Janet Pollock and Richard Garnett

SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER SOCIETY MEETING

Arrangements have now been finalised for the meeting on Friday, August 17th at the Dorset County Museum.

- 9.30 Arrival.
- 10.30 Lecture: 'The Willows Pattern' by Dr Rosemary Sykes, on *Lolly Willows*.
- 10.45 Coffee.
- 11.15 Discussion seminar.
- 12.15 Lunch at the Saxon Arms, Stratton (off the A37, three miles north-west of Dorchester). Offers of lifts for those without transport would be appreciated.
- 2.00 Visit to the garden of Sylvia and Valentine's house in Frome Vauchurch, Maiden Newton, by kind permission of the owners. Followed by a walk along the river to the tiny church of St Francis.

Cost is £3.00 (not including lunch). Payment on the day. Please confirm by July 31st to Eileen Johnson if you intend to come.

'The Willows Pattern: reading, religion, furniture, puff pastry and the family tree in *Lolly Willows*'

Critics rarely dwell on the apparently eclectic details of family history (such as the 'decent family boast that great-great-aunt Salome's puff-paste had been recommended by King George III') and the extraordinary family heirlooms that are scattered throughout *Lolly Willows*. But are these entertaining snippets merely local colour added to the tale of one woman's liberation during the 1920s? I believe that Sylvia Townsend Warner has deliberately woven a 'Willows Pattern' of 'canons of behaviour' to which Laura's (intended) fate - marriage to one of the 'suitable and likely undertakers' selected by her brother - is closely bound.

The Willows pattern is shown both to mirror social trends within the middle class over three centuries, and to be one that (con)fuses the material with the moral. One way in which this fusion is underscored is a punning use of motifs which become ideological symbols: 'Willows' is the name of a family which attaches great importance to its family tree; one which thinks of itself as dynastic, as 'the house of Willows'. It actually turns out to be the contents of the Willows houses (especially the furniture and the books) that maintain the appearance of a Willows tradition, even though the Willows homes are, themselves, regulated in traditional ways. Indeed, Warner even uses the family furniture to show how tradition is (literally) furnished.

Lolly Willows traces the Willows family's roots back to the eighteenth century, but I also want to suggest that the books Laura reads (such as 'Glanvill on Witches' and Culpeper's Herbal) prompt a return to the time of the English Civil War and the intellectual ferment of the late seventeenth century. In particular I want to consider the way in which Warner carefully details what Laura read, and how (with two interesting exceptions) the texts mentioned are not novels. But the novel is the form Warner herself is using and it has been the dominant literary form since much the same time as the origins of the Willows family tree. Why should this be?

Come to the study day to find out...

Rosemary Sykes

A CHILD'S EYE VIEW OF SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER

One of the members who attended the East Chaldon meeting was Bridget Vaughan, who afterwards kindly wrote down her childhood memories of Sylvia Townsend Warner for the Newsletter.

'My Father, Mother and myself, Nanny Tweed and the cook general lived in the top part of Inverness Terrace, and Sylvia and William the Chow lived in the bottom part. It all seemed fun and harmonious and Sylvia was part of my family. The only clear memory I have is of William chasing after the car when we went out one day.

Later, when I was five I went to stay with Sylvia and Valentine in Norfolk where I had a most delightful time, though I wasn't all that keen on my Nanny, Nanny Pettar. I have a couple of photos of this time, including one where I am holding a large gun, another at tea with my Nanny and yet another holding Victoria the goat. I remember doing a drawing of Meep and her kittens. However, the most vivid memory is of leaning out of the window where Sylvia and Valentine were walking arm in arm in the garden and calling out very loudly "You look just like husband and wife." My Nanny was furious and said "Don't you ever say that again." It was burnt so clearly on my memory that I can remember exactly what Sylvia and Valentine were wearing. Valentine looked most dashing in slacks, a jaunty fedora, white shirt and white sleeveless cricket pullover. Sylvia was wearing a print frock, predominantly red, and a black straw hat over one eye.

After that I stayed with my Mother in London and I remember that she received a poem from Sylvia about lambs which she was very pleased with. Sylvia came to see us, and unfortunately I dropped the bureau flap on her hand and she wasn't very happy about that. At this time my parents were separated. My mother lived in Holland Park Avenue and my father in Bathurst Street.

My mother died not long after this and my Father married again and I had a very unhappy time at home, though I loved my school. Sylvia always wrote and sent me presents.

When I was married, and had my daughter, Juliet, in Ghana she not only wrote, but actually made Juliet a charming romper suit which she wore a great deal.

We then returned and after a few months in Haslemere where my father and stepmother lived we moved to a wonderful flat in Chepstow Villas, as I wanted to go back to the area where I had been a child. Sylvia made me an apron with the alphabet on it and a letter to Juliet saying 'Learn your letters at your Mother's knee'. We soon bought our house on Denbigh Terrace, nearby.

When Juliet was four we went on holiday to Cornwall and on the way back called on Sylvia and Valentine at Maiden Newton. We had with us also a sweet Spanish friend of Juliet's called Vicky. We had a marvelous afternoon, and the thing I remember Sylvia saying was 'I don't mind being flooded here but I do so hate being rescued'. I thought then what a witty and darling woman she was and Valentine calm, quiet and mysterious.

This was a last time I saw Sylvia and it was a very happy occasion.'

Bridget Vaughan

PURE PLEASURE: Mr Fortune's Maggot

(The literary critic John Carey published a series of pieces in The Sunday Times on the fifty books he had chosen as his 'Books of the Century'. One of these was Sylvia Townsend Warner's second novel, *Mr Fortune's Maggot* (a book which tends to be overshadowed by *Lolly Willowses*). He has generously given permission for his article to be reprinted in the Newsletter.)

In 1918, when Sylvia Townsend Warner first moved to London, she was too poor to join a book club, so she signed on at Westbourne Grove public library. One book she borrowed was a volume of letters by a woman missionary in Polynesia, which pleased her because it had the minimum of religion and a lot of everyday life. It must have stayed in her mind, for one morning in 1925 she woke up remembering a very vivid dream. A man stood alone on an ocean beach, wringing his hands in despair. She knew he was a missionary, and that he was on an island where he had made only one convert, and that at the moment she saw him he had just realized that the convert was not a convert at all. She jumped out of bed and began to write it down, and that was the beginning of *Mr Fortune's Maggot*.

'Maggot', she explains at the start of chapter one, is an old word meaning 'A whimsical or perverse fancy'. Her missionary is the Revd Timothy Fortune, who works for many years in the Hornsey branch of Lloyd's bank, until an inheritance from his godmother allows him to train for the ministry. Why he chooses to go to the South Seas is not clear. Perhaps that is his maggot. On the remote island of Fauna he is the only white man. The natives are charming and childlike, always singing and dancing, and they are delighted with Mr Fortune, who brings with him many intriguing novelties, including a second-hand harmonium and a silver teapot. They have no word for chastity, and Mr Fortune is mobbed by beavies of giggling, naked maidens inviting him to come swimming.

His attempts to gain converts to Christianity are politely ignored, except in one case. A naked brown boy called Lueli comes and kneels beside him the first time he celebrates matins, and joins him in his lonely hut as pupil and acolyte. Their love is the subject of the novel. It was a delicate topic to handle in 1925. Writing it, Warner said, was like being pregnant with a Venetian glass child. She presents the relationship as innocent. There are times, especially in fits of anger, when Mr Fortune longs to throw Lueli to the ground and ravish him, but his inhibitions are far too strong, and beyond an occasional fatherly kiss there is no erotic contact. Mediated through Warner's wit and intelligence, it seems a much more probable scenario than our current moral panic about paedophilia would lead us to believe.

In the event it is Mr Fortune, not Lueli, who is seduced - or educated - by the island. Its lushness bewitches him. It is an earthly paradise, where the ripe fruits fall from the trees and the air is sleepy with salt and honey. Gradually, under its sway, his rigid soul blossoms. He spends hours in blissful idleness, watching the clouds. His body is rescued from years of neglect and repression. After initial stern refusal, he allows Lueli to massage him with fragrant coconut oil (he tells himself, in extenuation, that it is really a manly, athletic rub, like Elliman's Embrocation). As he unwinds, his faith in the Christian God vanishes, and he comes to see that to impose Him on the islanders would be like turning rifles and gunboats against their bows and arrows. One day he finds that Lueli, despite his lip-service to Christian doctrine, actually worships a small garland-bedecked idol that he keeps in a grove of flowering trees. The disclosure fills him with rage and horror at first, and it is only after the idol has been destroyed, and Lueli has almost died mourning for it, that he understands the folly of his obstinate Christian righteousness.

His decision to leave the island follows. For he sees that in trying to change and educate Lueli he has been killing the thing he loves. Lueli will be Lueli only if he remains remote, intact, incalculable. Mr Fortune's love can outwit its inherent urge to meddle and destroy only by renunciation. So he sails away, broken-hearted.

Warner pursues the psychology of the story with beautiful accuracy, and seems to have felt distress at where it led her. She added a postscript: 'My poor Timothy, good-by! I do not know what will become of you.' Three years later, she began her long, tempestuous but deeply happy lesbian relationship with Valentine Ackland. So, unlike Mr Fortune, she found an alternative to renunciation.

John Carey

THE END

'Now my mind begins the rope-twist of water that begins to run out. The familiar pleasure & exhilaration of working *towards an end* contests with something almost like terror at the thought of where shall I be when I no longer have this regular and tried preoccupation.'

Sylvia Townsend Warner, diary entry for July 20, 1956