

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 Eight

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

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The Society's own website is online at:
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NEWSLETTER NUMBER EIGHT

Welcome to the first Newsletter of 2004. This Newsletter contains information about the year's events and about the Society's new website, which recently went online. It also includes the reprint of a review by Penelope Fitzgerald of STW's *Letters* and *Collected Poems*; a letter to STW from the historian and witchcraft expert Margaret Murray about *Lolly Willōwes*; an uncollected short story 'Cuckoo' by STW and a poem by Valentine Ackland.

Thanks go to Eileen Johnson, Judith Bond, Sheila Milton and Peter Tolhurst for their contributions to the Newsletter.

Judith Stinton

SUBSCRIPTIONS: a reminder

If you haven't yet paid for 2004, then please send your subscription to Judith Bond, 26 Portwey Close, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 8RF. UK membership is £10, overseas membership is \$20. Cheques should be made payable to the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society.

SUFFOLK WEEKEND - September 26th-28th 2003

This proved as enjoyable a weekend as last year's event. The weather was not quite so kind, perhaps, but was not bad enough to stop us in our tracks.

We met up at a restaurant in Aldeburgh on the Friday evening. There was enough time to wander along the High Street for a short while and to admire the houses and peer in shop windows.

The next morning saw us all travelling in convoy to the Red House, just off the Leiston Road on the outskirts of Aldeburgh. The Red House was the long-time home of Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears. Though Pears died in 1986, the house is maintained by the Britten-Pears Foundation as it was in their lifetimes. The Britten-Pears Library is housed in a purpose-built extension: a long, light, gracious room, open to researchers. We received a warm welcome from the resident custodians, and were given a guided tour of this fascinating house, which is normally closed to visitors. Paintings and objets d'art covered the walls and window-sills. Particularly interesting to us were the pictures by John Craske, which were particularly fine examples of his craft. Our thanks go to Elizabeth Gibson and Pam Wheeler for organising coffee and biscuits for us, and to them and the Director for being such kind hosts. Photos in the garden followed.

From the Red House we drove the short distance to Snape, to view the collection of

Craskes which Sylvia had given to Peter Pears for the Snape Maltings in 1971. They had been brought out of storage specially for us, and we marvelled again at Craske's ingenuity and imagination: though it was obvious that the Maltings are finding it difficult to conserve these fragile works.

Lunch (and an informal Committee Meeting) followed at the Ship Inn, Orford. From there, some of us drove north, to visit a large second-hand bookshop at Westleton. After making our purchases, we adjourned to the nearby teashop.

Sunday dawned distinctly damp and chill, but by the time we reached Lavenham the sun shone warmly. The church was our first port of call, followed by a walk down the hill behind it, trying (somewhat unsuccessfully) to find The Barn where Sylvia used to stay. We really needed more time there. But lunch called to us from Stoke-by-Nayland, and there was just enough time to make a short visit to the wonderful church there. Then we made our way to the tiny village of Wormingfold and the secluded house, deep in the valley, of Ronald Blythe, acclaimed author of *Akenfield*. His ancient house was previously lived in by the painter John Nash and his wife, from whom he had inherited it. While we sat enjoying the tea and home-made fruit-cake which Ronald Blythe had prepared for us, he regaled us with his memories of Sylvia and Britten and Pears - and, of course, John Nash. He also gave us a potted history of his house and an explanation of its unusual name: 'Bottengoms' or 'Guma's Valley'. Despite the windy, rainy weather, some of us explored the wild garden, and it was with difficulty that we managed to tear ourselves away from this magical place.

From here, it was time to make our farewells and to return home. The weekend had been most enjoyable; good friends meeting in a mutual interest. We are very grateful to Peter Tolhurst for using his vast knowledge of local contacts to arrange visits for us.

Eileen Johnson

THE SOCIETY'S CONSTITUTION

At a Committee Meeting held in the Dorset County Museum on Tuesday 13th January it was agreed that 'the Constitution as set out in Newsletter 7 was found to be impracticable, and after discussion we have agreed to revert to the Constitution published in Newsletter 4.'

Any member wishing for a complete copy, please contact the Secretary.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS 2004

Weekend of April 30th to May 2nd

Friday, April 30th at 6pm in the Dorset County Museum. Judith Stinton and friends will be giving readings from the newly revised and expanded edition of her book, *Chaldon Herring: Writers in a Dorset Landscape*, as a part of the Dorchester Festival. Admission £4, to include a glass of wine. Copies of the book will be on sale.

Saturday, May 1st

The fourth AGM of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society will be held in the schoolroom of the Dorset County Museum, High West Street, Dorchester, at **10.30 am**.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the AGM held on May 3rd 2003
3. Matters Arising
4. Secretary's Report
5. Treasurer's Report
6. Membership Officer's Report
7. Programme for the year
8. Election of Officers
9. The Constitution
10. Any Other Business

Resolutions for discussion at the AGM must be received in writing by the Secretary at least one month before the meeting, and must include proposer and seconder.

2.30pm. Lecture by Janet Montefiore in the Dorset County Museum: 'Wartime Fiction of Medieval England. A consideration of Sylvia Townsend Warner's *The Corner That Held Them* and T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*.

Evening visit to Chaldon to STW's grave and for a walk.

Sunday, May 2nd

10am Walk around Maiden Newton, home of STW for forty years. Led by Judith Stinton. Coffee to follow.

pm. More literary rambles: a visit to Thomas Hardy's house at Max Gate, Dorchester, and possibly on to see T.E. Lawrence's grave at Moreton (and Laurence Whistler's windows in the church).

DORSET WEEKEND September 24th - 26th

We have decided to explore Sylvia's connections within Dorset for our late September weekend. Possible visits might include Litton Cheney; Ashley Chase; Abbotsbury and Toller Fratrum.

More details in the July Newsletter. Meanwhile - note the dates!

BOOK NEWS

Chaldon Herring: Writers in a Dorset Landscape by Judith Stinton, published by Black Dog Books in paperback at £14.95. A new edition of the book first published in 1988, revised and expanded - including more material about STW - and with over 80 illustrations.
(See above in the May weekend events.)

Line Dancing, a selection of East Anglian short stories published by Black Dog Books in hardback at £14.95, a follow-up to the highly successful first selection, *A Distant Cry*.

'Yes, but it won't sell, no one reads short stories any more.' This, the rather jaundiced reaction of one London critic to the idea of an anthology was confounded last year by *A Distant Cry*, the hugely enjoyable collection of short stories from Black Dog Books. To celebrate its success the party continues with *Line Dancing*, a second volume of stories from the region.

Either provincial reading habits lag some way behind those of the metropolis or, more likely, this maligned literary form continues to thrive in a part of the country renowned for its non-conformism and blessed with some of the country's finest writers...

Readers of *A Distant Cry* will welcome the reappearance of some of the country's leading women authors...including Susan Hill, Penelope Lively, Ruth Rendell and Rose Tremain - and Sylvia Townsend Warner, whose stories 'Two Children' and 'Elphenor and Weasel' appear in the selection.

And another east Anglian collection...

Norfolk at Christmas: an Anthology, compiled by member Moya Leighton and published by Lucas Books, includes Sylvia Townsend Warner as well as Adrian Bell, Dorothy Sayers, Henry Williamson and Parson Woodforde, amongst others. Price £8.99, inc p&p, of which £2 will be donated to the STW Society. Further information from 01603 737168. Orders to: Moya Leighton, 3 The Maltings, Church Close, Coltishall, Norfolk NR12 7DZ. Cheques made payable to Moya Leighton.

PUZZLING LINES...

The drawing opposite first appeared in *Time and Tide*, as part of a series of literary cartoons, all with captions by Sylvia Townsend Warner. Does any reader know who the cartoonist is? Or how STW came to write the texts?



Mrs. Woolf is Visited by some Uncommon Readers

A trail of smoke hung over Iowa, a scream from the engine awakened a child in Indianapolis, at Columbus an old woman had got out in a hurry, leaving her bag behind; but the train had started, it was too late to do anything about it and the negro boy was coming down the car with bananas. But it is impossible to fix the mind upon bananas, for in the harbour were streamers waving, steamers bathing, banded funnels with their sea-going tilt. Meanwhile the waxen fruit bought in the Caledonian Market remained perfectly immobile. And now, having passed the gloom and the felted silence of the archway at Euston, these young men were assuring her that they had read all her books and found them most congenial.

It was all rather confusing; but everything is confusing when one comes to think of it.

www.townsendwarner.com <<http://www.townsendwarner.com>>

When the Society was inaugurated in 2000 we were very lucky to be able to have a place on Ray Russell's Tartarus Press website. This has helped us greatly in spreading the news of the Society's existence. In our continuing efforts to reach potential members we decided last year to look into the possibility of setting up the Society's own website and this was made possible by a very generous donation from our patron, Janet Pollock.

The Society contacted Julius Gorman, a website designer with an artistic background, who has considerable experience in designing websites to reach the widest possible audience. He suggested ways in which the site could be made easily accessible by "surfers" of the net, one of which was the simple website address:

www.townsendwarner.com. Links with the websites of other organisations also help to put our site at the top of a search engine's results, and Julius negotiated an arrangement for us to be linked with the online booksellers, Amazon and ABE books. We hope that people using the society website will use the link to browse and possibly purchase books. By doing so they will help the Society's finances, as we shall receive commission for books purchased through our link. We also have a links with the Sylvia Townsend Warner/Valentine Ackland Archive website, the site of the Dorset County Museum and the Tartarus Press site.

The site has information about the Society, a brief biography of Sylvia and a bibliography page. We should be very grateful for any suggestions of books to add to the list we are building up of works about Sylvia. Several of our members have written books about her and we have tried to include as many of these as possible - please let us know of any omissions, or any other books not included on the list.

There is also the facility for downloading a membership application form which we hope will attract new members. The News page is specifically for giving information about forthcoming Society events and any other important happenings which members would like to make known to a wider public, such as the launch of a new book or a lecture. We will be updating this page regularly so we will depend on information from members to make this page interesting and relevant. Please get in touch if you have anything you would like to be mentioned here. We hope that at some time in the future we may be able through the website to create an online forum for the discussion of ideas and the sharing of research about Sylvia.

Finally, we owe many thanks to Janet Pollock for her kind donation which has made the website possible and to Ray Russell for launching the Society initially into the world of the Internet. We would also like to thank Susanna Pinney for permission to reproduce photographs from the Archive.

Please visit the site at www.townsendwarner.com <<http://www.townsendwarner.com>> and let us know your comments.

Judith Bond

Keeping warm

Reviews of Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Letters* and *Collected Poems*

by
Penelope Fitzgerald

Sylvia Townsend Warner expected her correspondence to be published; indeed, she sensibly provided for it. 'I love reading Letters myself,' she told William Maxwell, her *New Yorker* editor and literary executor, 'and I can imagine enjoying my own.' She was born in 1893, an only child. Her father was a Harrow master, who, in a way not very complimentary to his profession (but quite right for STW), never sent her to school. She was allowed to study what she liked, and was devoted to him, emerging from the 'benignly eccentric household' as a musician: she was about to go to Vienna, to study under Schoenberg, when the First World War broke out. When her father died, leaving her, as she put it, 'mutilated', she saw that it would be better to earn her own living than stay in the country and quarrel with her mother. She came to London, and worked as an editor on the monumental *Tudor Church Music*. Plain, frail, short-sighted, not quite young any more, and, for the first time in her life, rather poor, she set out to enjoy herself. 'I am sure that to be fearless is the first requisite for a woman: everything else that is good will grow naturally out of that.'

In her first novel, *Lolly Willows* (1926), she puts the situation in terms of fable. The decorous Lolly sees that she must escape her family. This intimation comes to her in the greengrocer's, when she looks at the plum jam and feels herself in a darkening orchard, where the birds are silent. To find out where the jam comes from, she gets an Ordnance survey map - as STW did when she set off in search of T.F. Powys, the writer she most admired. When a well-meaning relative pursues Lolly even to her country cottage, she asserts her will by transforming herself into a witch. Admittedly, she has now been captured by Satan, 'the loving huntsman', but she has proved that she 'prefers her own thoughts above all others,' and, in any case, she feels that she knows more than Satan - more about death, for example, 'because, being immortal, it was unlikely he would know as much.' This is reassuring, and typical of the writer. What STW herself wanted to do, and did, was to write (though sometimes she thought she was better at sawing and digging), to hear music, and to live in the country with the human being she loved best, Valentine Ackland. The two women settled in one cottage after another, and finally at Frome Vauchurch, in Dorset.

What happened to them? That was left in their letters, journals, and poems for the world to understand. In 1935 they became 1935-ish members of the Communist Party. In 1936 they went to Spain together for three weeks to help in the British Red Cross

bureau. By 1950 Valentine had joined the Catholic Church, and STW, while remaining fiercely anti-clerical and ready to fight to the death against any privilege or bullying, allowed a little irony to modify her left-wing views. 'It takes reckless resolution now,' she wrote, 'to admit that one has known a more civilised age than the present. It is painful to admit it to oneself, and apparently shameful to mention it to others. Everyone is busy pretending that even if they once or twice went out to tea they always drank the tea from a mug.' In 1949 Valentine (described as a 'sea-nymph who can split logs with an axe and manage a most capricious petrol-pump') fell in love with another woman, a young American, and STW courageously faced solitude, preferring 'the sting of going to the muffle of remaining.' The crisis passed, because, STW thought, 'I was better at loving and being loved,' and they returned to a life that she could only call blessed. She meant travel, many friendships, gardening, jam-making, perilous motoring, cats, books, and music. Guests might find the cottage exceedingly cold (Maxwell says the temperature was the same inside and outdoors and the front door stood wide open), but the welcome could hardly have been warmer. These years brought STW, not prosperity, but recognition, both here and in America, as a deeply imaginative writer whose novels and poems were most distinctly hers. More than this she didn't expect: when, in 1967, she was invited to become a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature she mildly pointed out that it was her first public acknowledgement since she was expelled from kindergarten for upsetting the class.

In 1968 Valentine died of lung [*sic*] cancer. 'I have always prayed that I might not die first,' STW wrote, 'though my age made it probable that I should.' As she went through her dead friend's possessions, she found in the coat-pockets notes from herself, 'on the lines of Keep warm, Come Back Soon.' They had agreed that STW should live on at Frome Vauchurch, and this, until May 1978, she did. 'With a heart as normal as a stone' but quite undaunted, she was still writing and reading voraciously - and giving dinner parties and denouncing Mrs Thatcher - to the very end. Misfortune and egotism, she thought, turned women into vampires - very different from witches - and this she was determined to avoid.

Her letters, from which I have been quoting, are formal, in the sense that STW hardly knew how to write carelessly. It isn't that she is considering the effect: she produces one, from a long habit of elegance. She knew that herself. 'I can't say it yet,' she wrote to Leonard Woolf after *Beginning Again* came out. 'Already I am writing like a printed book, and falsifying my heart.' Often, however, her formality couldn't be improved upon - for example, to David Garnett:

'I was grateful to you for your letter after Valentine's death, for you were the sole person who said that for pain and loneliness there is no cure.' It enabled her to deal with publishers, and, most difficult of all, to give money away gracefully: 'I can well afford it; I have always made it a rule in life to afford pleasures.' Every now and then a short story that she never had time to write rises quietly to the surface:

Now I will sit down to tell you about two very old and distant cousins of mine, brother & sister, who live together. She is in her nineties, he is a trifle younger. They were sitting together, he reading, she knitting. Presently she wanted something, and

crossed the room to get it. She tripped & fell on her back. So she presently said: Charlie, I've fallen & I can't get up. He put down his book, turned his head, looked at her, and fell asleep.

Just as careful, and just as brilliant, are the descriptions of day-to-day life in the cottage and the village, often to correspondents who had never seen either. All records of passing time were precious to STW, from Proust to Gilbert White's notes on his tortoise. 'Continuity,' she said, 'it is that which we cannot write down, it is that which we cannot compass, record or control...An old teapot, used daily, can tell me more of my past than anything I have recorded of it.' Few people can ever have described a teapot as well as STW.

Editing this volume was clearly a labour of love, and not an easy one, for William Maxwell...[but] disappointingly, there is only a sketchy index. Addicts of collected letters will tell him that this is a serious mistake. STW's index would have read, in part:

celibacy, STW recommends
clearing up, STW's passion for
coalshed, T.H. White's diaries lost in
cold baths, STW advises, if piano kept in bathroom
Contre Sainte-Beuve, STW translates...

It is sad that she should have died such a short time before the publication of her *Collected Poems*. Claire Harman begins with the unpublished and uncollected work, arranged as far as possible in chronological order. STW is shown as an endless reviser, hard to satisfy. *The Espalier* (1925) and *Time Importuned* (1928), with their demurely ironic titles, are the only two collections she brought out in her lifetime. *Opus 7*, a satirical narrative in the style of Crabbe, based on the story of a 'drinking old lady...a neighbour for many years, and I had the greatest esteem for her because she knew what she wanted,' came out in 1931. The late poems were privately printed, except for *Boxwood*, which STW thought of simply as verses for Reynolds Stone's wood engravings (although it includes the haunting 'People I never knew'). The rambling joint collection with Valentine Ackland, *Whether a Dove or Seagull*, has not been reprinted here, for the tactfully put reason that 'it exists on its own terms.'

STW was a Georgian poet, and my only complaint against Claire Harman's excellent introduction is that it takes the word 'Georgian' as an insult, and I had hoped that it no longer was. She was Georgian in her subject matter and also in her professional skill, composing, as she said, 'with piteous human care.' Here she can bear comparison with Walter de la Mare, the master of the two-stress line:

Winter is fallen early
On the house of Stare...

STW almost always succeeds with this precarious metre, which sounds nostalgic in 'The Repose,' mysterious in 'Nelly Trim,' and in 'Blue Eyes' exactly suggests Betsy's disappointment:

Down the green lane

She watched him come,
But all he did
Was to pinch her bum.

With half-rhymes and unstressed rhyme she made a number of delicate experiments, letting the meaning control them, so that in 'Anne Donne Undone' the rhyme gradually disintegrates as Anne struggles with weakness and fever, while in the triplets of 'Journey by Night' it almost disappears. In one of her *New Yorker* pieces, 'Interval for Metaphysics,' STW remembers what it was like, as a small child, to relate the world of words to the world of things, and stand looking at a wooden paling 'which had suddenly developed its attaching gravity, and had gathered to itself the pale primrose that forsaken dies, and a certain expression that the sky puts on at dusk, and that I had rarely seen, since I was supposed to be in bed by then.' Yet she was surprised, twenty years later, to find she was a poet. 'I haven't yet got over my surprise that I should be doing it at all.'

Her sharp-wittedness had always made her more, rather than less, sympathetic to other lives, past or present, birds and animals as well. In a tiny lyric, Winter is an old beggar standing motionless in the fields.

All day he will linger
Watching with mild blue eyes
The birds die of hunger.

Loneliness, I think, she considered, after mature reflection, the worst suffering of all. It is at the heart of her finest poem, 'Ballad Story,' and her novel set in a medieval convent, and dedicated to Valentine Ackland, has the epitaph: 'For neither might the corner that held them keep them from fear.' But, in the end, what is most striking about this civilised poet is her affinity with whatever it is that defies control. By this I don't mean either sin or magic, for she regarded both of these as perfectly amenable, but what she liked to call 'the undesigned'. Against Nature we oppose human order - the lawn must be mowed and appointments must be kept, even though 'the clock with its rat's tooth gnaws away delight.' But, conversely, we can accept the threat of disorder, even if it is never let loose, as the most precious thing we have. 'I have tamed two birds,' she wrote in 'The Decoy,' called 'Metre and Rhyme'

At whose sweet calling
All thoughts may be beguiled
To my prepared place;
And yet by blood they are wild.

(This article first appeared in *London Review of Books* in 1982, and is reprinted with their kind permission.)

The Goddess of the Witches: Margaret Murray on Lolly Willowes

Amongst the letters sent to Sylvia Townsend Warner preserved in the STW archive is one from Margaret Murray, author of *The Witch Cult in Western Europe* and *The God of the Witches*.

University of London,
University College,
Feb. 13. 1926

Dear Madam,

Messrs Chatto & Windus sent me a presentation copy of your "Lollie Willowes," saying that as the author of "The Witch-Cult in Western Europe" I might be interested in it. They were quite right, I was very much interested; & I should like, if I may be allowed, to congratulate you. I don't read many novels because being a conscientious reader I can't skip, but I read your book right through with real enjoyment. Your witch village is delightful & shows people that the witches were neither wicked nor persecuted. I wonder whether you called the village Mop by accident or by knowledge & intention.

May I make two criticisms? 1) your devil is not the devil of the witches but the devil of the Christian. This is shown very markedly by 2) the one false note which you have struck in the whole book, "the success of his recent battle in Flanders."

It is impossible to make a perfect work in this world but with the exception of the above I look upon your book as one of the finest & most human presentations of a witch that I know.

I have ventured to write to you because when my book appeared it produced such a crop of extremely objectionable letters that my faith in the judgement of the public was a little shaken. Your book may perhaps do the same for you, therefore I write because I know the subject better than most people & can speak with some authority. Again I congratulate you on the book.

Yours truly,
M.A. Murray

One week later, STW went to lunch with Margaret Murray. Later that same day she wrote to David Garnett (whose idea it had been to send Miss Murray a copy of the book), describing her formidable hostess:

'She is most fit and right; short and majestic, a Queen Victoria with the profile of Louis Quatorze and small fierce fat white hands. I wish I were in her coven, perhaps I shall be. Round her neck she wears a broad black velvet band probably for a good reason. She said things that would make the hairs of your head stand bolt upright.'

It was, Sylvia wrote, 'such a pleasant afternoon'. It was also a unique testimony to her novel.

Cuckoo

by

Sylvia Townsend Warner

Frau Beigel came up from a hole in the ground into the light of a spring morning. Her forehead, her shoulders, her hands, her knees, in turn felt the warmth of the sun. Sunlight clothed her from head to foot, and through the rents in her slippers the soles of her feet became aware of warmth and a feeling of life.

It really was the first day of spring.

The sky was a pale remote blue, as if all night it had been rising higher and higher. There seemed to be an immense space of tender, elastic air between the height of heaven and the remnants of the little provincial city which three years earlier and for no particular reason had been pattern-bombed. And in that space nothing at all was happening: not a movement of wind, nor a cloud, nor a wreath of smoke, nor a bird; scarcely even a sound.

No one could remain unaware of the charm of such a morning. Having shaken out her duster Frau Beigel looked around her, saw the tender colour of the sky and the delicate pinks and greys of the scorched ruins, and conceived a hope to match the promise in the air. This summer there would not be so many flies.

For everything passes and gets forgotten. Children played among the ruins who did not remember when they had been streets and squares, and the bodies buried under heaps of rubble and in obliterated cellars had mouldered away. So one might reasonably hope that this summer there would not be so many flies.

Frau Beigel stood warming herself, and little by little her shadow moved up the broken steps which led down to her dwelling, as if it, too, were creeping forth into the sunlight. Frau Beigel's dwelling was half a cellar - the other half was blocked by the heap of bricks which had fallen in when the house fell - and she shared it with a woman whom she believed to be called Ilse. They had lived side by side for over two years, but without achieving any intimacy. The two women shared nothing except their shelter and the fire they kindled when they could collect enough fuel. Each kept her food, her clothes, her cooking-pot apart, sternly not stealing and not examining. It was perhaps the best way to live.

The other woman went out every morning, wearing a hat, so Frau Beigel supposed she worked as a servant for one of the occupying families. Frau Beigel also worked, she was a charwoman at a clinic. But the clinic only opened three days a week, which was why she was now dawdling on her threshold at ten in the morning.

It was an empty hour. The queue had already gone from before the greengrocer's, the

children were in school. An American with a camera, some journalist, no doubt, had crossed the further corner of the square, thoughtfully scratching himself and yawning, and after him there was no one to look at until an old man appeared, walking clumsily and like a crab over the broken ground. He was a countryman, so much she could plainly tell by his gait and carriage. He came on, staring round him as if he were looking for a strayed cow. And as a peasant looks for a strayed cow and sees nothing else, nor trees, nor hawthorns in bloom, nor the ridge of a mountain, the old man walked among the ruins without seeming aware of them, and set his feet on door-knobs and fallen roof-tiles as though they were gentians.

Then he saw Frau Beigel, and quickened his pace. His countenance relaxed. He had found his cow. She recognised in the old countryman her Uncle Joachim. He looked exactly the six years older that the lapse of time since their last meeting warranted, and under his arm he carried a bundle wrapped in a black cloth.

"Good morning, Maria," he said. "What a fine morning! So I have nosed you out."

"Good morning, Uncle. I hope you are well."

"I can't complain," he replied. And indeed, in his dusty, ill-fitting black suit, with his brown skin and clear eyes, he looked as hardy as an animal which has ridden out the cold season in its burrow and comes forth to shake itself in the sun. But why was he here? That, seeking her, he should find her, was not very remarkable: the peasant's shrewdness is not far removed from the animal's instinctiveness, he had, as he said, nosed her out - and for that matter she herself had kept enough of her peasant origin to have remained in the same quarter of the town, burrowing herself a new home under familiar ground. But that Uncle Joachim should seek her out for no reason beyond family affection would be remarkable indeed.

"How are things at the farm?" she asked.

"They don't go too badly. Better than here, anyhow. How old you look, Maria, and how out of condition! It hasn't done you much good, being a town widow."

"Here, we are all more or less hungry," she answered.

"So I suppose. Still, it is the lot you have chosen. I've not come here to ask you to change it."

She had not supposed it, any more than she had substantially supposed that the black cloth wrapped a pound of butter, sausage-meat, or new-laid eggs. She knew Uncle Joachim. Such hands do not open to shower such gifts. But such hands can be opened with a golden key. In the promise of the spring morning Frau Beigel conceived a second hope. Why should not Uncle Joachim, selling on the black market, take her as an agent?

"I don't wish to change my lot," she said. "I am too old to change. Besides, I can earn."

He looked at her slippers.

"Good money," she went on, forestalling his enquiries. "There is no shortage of money, at any rate. Never in all my days have I known such spending. It has to be seen to be believed."

She talked on, baiting the water, and he, like an old fish under the weed, watched her crumbs go down-stream.

"But those who have got the stuff to sell," she concluded, "are never the ones who get the high prices. It is the agents and the go-betweens who make the money. There's no fair-dealing left in the world, more's the pity!"

He hoisted the bundle more securely under his armpit; but all he said was, "Stale news, Maria. No one will pay you for telling them that."

His gesture with the bundle, though, had told her that he had brought something to market. She set herself more earnestly to cajole him. It was all she could do to keep the water from running out of her mouth. In the palms of her hands she could feel the freshness, the fatness, of Uncle Joachim's meat and butter - which she would sell for him. Honestly, too, taking only a bit here and a bit there, not palming-off social relief stuff on clients and eating the fresh herself. For hunger was not her only hunger, she had a more imperious appetite to appease. Selling for Uncle Joachim she would have a career, and an object in life. She would be a person again.

But he was not hooked yet: and even if he took the bait, would she have the strength to land him? This burst of hope on a fine spring morning made her feel weak and dizzy - so dizzy that the power of sight seemed to drain from her eyeballs as she saw him come closer and take the bundle from under his armpit.

"I had business in the town anyhow," he began.

She nodded. She could not speak.

"So I thought I'd bring this along."

As fold after fold of the black cloth was loosened a bony contour was disclosed, and she thought it might be the high breast of a fowl. He undid the last wrapping, and what she saw was a cuckoo-clock. Hunger and weakness undid her. Reckless with disappointment she exclaimed, "And what on earth possessed you to bring along that old trumpery? What use is a clock, a *clock*, when people are starving?"

"That's all you know about it! Clocks, watches...they are selling like hot cakes. You'll find me a buyer fast enough, Maria, if you just give your mind to it. And I'll give you five per cent." Even then she could have landed her fish. But unnerved, she screamed out at him, "Sell it yourself, then! I've no time for such nonsense. People don't even buy watches now. As for that old thing, you couldn't sell it to a Russian!"

"That's what you think. But you don't know everything."

In spite of her fury she could not help feeling a waft of contemptuous pity for the old zany, as he began twiddling with his toy.

"It's in perfect order," he said. "It loses a little in the evening, but what does that matter? Nobody thinks of time in the evening."

Jolted into movement, the clockwork set up a lumbering wooden rhythm, like the noise of a farm-wagon. He peered into the painted clock-face.

"Listen, Maria! It's coming."

It was as though he thought she were still a child.

Rheumatically, the wooden bird raised its wings. The mechanism creaked, the tick-tock staggered.

"*Cuckoo! Cuckoo!*"

A woman who was crossing the square stopped abruptly, clasping her shopping-bag to her stomach, and gazed at the sky. Another woman rose breast-high into the sun from her cellar-hole. Two men coming round the corner stopped to listen, and one of them spat for luck. The woman half-way out of the cellar-hole began to call to someone underground. Everywhere heads popped out, people who had been dozing on the rubbish-heap sat up, and voices asked, "Did you hear that? The cuckoo... It was a cuckoo!"

"Do you see, Maria? It's in perfect order."

The bird's wings had stuck. He poked them with a horny forefinger, and they fell back with a little click.

Now the journalist with the camera reappeared. He, too, had heard the cuckoo. But being better-fed and better-clothed than those other hearers he was also readier-witted; and so, seeing the old countryman wrapping up a carved object in a cloth he approached, and said with polite interrogation, "*Kuk-kuk?*"

Uncle Joachim thrust the cuckoo-clock into the journalist's hands, and said to Maria, "You know how to talk to these people. You're used to them. Tell him he must pay me in American money."

The butter, the eggs, the sausages, the pork so rosy and so white, the taste of fresh food, the taste of life, the feet taking hold of the ladder, the achievement of a position, the becoming somebody again...if she could drive a good bargain now, all these might yet be hers! But anxiety made her rapacious, and the journalist turned away from the bawling, malodorous woman, and did his bargaining with the old countryman, whose

greed had, at any rate, a grace of briskness and gaiety. And because it was such a fine spring morning, and because he, too, had conceived a hope by it, a hope for some kind of a bettered world, he gave two dollars for the cuckoo-clock.

Uncle Joachim had tucked away the money and folded the black cloth when an idea struck him. Capering after the journalist he began to gesticulate, puffing out imaginary smoke, pulling a long face, and pointing over his shoulder at Maria. When he had got his cigarettes he came back to his niece.

"Here you are," he said, pulling two from the packet. "You have not earned them, but I will make you a present of them, for luck."

Off he went. Coming wearily to her senses Frau Beigel became aware that she was the target of angry and disapproving glances. For by now all the neighbours knew that they had made fools of themselves, taking an old cuckoo-clock to be the real cuckoo, and they resented her share in the transaction.

(This story first appeared in *Lilliput*, March 1949.)

WHINBURY CAMP

Thin-coming, the evening over these tall wide downs;
Thin-coming I, who like a wraith from those
Remote days few men saw who looked ahead
Then, climb this steep hill where they hid their dead.

I am a shade of time, while they are bones
Solid and matched in matter with this earth;
I climb unharmed up the green rampart-side
Where stone-age men clambered and fought and died.

Back upon them I look with glance as sure
As they on ape and mammoth, whose huge bones
Were never strange to find but seemed to share
Earth well with them. Now, in this tenuous air,

Of evening islanded in darkening night,
The wraiths I fear are men I cannot see,
Who'll move in life and time when I am gone
Back to the permanence of earth and stone.

Valentine Ackland

(Published in *West Country Magazine*, Autumn 1946.)

The writer Jocelyn Brooke suggests a few place-names to John Betjeman for his column in the *Spectator*:

I, for one, am well acquainted with the charming village of Compton Burnett (Dorset) and its neighbour, Hodgson Burnett, nor should readers overlook Malcolm Muggeridge, famous for its annual folk-dancing festival (not to be confused with Nether Muggeridge). Cowper Powys (Merioneth) and Morgan Forster (Mon) are both well worth a visit; so is Townsend Warner (Bucks), noted for its ancient ducking-stool...