

The Espalier, Time Impartuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowses, 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, Elmor 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 Gully, 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 Impartuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowses, 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, Elmor 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 Gully, 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 Impartuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Collected Poems, Selected Poems, Lolly Willowses, Mr Fortune's

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Newsletter Number Thirty One

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The Society's own website is online at www.townsendwarner.com

NEWSLETTER NUMBER THIRTY-ONE

Greetings from your new Newsletter Editor. My name is Jay Barksdale and I live in Jersey City, USA. First, many, many thanks to Judith Stinton, who created such splendid newsletters all these years. I hope I can come close. Now retired, I was a librarian at the New York Public Library. Decades ago I read *Lolly Willowses*, and, as often happens with that book, became another captive. I kept reading her work, discovered and joined the Society, and first came to Dorset in 2006. I hope you will send me news and items of interest to share with our fellow members, and suggestions and corrections.

I am grateful for contributions to this issue from Jennifer Nesbitt, Judith Stinton, Peter Swaab and Peter Tolhurst.

June Weekend 2015

A small, but rather noisy, bunch of members met up on the Friday evening, June 12th, at a familiar venue, No 6 North Square in Dorchester. Conversation was wide-ranging, and huge platefuls were served, along with generous quantities of wine.

The AGM on Saturday morning was attended by the Journal's new editor Peter Swaab, who explained his plans in detail (having dashed up from London that morning to do so). The retiring editor Helen Sutherland was thanked for all her work, as were Judith Bond and Judith Stinton, who are giving up their roles as Treasurer/Membership Secretary and Newsletter Editor respectively. A tribute to 'the two Judiths' sent by Peter Tolhurst was read out by our President Eileen Johnson (who informed us that she too will be retiring next year).

We are pleased to be able to announce that Judith Bond will be replaced by Jenny Wildblood as Treasurer and Vike Plock as Membership Secretary, while Judith Stinton will be succeeded by Jay Barksdale as Newsletter Editor.

It was a longer meeting than usual, leaving Lynn Mutti with only a short time to talk about Percy Buck and her research about his life. (Meanwhile outside the window there was a demonstration against the closure of some of the children's services at Dorset County Hospital.)

We adjourned for lunch over the road at Café Jagos, and then spent the afternoon at Abbotsbury Swannery. There were plenty of 'baby swans' as the roadside signs called the cygnets, greyly fluffy and not yet in the ugly duckling stage. Four o'clock was feeding time, and some of us joined in, throwing wheat from the buckets provided over the white mass of feeding swans.

The meat of the swans tastes like mud we were told, and so we opted for more conventional (Italian) food at our evening meal at La Gondola in Dorchester, which seems to have been enjoyed by all.

On Sunday morning we met at Athelhampton House, which manages to show a certain grandeur while retaining a domestic feel. The gardens – like a series of rooms – are full of surprises, including a statue of Queen Victoria in all her finery, with the added decoration of bird-droppings.

Three of us sneaked off along the road to St Edward's Church, a Victorian building now richly adorned with icons, and used by the Greek Orthodox Church. It was an unexpectedly exotic sight in a place formerly known as Piddletown. Church-goers in those days behaved differently. It was: *Into Church. Out of Church. Into Cat. Out of Cat. Into Piddle*. We, however, chose the Martyrs Inn, Tolpuddle, for a prolonged and very chatty Sunday lunch, well away from any water. Some members went on to the Martyrs Museum down the road; for the rest of us it was time to go home.

Judith Stinton

Claire Harman, Sylvia and Charlotte Brontë

Claire Harman's major new biography of Charlotte Brontë, celebrating the author's bicentenary in 2016, is due from Viking Penguin on 29th October and from Alfred A Knopf in March 2016. On the same day, Viking Penguin will republish, in paper and as an ebook, her first biography, the prize-winning *Sylvia Townsend Warner*.

Weymouth Manoeuvres, 1936

Where on the night a stain of light
runs over, there shudders the fear we dread;
the beam that lightly runs over the sky
is death – is a searchlight overhead.

Valentine Ackland
Life and Letters Today, Spring 1937

Musical Matters

Jonathan David, composer of the song *Azrael*, heard at the *Words & Music with Sylvia Townsend Warner* recital of 30 June 2012, Dorset, has set another poem of Sylvia's - *King Duffus*. For baritone and piano, it is the first of *Two Kingsongs*, the other being Shelley's *Ozymandias*. It was commissioned by the Cheah-Chan Duo who gave its premiere in 2013. No mere ballad this, it is eight pages in 7/8 meter with 3 sharps, mm = 144, and marked 'relentless, searing!'. For more information, or to purchase a score, contact Jonathan at jd@JonathanDavidMusic.com

Also currently available, from the Dutch music publisher Donemus – www.donemus.nl – are settings by Marius Flothuis (1914-2001) of *Falling Asleep in an Orchard* and *Black Eyes*. They are in his *Four Trifles* for voice and piano, op. 33 (1948), available for high or low voice. The other texts are by Sara Teasdale and Kathleen Raine.

Sylvia in California

Variety (online) reports that on June 17th, at a fundraiser for 826LA, a non-profit writing and tutoring center in Los Angeles, actor "Julia Louis-Dreyfus exuded charisma reading what must be one of the most elegantly penned thank you letters called The Matchbox sent from writer Sylvia Townsend Warner to fellow writer Alyse Gregory". This is the letter of 23 December 1946, in *Letters*, page 94. It is also reprinted in Shaun Usher's *Letters of Note*, and found at his site lettersofnote.com.

Not Everyone is a Fan

In the first issue of *Scrutiny*, 1932, Q.D.L. (Queenie Dorothy Leavis) reviewed *The Salutation*. She was severe.

"In *Lolly Willowses* this author's slender talent for handling the *conte* of David Garnett with persuasive *chic* produced a certain success, compromised only by the writer's occasional uncertainty as to the precise degree of seriousness to which she was committed. In this new volume of short stories she engages more earnestly, but on experiments where her special qualifications are useless. The sophisticated playfulness that gave distinction to *Lolly Willowses* is ineffective when DeFoe and T. F. Powys, who rely on personal modes of feeling, are the models. Now the naïve expression of genuine feeling is not in Miss Warner's bag of literary tricks. So that in these stories, though each is based on a clever enough idea and worked out carefully to pattern, the sensitive reader finds only a sterile exercise, lacking the genuine poignancy always present in T. F. Powys even when, at his worst, he appears to be merely using a formula himself. Miss Warner, and this is true of the class of writer to which she belongs, is ineffective in proportion to her pretensions. This is shown by the title-story: it is pseudo-sensitive, the undertaking demanding a far deeper kind of sensibility than Miss Warner possesses. This is of course to apply serious standards; it hardly needs saying that *The Salutation* is far above circulating library level."

George Townsend Warner – *On the Writing of English*

In the 2011 *Journal* Claire Harman writes of GTW's book *On the Writing of English* (1915): "This excellent guide to essay-writing, written with a great deal of inventiveness and humour,...". Here is the *Introductory*.

"I know, of course, that it is the present fashion among many to give up the setting of "Essays". It is absurd, they say, to expect such things of boys: therefore we will set them something more suited to boyish minds: we will ask them to describe a scene or an occurrence; to write a letter on some easy subject; to sum up the arguments for and against some proposal; but "Essays?" - No. Doubtless it is well to set subjects of which a boy can reasonably be expected to know something. But still, all the old mistakes which the boy made in his "Essay" - so called - come up again, and the old difficulties beset him. Lack of order, slang, pomposity, journalese, circumlocution, rhetoric, and cheap moralizing will not be rooted out of him by changing the name of what we tell him to write. For, in the end, we all want the same thing: we wish him to think, and to write down his thoughts in good English; that is all.

That being so, I have tried to give help in Essay-Writing, because from older boys I cannot see that it is wrong to ask for an "Essay". They play with men's bats and cricket balls, and learn; they read men's books, and learn; they may equally well practise using their pens in the same grown-up style. Even if they fail, they are learning, just as they are learning in cricket and in letters. Besides, there is something stimulating in asking them to try a thing which presents difficulties. Intellectual pap is demoralizing. A boy who wishes to learn - and most do so wish - will often make better efforts to do what strikes him as "grown-up" than what seems "babyish", for his whole bent is to go forward into being man-like.

Yet if experience shows that most boys are anxious to learn to write better, it also shows that it is hard for them to learn. The best way to teach them is to take each boy himself, and correct and rebuild his "Essay" under his eye. But although boys are generally ready enough to give up time out of school for this purpose, it is often impossible for the teacher to find the time. With a form of twenty-four boys, even a quarter of an hour apiece means six hours in the week added to a time-table, and it is easy to give half an hour to each essay without feeling that the time is too long. Nor are attempts to select out of the form satisfactory. To teach only the best ones, or only the worst ones, is unfair to the others. And though this individual teaching is unquestionably useful, it does in some ways involve a waste of time. The same things have to be said over and over to different boys. They do not all make the same mistakes, but certain types of mistakes occur often. Of course, a general criticism of the essays on the whole form has its uses, but one is bound to leave much of the ground unsearched; and besides, firing at large is not nearly so destructive - or instructive - as it should be.

Accordingly, I have tried to set down briefly the first principles of building up an "Essay"; the way to gather and sort material; then to reveal the commonest pitfalls which lie in wait for the beginner, and to put him on his guard against glaring mistakes. I have laid some stress on these, because unless a boy knows what is bad, and why it is bad, he has no standard by which to choose what is better. At the end I have tried to explain where merit lies. As my aim has been to write a book which a boy can read for himself, I have sacrificed pedagogic decorum of instruction; and if now and then some reader may be tempted to read another page or two, to see what comes next, much has been done."

Of course one may buy a copy from any number of on-line book-sellers, but if you wish to give your patronage to a current publisher, an on-demand paperback may be bought from Turtle Point Press - turtlepointpress.com

Spinning Stories: Literature, Gender, Politics - Jan Montefiore

A number of admirers of Warner met in Canterbury on 19 June for a conference celebrating the work of one of her warmest and most persuasive advocates, Jan Montefiore. Jan is known to readers of the *Sylvia Townsend Warner Journal* as the writer of three persuasive essays first published there, on Warner's poetry, her biography of T.H. White and her letters. Along with other pages on Warner, parts of these discussions found a place in Jan's influential books *Feminism and Poetry* (3rd edition, 2004), *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s* (Routledge, 1996), and *Arguments of Heart and Mind: Selected Essays 1977-2000*. More recently she has written an indispensable account of 'Sylvia Townsend Warner Scholarship 1978-2013: An Annotated Bibliography, with Introduction'. This appeared online in *Literature Compass* 11 (2014), 786-811.

The day was titled 'Spinning Stories: Literature, Gender, Politics', and it marked Jan's retirement from the University of Kent. It included reminiscences of some of the pioneering days of gender study and academic interest in women's writing, in which Jan played an important role, not only in her writings but in setting up the first MA course in gender studies. The plenary speakers were David Mitchell, who read from his latest novel, and Laura Marcus, whose talk on 'Listening to Literature in the 1930s' included a discussion of Sophia listening to Minna's story-telling in *Summer Will Show*. One of the other panels included two talks on Warner, Claire Buck on 'Warner's Waste in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Opus Seven*' and Peter Swaab on 'Warner's Weasel: Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Choices of Life'.

Peter Swaab

The John Craske exhibition

The collection of Craske watercolours and 'wool paintings' amassed by Sylvia and Valentine during their time in Norfolk was given to the Aldeburgh Festival Foundation in 1970 where, despite the terms of Warner's bequest, they have remained in store. Now, after years of neglect, the work of this little known fisherman-artist has begun to emerge 'into the sharpened light of a seaboard sky' as Sylvia intended. The steamboat 'James Edward', Valentine's first purchase on discovering Craske in 1927, and the dramatic little embroidery 'Rescue by breeches buoy from the ship Zero' were both shown at Salthouse on the Norfolk coast in 2008, and again as part of the *Masterpieces* extravaganza *Art and East Anglia* at the Sainsbury Centre in late 2013. At the same time Craske's last great tapestry 'Dunkirk', given to Norwich Art Gallery by his wife Laura, made a rare appearance at Gt Yarmouth's Time and Tide Museum in its *Frayed: Textiles on the Edge* exhibition of Outsider art.

These tantalising glimpses of Craske's remarkable talent were, in effect, a prelude to the main event earlier this year at Norwich University of the Arts, the first major retrospective of his work since the 50th anniversary exhibition held in 1993 in Dereham, and organised to coincide with the publication of Julia Blackburn's *Threads: The delicate life of John Craske*. The 'Dunkirk' embroidery was again the centrepiece of the Norwich show, but half the 45 works on display were from the STW/VA bequest with contributions from the Mo Museum in Sheringham, three small maritime needleworks from the Dorchester archive and the rest from private collections. John Duigan had been Craske's doctor in Dereham and had occasionally accepted work in lieu of payment for outstanding medical bills. In addition to several lovely embroideries there were photographs, the doctor's 'stuff book' containing a poem about his patient and a copy of *The Women of the Bible*, a large Victorian tome retrieved from the attic just prior to the exhibition. Tucked inside and previously unknown were several painted 'thankyou' cards from Craske.

What does this painterly feast tell us about the artist? The small selection from his home town of Sheringham gives us some idea of Craske's range and subject matter from the rare oil-on-bait board of the crab boat 'Gannet' to the embroidered 'Basket of fish on a cliff' and the oval needlework of lighthouse and lifeboat 'With Christ in the vessel we'll smile at the storm' as a border text. Ships and the sea were all he knew before being struck down by 'harmless mental stupors' in 1917 and he spent the rest of his life reworking the maritime images still fresh in his mind. As Sylvia put it '... he painted like a man giving witness under oath to a wild story...', whatever the subject 'Craske gives you his word for it.' With no thought of posterity Craske seldom provided a date or title for his works although the descriptive labels they have since acquired – 'Steam trawler with auxiliary sail wallowing at sea', 'Fishing smack long-lining for cod' and 'Lifeboat, cackle buoy and ships in heavy sea' – are together a metaphor for the artist's protracted struggle with ill health.

Refreshed by periods of convalescence beside the sea Craske painted largely from memory and an imagination enlivened by seafaring tales and folk ballads that drifted inland to his Dereham bedside. One of the recently discovered picture cards to his doctor is a brooding monochrome of sea stacks rearing up out of the waves while, in one of Craske's few 'historical' pieces, smugglers unload barrels deep inside a cave. Both scenes depict rocky configurations far removed from the tidal creeks and crumbling cliffs of Norfolk's debatable coastline. Even the red brick cottages in 'Fishing Village', painted on two sheets of lining paper, are more like those where he lived in Dereham than the beach cobble vernacular that was to provide the setting for Warner's novel *The Flint Anchor*.

Although the range of Craske's maritime subjects remained constant throughout his life the great change in his work took place in the late 1920s when declining health forced him to abandon painting in favour of needlework. Once he had mastered the technique Craske soon developed his own bold style of 'painting in wools', embarking on the series of ambitious compositions that will secure his reputation. Unfortunately three of his four great tapestries were not available for the Norwich exhibition. 'Panorama of the Norfolk Coast' was deemed too fragile to leave the Glandford Shell Museum but the absence of 'Saltings with ruin, Norfolk Coast' and the beautifully observed 'Beach Scene', both owned by the Britten-Pears foundation, was especially unfortunate given that the exhibition was destined for the Peter Pears Gallery in Aldeburgh.

One effect of keeping the STW/VA collection locked away in a cupboard is that the works are rarely exposed to 'the sharpened light of a seaboard sky' that is gradually leaching colour from the Glandford 'Panorama'. By contrast the colours of 'Fishing boat with orange sail', the deep blues of 'Lighthouse ship' and the green headland turf of 'Rescue by breeches buoy' remain fresh and vibrant, the compositions still 'crackl[ing] with vitality'. A less welcome effect of storage is evident in 'The evacuation of Dunkirk'. In 1947 the curator at Norwich Castle Museum had announced 'I do not consider that work of this type comes under the heading of art' and Sylvia only managed to get the embroidery de-mothed some time later by 'being extremely unpleasant to the Authorities'. From this, the star attraction of the Norwich/Aldeburgh exhibition, Craske's ability to orchestrate a complex drama with all the confidence of an artist at the height of his power was now clear for all to see. As Sylvia has it 'In relation to his other pictures it is on a par with the Beethoven's posthumous quartets'. In 1970 after Peter Pears had agreed to accept her Craske's for Aldeburgh Sylvia wrote in her diary, 'There you are ... with your future assured, you will have a good home in your native climate, and be honoured in your own county'. The collection still awaits a 'good home' but, 45 years later, Craske has at last received the recognition he deserves in his 'native climate'.

Peter Tolhurst

***Threads* by Julia Blackburn**

(Jonathan Cape £25)

When I learnt from Julia Blackburn that she was to write a book about John Craske I became very excited by the prospect of learning more about the Norfolk fisherman-artist whose work I had long admired. Blackburn was already a writer of repute and had twice been short-listed for the Orange prize and so I quickly parcelled up what information I had and sent it off. In truth there is little to go on; Craske was not a learned man and the paper trail amounts to a few 'thankyou' cards to his doctor and a letter in 1940 to Elizabeth Wade White who bought his work and had organized an exhibition in New York. What we do know comes largely from his wife Laura's account, typed out by Valentine along with two versions of how Valentine had discovered Craske in Hemsby. Beyond that there are brief references to him in Sylvia's diary and in her correspondence especially with Peter Pears when arranging to leave her Craske to the Aldeburgh Festival Foundation in 1971. The one potentially valuable document, a typed ms of Craske's 'My Life and the Sea' which Blackburn had identified, proved a disappointing mix of childhood anecdotes and descriptions of fishing – statements of fact like his paintings but without their dramatic intensity – when it eventually turned up in the Britten-Pears Library.

Faced with such unpromising material Blackburn sets out in search of her subject but things don't go well from the start. She visits Norwich Castle Museum and is shown the wrong piece of needlework – Craske's 'Dunkirk' embroidery is in store and cannot be brought out. She goes to Sheringham where Craske was born and brought up but the few surviving relatives scarcely remember him at all. At the local museum (The Mo) she comes across several examples of his work in a cupboard – 'maybe they were a gift from Laura' – but which were purchased by the museum in the 1990s. Then to the Whelk Coppers tea rooms (not the Whelk Kettle) where an old lady thinks Einstein once visited the resort, where the entrance gates were reputedly designed by Walt Disney and you begin to get the picture. There are trips to Grimsby where Craske first went to sea with his brothers and to Hemsby, blitzed by arcades and fast food outlets, but again there is no sign of John Craske. Time has washed away all trace of him and, on a visit to Dereham where Craske spent the last twenty years of his life in bed at 42 Norwich Road, Blackburn becomes unwittingly complicit in his removal from the historical record. She is adamant that the 'red brick cottage in a row' seen by Sylvia in June 1931, has been demolished but there it is at the end of a Victorian terrace awaiting a blue plaque. We are also told that Dereham is where 'John Cowper.... went mad and died' but the memorial window in the church – dedicated to the patron saint of sailors – is to poor William Cowper, the poet 'who kept a tame hare in his front room.'

Blackburn's books are deeply subjective and, by her own admission, she has 'grown accustomed to the overlap between her own life and the imagined life of a

stranger.' This approach, while oddly attractive, can also be misleading. *Threads* is subtitled 'The Delicate Life of John Craske' and anyone under the impression they had bought a conventional biography might well feel they had been stitched up. For long periods her subject hovers in the shadows, he had no real life at all and *Threads* becomes something of a rescue mission, but who or what exactly is being saved? – at one point Blackburn confides to her diary 'Sometimes I wonder if I have lost the thread.' When recommending a period of convalescence on the coast at Wiveton Craske's doctor told Laura that 'only the sea will save him' and this becomes the nature of Blackburn's quest.

'All I can do is hold to a few facts and images ... And let myself drift ... Maybe that is already a way of getting closer to my subject, because John Craske knew a lot about drifting and I need to keep alongside him.'

Drifting around the coast with her husband or in the company of assorted friends Blackburn casts the net wide. The random collection of exotica hauled ashore would not look out of place in the Glandford Shell Museum although it often has little to do with Craske who slips effortlessly away on the ebb tide. There is the little auk found on the beach at Walberswick, the neighbour's parrot called Freddie (pieces of eight?) and the tale of Mr Hagger's ashes. Circus freaks like the Elephant Man and the Norfolk Giant prompt speculations that the pituitary gland may explain Craske's medical condition but a consultant considers mental instability the most likely cause of his stuporous states. The true story of Einstein who spent three weeks hiding in a hut on Roughton Heath is so compelling that Blackburn arranges a brief encounter on the coast path between Craske and the great man even though, as she acknowledges, Craske was in Dereham at the time and, according to the Einstein Archive, he was not allowed out of the village.

Midway through the book we learn from Blackburn's diary extracts that the health of her husband, Herman Makkink, is increasingly frail and with his death *Threads* is transformed into a more encompassing meditation on mortality as the author weaves her own sense of loss with that of Laura Craske. Towards the end Blackburn recreates John Craske's last weeks and the process by which 'Dunkirk', his last great embroidery, takes shape allowing the shy invalid artist she had pursued for so long and so imaginatively to 'sweep in a great arc of energy' out through a hole in the sky of his incomplete masterpiece. It also prompts the more mundane questions 'Where exactly is Craske buried, where indeed was he born?' that a conventional biography might have answered. The planned trip to St Ives to see the Alfred Wallis collection is overtaken by events and the opportunity to compare Craske with his more illustrious contemporary lost. Was he a better artist? Blackburn doesn't know and perhaps it doesn't matter although a joint exhibition might enable us to decide. What we have now is a beautifully illustrated tribute to this most elusive artist whose story is woven into some of the 20th century's most remarkable wool paintings.

Peter Tollhurst

Sylvia Townsend Warner at the 25th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf: Virginia Woolf and Her Female Contemporaries

The International Conference on Virginia Woolf marked its twenty-fifth year by broadening the scope of the conference to feature women contemporary to Woolf. The conference, held June 4-7, 2015 at Bloomsburg University in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, drew scholars from around the world speaking on over 66 women. While most of the women discussed were writers, some were activists, artists or aviators.

And one was, of course, Sylvia Townsend Warner. Four papers on Warner were presented at the conference.

Vara Neverow of Southern Connecticut State University spoke on "Splintered Sexualities in West's *Return of the Soldier*, Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Warner's 'A Love Match'" on a panel about women writers' responses to the Great War. A panel dedicated to Warner and Woolf, entitled "Woolf and Warner: Narrative Challenges to Culture Conventions," was chaired by Stacy Carson Hubbard from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Alichia Keddy of Carleton University spoke on "Politicized Failure and Social Critique in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show*." Keddy's presentation considered Warner's novel through the lens of failure: "Failing social conventions can provide an escape from the disciplinary mechanisms of society that regulate behavior and norms. I argue that Warner dramatizes the stakes of women's social 'failures' through Sophia's and Minna's experiences. In particular, Warner reveals the ideological and material conditions that enable classed women like Sophia to fail and thrive, while unclassed women like Minna are often marked for failure and death."

Jennifer Nesbitt of Penn State York spoke second, on "Baba Yaga and the Fisherman's Wife: Tales of Two Feminists." I argued that the references to fairytales in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and Warner's *Lolly Willowes* (1926) are symptomatic of the authors' respective positioning within feminist criticism and also portend the current debates surrounding the inclusion (or not) of women's writing in the expanded field of modernist studies.

The panel concluded with a presentation by Candis E. Bond, from Saint Louis University, called "Appropriating Sacred Ground: Cemeteries in the work of Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Townsend Warner." Bond's paper "explored the significance of burial grounds—cemeteries and crypts—within fictional and non-fictional texts by Woolf and Warner. Woolf and Warner often present outcast female characters wandering through cemeteries in their fiction in order to draw attention to women's ability to deconstruct oppressive histories by appropriating formerly sacred ground; cemeteries are represented as a kind of urban underground, serving as territory available for women's (mis)use."

The conference was remarkable for not only the range of scholarship but its inclusive and expansive audience. Organizers Julie Vandivere of Bloomsburg University and Erica Delsandro of Bucknell University secured funding from the Degenstein Foundation to involve local high school students, and they worked tirelessly

with Bloomsburg undergraduates and community members to build support and enthusiasm for the conference. There were several undergraduate panels at the conference, and a local bookstore hosted a weekly reading group focused on modernist women writers. During the conference, a local theater staged *Septimus and Clarissa* (2011) and conference participants also attended the opening of a juried art show, titled *Mark on the Wall*, featuring works "broadly influenced by those female artists who were contemporaneous with Virginia Woolf."

The conference's plenary sessions featured leading scholars and writers in the field of women and modernism. Susan McCabe (University of Southern California, Dornsife) and Linda Leavell, author of two award-winning books on Marianne Moore, spoke on the role of patronage, friendship and money in fostering female creativity. Two parallel plenary dialogues were led by, respectively, Jane Garrity (University of Colorado) and Helen Southworth (University of Oregon), and Melissa Bradshaw (Loyola University, Chicago) and Madelyn Detloff (Miami University). Garrity and Southworth explored the concept of "obscurity" in women's writing, while Bradshaw and Detloff focused on "big-personality" women writers—or, as they termed them, "divas"—and the politics of literary reputation. A theory roundtable highlighted new scholarly approaches that seek to "level the playing field between so-called major and minor figures."

A plenary session with Anne Fernald and Cassandra Laity, co-editors of a new literary journal *Feminist Modernist Studies* (prospective launch in 2017), sought suggestions for possible topics for special and regular issues, subjects for a planned "out of the archives" feature, venues for advertising the launch, and the possibility of holding a conference and/or forming an association affiliated with the journal.

The opening reception doubled as a celebration of two pioneering feminist modernist scholars, Jane Marcus and Shari Benstock, both of whom died in the week preceding the conference. The reception was followed by readings by poet Cynthia Hogue and novelist Maggie Gee.

The 26th Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf will be held at Leeds Trinity University, June 16-19, 2016. The theme is "Woolf and Heritage," which will offer scope for continuing the work of the 25th conference in expanding to include a range of women in modernism. For more information, visit the conference website, <http://www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/events/humanities/the-26th-annual-conference-on-virginia-woolf--virginia-woolf-and-heritage>, or join the Facebook page for the conference.

Jennifer Nesbitt

Two Letters at Columbia University

Reproduced with the kind permission of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Jane R. Siegel, Librarian. The first is a TLS (typed letter signed) to Dorothy Brewer, given to the Library in 1966. The second, an ALS, is to Benjamin Huebach.

Frome Vauchurch,
Maiden Newton,
Dorset.
Telephone: Maiden Newton 276

29.xi.1938

My dear Miss Brewster.

I am very glad to give something for League's Sale for Spain; and here is the first draft of *After the Death of Don Juan*. I am afraid it is a very unappetising object; but as mss go it is pretty good, as it contains considerable variants, as on the verso of p. 68, etc. And only one page (218) is missing. The end, too, is a variant of the published version. I am not quite sure when the book is coming out in the States. I believe in January. I am not sure of the etiquette of selling a ms before publication: there may be some technical point over copyright. But I am quite sure that my publisher, Ben Huebach of the Viking Press, will waive any question of such formalities since I know he feels as strongly as I do the necessity of raising funds

[p. 2]

for Spain.

I hope the sale will be a great success. Jean Untermeyer told me about the last one, and sent me a copy of the catalogue. I felt much admiration for the organisers who had got such good wares and such good buyers.

Yours sincerely

Sylvia Townsend Warner [signed]

Frome Vauchurch, [etc.]

24: x: 1938

My dear Ben,

I am sending by this post an advance copy. of *Don Juan*. [this, oDJ, added in different ink] I did not send you a set of the proofs because, having been hurried through, they had some fairly intricate confusions in them; and knowing that you have your eye on 1939 I thought I would wait to send you a painless copy.

With love

Sylvia.

William Maxwell and sleep

"...Yesterday, Bill Maxwell came to lunch at the Four Seasons. "You know everything about me," he said. "I've written it all." "Almost all," I said. "There are one or two things...but I don't really care..." We have laughing, loving, mutually nourishing times, each of us making the other feel whole and rich in experience and exceptional. Bill said, "I wanted to bring you a present, so I typed out this early poem of Louise Bogan's. I am reading the biography in proof. It's always (what was his word?) to find out things you didn't know about someone you know very well. She had a love affair."

We talked of death (always) and sickness and aging and books and writing and one another and love and just being... We are the best mutual appreciation society in the world. Bill has a passion for naps: "I jump into my pajamas," he says. He is so very young – a young man – seems so vulnerable and spiritual. And he has sensuality. Is this the wick of the lamp? He gives such a pure light. Actually he has the purity of the good-worldly, by which I mean that of goodness beyond cynicism, indeed having assimilated cynicism."

from *The Grand Surprise: the Journals of Leo Lerman* (Knopf, 2007)

"...Because I actively enjoy sleeping, dreams, the unexplainable dialogues that take place in my head as I am drifting off, all that, I tell myself that lying down to an afternoon nap that goes on and on through eternity is not something to be concerned about. What spoils this pleasant fancy is the recollection that when people are dead they don't read books. This I find unbearable. No Tolstoy, no Chekhov, no Elizabeth Bowen, no Keats, no Rilke. One might as well be –"

from *Nearing Ninety* (in *The Best American Essays*, 1998, Houghton Mifflin)

Sylvia Cited

Tom Brightwind, mock non-fiction from Susanna Clarke's collection of stories *The Ladies of Grace Adieu*, contains the following footnote (p 176), concerning the fairy word "brugh", a fairy habitation:

...Another chronicler of fairy history wrote of "a steep-sided grassy hill, round as a pudding-basin...A small lake on its summit had a crystal floor, which served as a skylight." (Sylvia Townsend Warner, *The Kingdoms of Elfin*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1977)

Egdon Heath

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir, – “The vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath”...So wrote Thomas Hardy in the opening chapter of *The Return of the Native*. The adjective “vast” is no longer applicable. A great part of the eastern heath was lost when the War Office retained its wartime hold on the Isle of Purbeck. Conifer nurseries occupy another stretch near Wareham, and north of Wool the heath is a practice-ground for the tanks of Bovington Camp. But to the west a large fragment of the heath remained, still wild and unenclosed, still justifying Hardy's phrase “an ancient permanence.”

It is here that the Atomic Energy Research Department proposes to take 700 acres for a research station. “The land” – we quote from the official statement issued to the local Press – “will be bought from a willing seller. The establishment would not be derated and would be a welcome addition to our ratable value.” Others may not feel so complacently about the loss to the English-speaking world of this remnant of the Wessex of the Anglo-Saxons and of Thomas Hardy. It is for their information, and with an irrational hope that some other site may yet be found, that we ask you to publish this letter.

Yours faithfully,
SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER.
REYNOLDS STONE.
Dorset, March 1 [1956]

The 10 Best Spinsters

Judith Stinton sends this squib from *The Observer*, The New Review section, 5 July 2015. Lolly Willowes came in 9th, beating out Miss Jean Brodie. The others were, in order, Stevie Smith, Rhoda Nunn, Eleanor Rigby, Gwen John, Miss Havisham, Barbara Pym, Anne Elliot, and Elizabeth I.

“Literary spinsters are all too often given witchy traits (see Miss Havisham). So let's have ourselves an actual witch. Lolly Willowes is the eponymous heroine of Sylvia Townsend Warner's best-selling fable of 1926. Weary of playing the maiden aunt, she moves to the village of Great Mop where she enters, aged 48, into a pact with the devil. “One doesn't become a witch to run round being harmful,” she says of her liberation. “Or to run round being helpful either, a district visitor on a broomstick. It's to escape all that – to have a life of one's own, not an existence doled out to you by others.”

The Marriage of Arthur and Purefoy

Sylvia Townsend Warner

Maiden Newton, Dorchester
Maiden Newton 276 8 : x : 1958

Dear Mr. Reynolds,

...A.M.'s wedding. This took place in a thick yellow fog, a real pea-souper. There was a slight moral fog, hanging over the ceremony because some of the bride's relations regretted the match. Dorothy, as she was then (it was Arthur, I think, who opted for her second given name of Purefoy) was thought by these to be making a very inexplicable match with a man so much older than she, and a widower, and poor, and whose hair was worn so eccentrically long. How mistaken there were in their forebodings! I suppose there has never been a happier marriage.

I gathered this as children do. As children do, I formed my own opinion. A.M. was a new, mysterious, and deeply pleasing experience. I had never heard anything quite like his grave, measured way of speaking, and he gave me on my birthday a copy of Kenneth Graham's *Golden Age*, with a Latin inscription: *In festo S. Nicolai Episc. et Confess.* I have the book still, with its date 6. dec. 1904. Before that *In festo* etc, which gave me such deep reverberations of pleasure, he had written *To Sylvia from The Stroller*. Now, looking back, I fancy a certain dryly amused acknowledgement in that use of the word, stroller, of the fact that his stage career with the Benson Company was another of the things, like the long straight hair and the widowerhood, that disquieted some of Purefoy's relations.

I don't know the history of his leaving the *Evening News*. It was a bondage to him, and he did not speak of it. I don't even know what released him, whether it was an inheritance of money or some benign gift. I image, the former. If it had been a gift, he would have praised the giver. I don't know about his fellow journalists. If you ask the *Evening News* for the names of people working for it at the time when Arthur was employed there I could perhaps tell you more. I fancy I must have met several of them at Melina Place.

This must do for the present. I have a great deal to tell you about later years, Arthur at Melina Place, and crushing black beetles at Loudon Road, and above all, Penally. But this must wait for the present.

Yours sincerely,
Sylvia Townsend Warner

from *Faunus : The Journal of the Friends of Arthur Machen*, Spring 1998, One, and reproduced with the kind permission of the Friends of Arthur Machen.

Sylvia on Gerard Manley Hopkins

From the diary entry of 29 October 1928 about letters of GMH to Coventry Patmore

“...They are the letters of a wild lonely mind, soliloquies – harping on like his own lark, an angel in a cloud even among his 500 examination papers. But an angel with a vial: a ruthless Catholic, a passionate priest. The more I read, the less I liked, the more I loved, the less I esteemed, the more I revered. But above all, lonely, talking to himself with the fluency of thought long practised in solitude. He composed too – and found the piano so unsuitable to his polyphonic leanings. 'Perhaps you know that the Latin writers exchanged and misapplied the words areis [sic – the word is arsis] and thesis (his greek hand ever lovelier – very round and silk-twist, very drawn). Areis is properly the rise of the foot in dancing or of the conductor's arm in beating time, thesis the fall of the same. Areis is therefore the light part of the foot, I call it the *slack*; thesis the heavy or strong, the stress.' He quotes Purcell, Full fathom five, in a very clear musician's hand.”

These letters were for sale at the music publisher Bumpus, and, “fascinated by these, [I] longed to buy them. Instead I went to Woolworths, and bought nails and a tea-pot. When I got back, I found my pass-book, so its as well I didn't.” She spent the evening on “Sukey's proofs: six octaves”. In February 1931 Sylvia tried to buy them for Valentine, but they had gone to a private buyer in Aberdeen.

If you are interested in Hopkins and the whereabouts of these letters, perhaps an inquiry to the newly re-formed Gerard Manley Hopkins Society would yield a clue – www.hopkinssociety.co.uk They have launched a website, in its early days, and also kindly included us in their long and handy list of literary societies.

Another visit to Woolworths

“I visited every counter of the domestic Woolworth, even to buying boot-polish, and refreshed myself with a sixpenny fish tea – plaice, of course. Cheap low-class meals are such a pleasure, I wonder I don't take to chewing-gum...” (*Diaries*, 17.9.1930)

Coda

I hope you enjoyed Newsletter 31. With best wishes from me to you, it ends as it began: hoping you will send news and items of interest to share, and suggestions and corrections.

Jay Barksdale