

The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve 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 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, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve 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 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, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve 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 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, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve 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 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, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve 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 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, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve 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 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, The Flint Anchor

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society ***Newsletter Number Thirty Three***

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER THIRTY-THREE

Books Reviewed * The STW/VA Archive * Poems * Anita Brookner
The AGM * The 2016 Weekend * Quintessential Sylvia! * Peter Scupham
The Mary Jacobs Memorial Prize * Events, News & Sightings

Thanks go to members Judith Bond, Ren Draya, Judith Stinton and Peter Swaab,
and guest Aileen Wang for contributions to this issue.

Suggestions, corrections, and contributions (especially for Quintessential Sylvia!)
for future issues are always appreciated.

Eileen Johnson, who helped to set up the STW Society, has now retired from her role
as Chairman. She was previously the Society's Secretary. As well as these major
contributions to the running of the Society, she has always been a popular, well-
informed and enthusiastic member, and we hope she will long continue to be so. (JS)

The Society was very pleased to welcome Janet Montefiore as its new Chair. A poet
and academic, Jan has written about Warner in her influential books *Feminism and
Poetry* and *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s* as well as in the *Sylvia Townsend
Warner Society Journal*. She helped set up the UK's first MA in Gender Studies at the
University of Kent, where she taught until her retirement in 2015. Since 2013 she
has been the editor of the *Kipling Journal*. (PS)

**Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Weekend
June 10–12 2016**

Essex is an unexpected county, with a gobby, gangsterish reputation at its London end,
an ancient forest at its heart – and the world's longest pier on its southern shore. Then
there are the marshes.

On our weekend, we came across them suddenly, turning the corner from Maldon's
recycling unit to saline expanses of water and mud. Our group had met up the night
before, at Bella's Italian Bistro in Burnham-on-Crouch, a long and lively town, with
almost as many boats as people. Two bottles of wine magically appeared on our table,
ordered by member Jay Barksdale in New Jersey, and we drank to his health.

Now, on Saturday morning, we were walking along the Blackwater estuary (with a
cuckoo calling) to reach the causeway to Northey Island. Northey is one of the few
publicly accessible islands in the Essex archipelago, and then only when the tides are
right.

In STW's novel *The True Heart*, Sukey Bond lives on such an island, and Jenny
Wildblood gave an evocative reading from the book. There were further readings when
we returned to the shore, which was also the site of the Battle of Maldon in 991, when

the ill-fated Byrhtnoth failed to foil the Viking invaders who were advancing from Northey Island. Eileen Johnson declaimed some of the poem about the battle in the original Old English.

We lunched at the Cricketers in Bradwell-on-Sea. One of STW's poems begins 'At Bradwell in the marshes there is an inn...' Unfortunately, there are three such inns, but the Cricketers happens to be by the Roman road which leads to St Peter's Chapel on the headland. The landscape continued to amaze. We had seen old Thames barges with brown sails sailing up the estuary. Now all around were the horizontal lines of the blossoming pea fields and the enormous sky.

The seventh century chapel sits squarely on the Saxon shore, on the site of a Roman fort. As well as its enduring religious purpose, it serves as a sea mark. Parts of the building are original, including the buttresses and the Roman brick around the windows. Inside it is hushed and airy – and never locked.

Further along the shoreline, on the other side of a small wood, is a watch house dating from Napoleonic times. Outside the wooden hut, the chatty occupier was drinking a cup of tea. He casually drew our attention to a marsh harrier, gliding over the sea. This was a rare sight for us, but an everyday occurrence for him.

We too were ready for tea, which we enjoyed not in a genteel tearoom, but in a bar at the Cap and Feathers, Tillingham, with the sound of European football in the background. It was a very generous one, with home-made scones, good strong tea and wedges of fruit cake.

Another Tillingham attraction is a half-demolished house, formerly used as a chapel by the Peculiar People, a non-conformist sect which was – how shall I put it? – peculiar to Essex. Zeph in *The True Heart* declares himself to be a member of this group.

The chapels are in decline, but there are still plenty of pubs. The last two we visited – the Three Horseshoes on Saturday night and the Huntsmen and Hounds on Sunday lunchtime – proved tricky to find, but worth the effort. Sunday morning was spent in Burnham's Arcadia Hall, where the writer Ken Worpole gave a vivid talk about the marshes, which he described as a poverty-stricken, peripheral landscape, a sanctuary for escapees from London. Many experimental communities began there: social, political or religious. Ken's talk provided background detail and rich colouring to all that we had seen during the weekend.

Thanks go to the organiser of the trip, Jenny Wildblood, who had coped with such hazards as tricky tides and the National Trust to ensure that all went smoothly, and to Richard Searle, who patiently ensured that the pubs we visited were still in existence.

Judith Stinton

Minutes of the 15th Annual General Meeting

Sylvia Townsend Warner Society
Dorset County Museum, 12 May 2016

Present: Eileen Johnson (Chair), Judith Bond, Judith Stinton, Richard Searle, Vike Plock, Peter Swaab, Jenny Wildblood, Lynn Mutti, Rowan Bright.

Apologies: Winifred Johnson, Annie Rhodes, Gill Davies, Janet Montefiore, Margareta Jolly, Jamie Britton, Ruth Williams, Helen Sutherland, Tess Ormrod, Chris Gostick, Lesley Clargo, Judith Fielding.

1. **Minutes** of the Annual General Meeting 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed. These were not printed in the Spring Newsletter, but have been circulated to members.
2. **Warner Archive:** Museum Director Dr. Jon Murden has been seriously ill and is not expected to return to work before the end of July 2016 at the earliest. His duties are currently being undertaken by the Trustees of the Museum. Consequently there has been no progress regarding access to the archive by researchers whilst the STW/VA room is being used for other purposes linked to the Lottery Bid for major development of the Museum premises.
3. **Journal:** UCL Press, after discussions with the *Journal* Editor Peter Swaab, has agreed to host the *Journal* on an 'open access' basis. There were initial design and technical issues which created time delays. These have now been overcome, in particular the suspension of an 'article processing charge' whereby authors of articles would have had to pay a substantial fee. This is becoming normal practice in academic circles. This fee has been waived for the first two or three years for the *Journal* pending further negotiation. Peter will give the URL as soon as possible and will work with Karina Taubert, the Society's webmaster. UCL Press cannot support a printed version of the *Journal* but Formara, a printing company, has given a reasonable quote to produce this, approximately £400 for 225 copies and distribution to members. The proofs of the 2015 *Journal* were circulated. Because there were only six unused engravings from *Boxwood* by Reynolds Stone and Warner that had not been used for previous covers of the *Journal*, the time was deemed appropriate for a complete change of style. An image of the 'Coat of Many Colours' made by Sylvia for Valentine is to be used for the 2015 *Journal* cover which it is hoped will be delivered to members close to the June weekend. Two journals a year are planned, and that for 2016 will be available later this year. There is considerable material in the pipeline so that two issues a year is realistic. An Editorial Committee has been formed of Dame Gillian Beer, Janet Montefiore, Claire Harman, Maud Ellmann, Laura Marcus, Ingrid Hotz-Davies and Glen Cavaliero. It is also hoped that articles from back-issues of the *Journal* can be uploaded to the Ingenta server to be freely available online, although there are copyright issues to resolve and costs from UCL to be obtained which may take some time.

5. **Treasurer's Report:** The Accounts were submitted unaudited and Stephen Mottram will undertake this shortly. The Society year-end has changed to 31 March and therefore the figures discussed were less than usual. The overall picture shows no big change and more subscriptions were received since the accounts were done. Back-journal sales totalled £450 last year.

6. **Membership Report:** Vike Plock reported that membership stands at 141; 23 members have not yet renewed, 4 have resigned and there are 3 new members. Advertising the Society in the Woolf, Kipling and other literary society journals was discussed.

7. All Other Business

a. **Chair:** Jenny Wildblood proposed Janet Montefiore as Chair of the Society, seconded by Lynn Mutti. Passed nem.con.

b. **Editorial Assistance:** Peter Swaab requested that Mercedes Aguirre Alastuey help him with the production of the *Journal* at this early stage of completely different organization. Lynn Mutti, Secretary, checked the Constitution; Section 3.4 states that: 'Certain agreed functions may be delegated by the Committee to those expressing an interest in such matters. They may be brought onto the Committee on a temporary basis to give help and/or advice if the members are in agreement.' Passed nem.con.

c. **Essay Prize:** It was decided that the Essay Prize Competition should be offered in 2017, and thereafter every three years, with a prize of £500 and publication in the *Journal* of the winning essay. 'Warner in her Time' was suggested as a subject with a maximum of 6,000 words imposed. Passed nem.con. The information regarding the 2017 Prize should be published in the summer edition of the Newsletter. The University of Pennsylvania 'Call for Papers' website also to be contacted. Peter suggested asking Janet Montefiore to be a judge. Judith Stinton reported that those who had judged previously would probably be willing to continue to do so.

d. **Book Donation:** The seven books donated to the Society by the Rev. Janet Smith to be kept until a Symposium is organized, possibly in 2018, the 40th anniversary of Warner's death.

e. Jenny Wildblood reported the death of well-known member **Graham Pechey** in February this year; Eileen Johnson to write to his wife Rosemary.

f. Judith Bond proposed a vote of **thanks to Eileen** for her many years of work for the Society.

Mary Jacobs Memorial Essay Prize

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society invites essays on any aspect of the life and work of Sylvia Townsend Warner.

Aim: to encourage further study of the writings of Sylvia Townsend Warner, in honour of the distinguished work of Dr Mary Jacobs.

The Award: the prize for the winning essay will be £500, publication in the Society's *Journal* and one year's free membership in the Society.

Procedure:

A 'call for papers' with details of the Prize will be published in December 2016 on the website of the University of Pennsylvania.

Essays should not be more than 6000 words.

Entries should preferably be submitted in electronic form, or else in hard copy, and should be submitted in two parts – 1) the essay without any identifying details, and 2) a separate document with author's name, essay title and email and postal address. Entries should be sent to the Editor of the Society's *Journal* at p.swaab@ucl.ac.uk

The deadline for entries will be 31 May 2017.

The winner will be notified by the Chairman of the Society in September 2017.

The winning essay will be published in the 2017 *Journal* at the end of the year.

Terms and Conditions:

The competition is open to all, with the exception of the officers of the Society.

The judges' decision will be final and no correspondence will be entered into.

The Committee reserves the right not to award the Prize if entries are deemed not to merit the award.

Essays entered must not have been published elsewhere or have publication pending.

The Society will not contribute towards any expenses incurred by entrants to the competition.

Sylvia Townsend Warner's Poetic Works

Aileen Wang sends us this: "On the 7th December at 8pm, the Southbank Centre's Poetry Library will be hosting an event for Warner fans, new and old, to celebrate her poetic works. * Aileen Wang and Katherine Rodgers are graduates of University College London's English department, and read *Lolly Willowes* and *Opus 7* as part of a Modern Fiction class. Enamoured by the characters, landscapes and fantasy of Warner's worlds, they went on to extend their reading of her work, and this year will be hosting an event to celebrate Sylvia Townsend Warner's poetry, as part of the Southbank Poetry Library's 'Special Edition' series. The event focuses on the poetic works so often overshadowed by Warner's more famous novels, and will include three short talks by a range of Warner experts. Professor Peter Swaab will deliver an introductory talk, Claire Harman will provide biographical insight into the poetry, and Frances Bingham will close the event with further critical discussion. * We hope to see you at this free event, which will be accessible but educational for new readers and hardcore enthusiasts alike. Attendees can also expect a selection of hand-illustrated quotes and passages from Warner's poetry, penned by a variety of part-time artists and illustrators based in London!"

Kudos to the London Review Bookshop

In August the website of the London Review Bookshop featured Sylvia, listing 14 of her books for sale and writing this about her: "Our author of the month for August this year is the English writer Sylvia Townsend Warner, who during her long life published seven novels, 19 collections of short stories, several collections of poetry and numerous essays, as well as scholarly works on musicology and a short [short?] biography of the novelist T.H. White. It is an astonishing body of work, encompassing radical politics, feminism, ambiguous sexuality and much else besides, but despite a recent revival of interest in her, remains severely underappreciated." * In addition, their blog posted the poem 'King Duffus', and the opening portion of the newly published (STW Society *Journal* 2015) libretto, 'The Sea-Change'.

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*Al morir su padre, Laura Willowes se fue a vivir a Londres
con su hermano mayor y su familia.*

LOLLY WILLOWES has been translated into Spanish! Celia Montolio's full 2016 edition is available through Siruela publishers, ISBN 978-84-16638-78-9. Celia corresponded with Society member Ren Draya for advice about several English idioms and references. (RD)

Quintessential Sylvia!

Ren Draya

Scene: Cornelia Street Café, Greenwich Village, NYC, a May evening

Characters: Jay Barksdale, Ren Draya

Topic: Sylvia Townsend Warner

Jay: What ideas do you have for our future Newsletters?

Ren: Hmmm, let's ask members to nominate their favorite Sylvia short story.

Jay: Nice focus! What story would be your choice?

Ren: "An Act of Reparation" – it's one of the pieces in *Swans on an Autumn River*.

Jay: Tell me more . . .

Ren: "An Act of Reparation" is quintessential Sylvia! It's funny, slyly feminist, and superbly written. STW jumps right in – the scholar in me would say she writes with economy – and starts with young, dumb Valerie Hardcastle sitting in a bank. The reader quickly realizes that Valerie was a gold-digger, a paid dancing partner enchanted by the attention of an older admirer, Fenton Hardcastle.

Grey-haired, though with lots of it, he was the educated type, and theirs was an ideal relationship till Mrs. Fenton, whom he had not mentioned earlier. . . burst out like a tiger, demanding divorce.

STW's characterizations of these three are deft, comic, yet never mean-spirited. Her satire targets not the simplistic second wife (Valerie), nor the competent and "uncommonly healthy and prosperous" first wife (Lois). Nor does she need to lacerate Fenton: this pompous old bore is merely the prop for Sylvia's real target: marriage as a confining, stifling trap.

The reader may initially assume that the "reparation" is Valerie's, in that she had taken Lois's husband; but STW offers a sweet twist: Lois, older and wiser and feeling deliciously free, has "an amused acknowledgement of a faint sense of guilt" for having inflicted the uninspired Fenton on this hapless child. And so Lois helps Valerie shop and cook for the old fusspot.

Finally, to entice Jenny Wildblood and all of us who have enjoyed the STW feasts at Eileen Johnson's home, the story includes one of STW's savoury recipes: how to prepare a tasty oxtail meal!

The Archive and I - A Personal Account

Judith Bond

The beginning of the 21st century marked an important turning point in my relationship with Sylvia Townsend Warner. Our Society was formed in 2000, and in 2001 I visited the STW/VA Archive for the first time, two events which were to have a major impact on my life for the next 14 years.

Dr Morine Krissdottir, Honorary Curator of the Archive, told me of its history. Sylvia had expressed a wish that material of literary interest belonging to her and to Valentine should be looked after and so William Maxwell and Susanna Pinney, her literary executors, came to an agreement with the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society whereby accommodation would be provided at the Dorset County Museum 'to store original works, copies, published and unpublished manuscripts and letters to and from Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland together with photographs, drawings and other personal items of interest.' Roger Peers, the Museum's Curator and a close friend of Sylvia, facilitated this and on 27 June 1981 a ceremonial opening of the Archive Room took place. The Room was fitted with bookshelves and cabinets made by Septimus Waugh, son of Evelyn Waugh, and the wooden plaque on the door was made by Sylvia's friend, Reynolds Stone.

To an admirer of Sylvia, the opportunity to visit this archive seemed like an invitation to paradise. The reality surpassed even my wildest expectations. It was housed in a wonderfully quiet Room and contained incredible items from the lives of Sylvia and Valentine. Here were things like books from their library, pictures from the walls of their house in Frome Vauchurch, the Eric Gill drawing of Valentine, a coat of many colours made by Sylvia for Valentine, antiques from Valentine's shop, embroideries by John Craske, the blotter from Sylvia's desk, and even bizarre items such as Valentine's garden spade, a pair of Sylvia's shoes, and to crown it all, Sylvia's death mask. (The whereabouts of Valentine's death mask, if it ever existed, is still unknown. See Newsletter number 30.) And of course there is a huge collection of papers, music, notes, scrapbooks, photographs, typescripts and, most exciting of all, original letters and diaries.

Morine and I discussed the problems facing the administration of such an amazing resource. A noble volunteer had made a card index of all the items as they had arrived from the Frome Vauchurch house. Now it was time for the next phase - creating a computer database of all these items and their locations in the Room so that they could be quickly found by researchers. I volunteered to undertake this task and for one day a week for the next 5 years I immersed myself in the details of the lives of Sylvia and Valentine. The task was enormous. There were hundreds, possibly thousands, of letters to friends, all Sylvia's diaries, all the originals of the letters between Sylvia and Valentine, many of which were published in 'I'll Stand By You', some notes by Sylvia about her novels, reviews, press cuttings, musical pieces, books, Valentine's diaries,

recordings made by Valentine on her various tape recorders, dolls and collages made by Sylvia, photographs of Sylvia alone, Sylvia and Valentine together, their pets, their houses, their friends - all endlessly fascinating and all having to go separately on the database. But what better way could there be for an admirer of Sylvia to spend time? Surrounded by her papers and minutiae of her life it was the next best thing to meeting her in the flesh.

During my time there we had visits from several researchers, all of whom were greatly impressed by the accommodation for the Archive. In most university libraries archives such as this would be kept in a secure storage area and individual items would be brought out for researchers on request. It was unique for them to be able to sit in a room surrounded by the presence of Sylvia and Valentine and to see so much of their lives. All researchers into Sylvia and Valentine seem to be delightful people and it was a wonderful experience for me to have the opportunity to meet them and to help in any way that I could. One of the most frequent visitors was the Society's great friend, Mary Jacobs, who took great delight in unearthing all sorts of hitherto unrecognised gems.

In 2007 Susanna Pinney transferred the ownership of the Archive to the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society. By this time I had completed the database and the Archive continued to be visited by a growing number of researchers. An archive is not a sacred relic to remain unchanged; it should grow and expand, live and be used. We purchased the letters from Sylvia to Oliver Stonor and a collection of very early poems by Valentine which she had sent to Bo Foster. We also purchased CDs from *The New Yorker* of their entire archive with all of Sylvia's stories which they had published. Members contributed items, one of which is 'Azrael, song for mezzo-soprano and piano', STW's poem set to music by Jonathan David at the request of Jay Barksdale to commemorate the Society's 10th anniversary. Non-members used the Society's offices to offer letters and photographs which they found in their family possessions. The Monckton How letters from Sylvia to her niece Rachel Monckton How show a different side to Sylvia.

My first impression of the Archive was of a place of peace and tranquility, despite the fact that it contained items which should have been at war with each other, such as letters between Valentine and Elizabeth Wade White and Sylvia's diary entries during this crisis in their lives together. This sense of a tranquil environment continued for the 14 years that I worked there. But later there were less tranquil moments to come.

In 2015 plans were made for the expansion and redevelopment of parts of the County Museum. These involved redeveloping the area where the Archive was currently housed. Also, Morine and I felt it was time to retire from our work in the Archive. A suggestion was made that the Archive should be transferred to Exeter University Special Collections Library, which already houses a number of archives of writers associated with the south-west of England and has most recently received the Powys

Collection, formerly located in the Museum. However, the literary executors of Sylvia's estate made the decision, which was their right under the terms of the 2007 gift of the Archive to the Museum, that it must not be moved. In my opinion, this decision has had the unfortunate effect of stifling research into Sylvia and Valentine, as the Archive is now closed while redevelopment takes place and will remain closed for at least 5 years. We are assured that after this the Archive will be a major part of the Museum's resources once again but this long period of inaccessibility will, I feel, be damaging to Warner scholarship. Already, several potential researchers have had to be turned away. If the Archive had been transferred to Exeter, access could have continued without problem.

It is unlikely that the Archive in its original form will be revived. It will be very carefully conserved and protected in the new County Museum and I suspect it will probably be held in secure storage where researchers will have to request individual items, as in most university libraries. So the days of being able to work in a Room surrounded by memorabilia from the lives of Sylvia and Valentine are gone, never to return. I feel privileged that I was able to enjoy this wonderful experience for so many years.

[The views expressed in this article are mine alone, and do not in any way represent the views of the Newsletter Editor, the Committee, the STW Society or the County Museum]

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The Lesson

When my cat calls me, he calls because he has something to say;
An observation, exclamation, a word
Of surprise, or praise.
He has only one other reason for his cries, and this I recognize
Because he speaks then in a gentler way,
As if he prefaced his appeal with, 'Lord,
I must if I may';
And then he leaps from ground to shoulder height and so,
Hastily, on to my breast:
There to be held and smoothed until - eyes shut, head low,
Laid on my arm - he can empty himself of love, and rest.
This is the way his life travels, the way his heart must go:
I watch him and wonder how, for so long a time, I did not know.

Valentine Ackland
The Countryman, XLV/2, Summer 1952

In Newsletter 32 there are two uncollected poems by Sylvia from
The New Yorker. Below are two more, and, I think, the last such.

16 November 1940

London Suburb

In Telfer Road and Harlech Road
The trees toss, the roofs are unmoved.
Each rooftop owns two trees or more;
The roofs are red and the trees are sere.
All night the trees will toss and rave
And men sleep quiet under a roof.
When the pale morning grieves
They will come out to sweep up the leaves.

In Harlech Road and Telfer Road
The trees snap, the roofs are shattered.
From swaying rafters scud the bricks
In nineteen-forty's equinox.
A red tile from the bank clerk's roof
Is bedded with the teacher's wife.
When the all-clear is said
They will come out to pick up the dead.

6 April 1940

Point of View

Sexton, you have buried many a rare,
Many a fair.
Say now which of those on whom you've scattered
Dry or spattered
Rainy clods it grieved you most to put
Underfoot?

Fair and rare, said he, and dusk and dun,
Death makes one.
Coffins, though, go quick into the grave;
Often I have
Grieved such briefly honored skill to put
Underfoot.

Judith Bond sends us this review from *The Spectator*, 7 June 2006

A Meeting of True Minds – Anita Brookner

The Element of Lavishness: Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner and William Maxwell, 1938-1978 edited by Michael Steinman

These letters record a friendship that proceeded, unmarred, for 40 years. It began as a simple transaction; in 1938 Sylvia Townsend Warner, as a dare, submitted a short story to *The New Yorker*. Her editor was William Maxwell. They proved sympathetic to each other, so sympathetic, in fact, that 150 stories followed, and, more important, 1,300 letters, in which it is possible to distinguish real love, albeit of a rare and disembodied variety.

Their circumstances could not have been more different. Sylvia Townsend Warner, an immensely popular writer, now diminished by the fate that awaits all once popular writers, lived in Dorset with her female companion Valentine Ackland, while Maxwell was a contentedly married man with two children. In time they were to visit one another, but the essence of their close association is contained in their letters, exuberant and expansive on her side, serious and attentive on his. As the association progressed they became extraordinarily intimate, so much so that each was familiar with the other's cast of characters. In many ways they were indispensable to each other. As Warner was to write, 'Do you know, I don't believe I could write at all if it were not that I had you for a reader. I might toy with ideas but I wouldn't write them down.' Write them down she did, and he responded with full-hearted appreciation and the kind of praise that all writers crave. It is clear that this was a meeting of true minds, despite the fact that it was Maxwell's task to edit other writers of the calibre of John Cheever, Mary McCarthy, J. D. Salinger, Mavis Gallant, and Vladimir Nabokov, all of whom graced the pages of *The New Yorker* in those legendary days.

It is possible that Maxwell, author of that perennially endearing novel, *The Château*, was the superior writer. He possesses a tact which Warner lacks, a loving prudence which it was her joy to entertain and to overwhelm. As their initial formality softens she regales him with village activities, the behaviour of her cats, and records of her formidable reading: she was an extraordinarily well-educated woman. His is a more ruminative nature: he seeks his pleasures in nature — there are many beautiful passages of description — and in work, his office at *The New Yorker*, his desk drawer which could be pulled out for a footstool, and the associations to which he remained faithful. Even when he is obliged to tell her that one of her stories does not quite hold together it is done with the utmost delicacy and accompanied by such lavish exchange, and marked by such genuine feeling, that one senses their pleasure in each other. Could such an association between writer and editor be sustained today? Hardly. There has been a decline in quality on both sides, and it is almost impossible to imagine such urbanity, such heartfelt good manners in the transaction.

They write at length and without constraint, of their excursions, their travels, their reading — and what reading! Pusey, Keble, Goethe, Chateaubriand, Proust, Byron — another trajectory impossible to replicate today. And their sunny affection seems quite unimpaired, so much so that one notices with sadness the advent of loss and its effect on the writing. After Ackland's death the energy slowly leaves Warner's letters, while Maxwell's replies become shorter, dreamier. From being exuberant and mischievous, indulgent towards quirks and foibles, Warner embarks on a form of mysticism that is the most striking characteristic of her late fairy or faery stories, while Maxwell is reclaimed by the solid realism of his own novels. There is a genuine and terrible sense of forthcoming departure, as there must be when one true friend senses separation from the other.

The connection continued after Maxwell retired from *The New Yorker* at the age of 67 and handed Warner over to his successor. At the same time, and inevitably, he became more absorbed in his own writing, while continuing, with the utmost courtesy, to express admiration for her late stories. She, on her side, becomes more abstracted. She is still capable of rising to the odd striking sentence: 'When I look back on my youth I see it glittering with maniacs.' Yet there is no autobiography, and certainly no nostalgia. He plans a visit which does not take place; she on her side is philosophical, almost relieved. There is a sense of an ending, although she trusts him to oversee an edition of her letters. (A work of commendation here for Michael Steinman, whose own edition of these letters is admirably self-effacing). Warner never lets go of her vision of herself as a writer, expresses no regrets, even [ever?] remains faithful to her calling. Here are two lives of remarkable consistency, consistent both in pleasure and in duty. There is no evidence, in these letters at least, that either of them ever wasted a single day.

John Updike once said that the best way to review a book would be to quote it in its entirety. That is what one is tempted to do here. What is surprising, and rather marvellous, is their sense of contentment, their resolute optimism, even when confronted with the follies of governments, or rather of Maxwell's government, for these were years which encompassed both Kennedy assassinations and Watergate. Warner, largely indifferent to the outside world, prefers to remain immersed in her garden, her cats and her writing. Maxwell delicately discerns that she is in decline, offers financial assistance should it be needed, makes arrangements for a visit which did take place, but not before Warner died, in 1978, aged 85. Maxwell himself died in 2000, at the age of 92.

Reading this volume one wishes one had known these two correspondents and had participated in their extraordinary good nature, and above all their loyalty. These qualities finally seem more important than their collected works, though they might not have thought so. Their legacy, as set out in these letters, is considerable, an object lesson in virtue from which all can benefit.

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Country Workers and Country Living

Sylvia Townsend Warner

SHARPEN THE SICKEL ! By *Reg Groves* (Porcupine, 12s 6d) tells how English agricultural workers won themselves a trade union. It is a vexed and gusty story, full of thwarted valour and bitter defeats – and not yet, one may think, ended, while farm labourers are tied to the land, as the serf was. The evils of the past are always easier to discern than those of the present; and this may account for a certain complacency in the final chapters. For the rest, the book is informative and succinct, though a few more dates would make it clearer reading.

How a former man-servant came back from the Crimea wearing his Sebastopol medal, kissed the cook, and said that 'nothing could have been worse than the generalship and that Lord Raglan was no commander'; how a Low Church bishop was used for a High Church purpose; how 'during the sermon a woman clothed in scarlet glided in, took a seat, and before the blessing glided out again', and was afterwards identified as 'an insane person belonging to Cromer, who gives out that she is the Holy Ghost', can be read in *A NORFOLK DIARY* (Harrap, 12s 6d). The diarist was the *Reverend Benjamin J. Armstrong*, vicar of East Dereham from 1850 to 1888. It is a book to keep on the same shelf with Trollope.

In *THE GORSE GLEN* (Brython, 8s 6d) *Hugh Evans* writes of the old deep Wales with the sureness that comes of hereditary acquaintance – so much so that one might think he had himself known the days of which his fathers have told him. Though unassumingly written, this is a very well-founded book; and a humane one. It is illustrated with drawings of bygone implements of husbandry, and reproductions of old bills and farm documents. It is significant that this is a translation from the Welsh.

Welsh-English – that stately dialect – is the feature of *E. Moore Darling's* *NATHAN THE VERGER* (Littlebury, 8s 6d). Nathan speaks with the shrewdness common to all village 'characters', but with a Celtic fervour to boot. 'Round the field did the forked lightning fly, following the line of haycocks, and then on to the second ring, ending with a ball of fire at the last haycock in the middle of the field.'

In *PASTURES NEW* (Laurie, 9s 6s), *Prynne Hutton* tells how she and her husband, having made themselves a home from two unpromising cottages, went on to make two contented cottagers from themselves. Besides mastering the problems of hens, goats, pigs and cows, the author learned how to agree with village neighbours – perhaps a more difficult achievement.

'It is nonsense to say that Shakespeare is spoilt by being read and acted at school; he is the only thing worth going to school for.' This comes from *Anne Treneer's* *CORNISH YEATS* (Cape, 12s 6d), an open-hearted piece of autobiography, full of animation and adventurous sensibility to literature and nature.

Margaret Leigh's 'Harvest of the Moor' – just republished by Westaway at half a guinea – and 'Highland Homespun' must have made many readers feel that an all-out wrestling-match with Mother Earth may be the most satisfying experience life can offer.

In *SPADE AMONG THE RUSHES* (Phoenix, 12s 6d), with coloured drawings by Myfanwy Roberts, she describes her experiences as a crofter in the remote western Highlands, with the same candour and eloquence, and the same persuasiveness.

Cape publishes thirty-one *SELECTED STORIES* by *Malachi Whitaker* (9s 6d), mostly of the provincial north of England. His writing has the fine sharpness of the imprint of a wren's foot. In two other volumes of short stories, *Neil Bell's* *TEN SHORT STORIES* (Golden Galley, 3s 6d) and *Margiad Evan's* *THE OLD AND THE YOUNG* (Drummond, 8s 6d), the *raison d'être* of the medium is mostly lost in the pursuit of 'arresting' prose; but in the last of his ten Neil Bell makes a solid narrative out of a touch-and-go theme.

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Peter Scupham on Sylvia's Poetry

During the Weekend of 2014 some of us enjoyed a visit to the home of members Margaret Steward and Peter Scupham. They were easy and gracious hosts, and Old Hall, South Burlingham is a delicious place, full of history and beautiful things. Over tea and scones, Mr Scupham read two of Sylvia's poems and talked about them, and her. He has also written about her and her poetry in the May-June 2000 issue of *PN Review* (Manchester), from which come these two excerpts:

"...The poem which heads this article [*People whom I never knew / In the house below the hill*] was occasioned by a Reynolds Stone engraving, part of a sequence, *Boxwood*, originally published in 1957 – and Sylvia was born in 1893. It is a sequence I am particularly fond of, inhabited by an owl whose

...quiet feathers
Sit duteously around him
Like good scholars

and by Dr Johnson's cat, listening to Johnson pray:

O Jesu pie, salvum me fac!
Whether that same Jesu heard him or no,
My ears attended to his woe.

Though these poems are avowedly written to order, they reveal, as does everything she wrote, an unillusioned way of seeing, feeling, and thinking demonstrated in plain style – her poetic vocabulary never mines the more outré veins of the dictionary – her deceptive simplicities and occasional archaisms made enticing by a sure and strange fitness of cadence. She was herself executant, composer and musicologist. Her concerns, ostensibly rural, haunted, balladic, were never modified to suit the exigencies of passing fashion; the literary assaults of the century no more modified her concept of how her

poems should comport themselves when they went out into the world than they did the work of such writers as Robert Graves, Ruth Pitter or Stevie Smith. She remained essentially faithful to the programme set out in about 1930 and quoted by Claire Harman, in which she expressed her distaste of poems which 'express soul-states', are 'verbally rich' and 'go on for a long time'. These attractive strictures are set against a preference for poems which, inter alia, are 'formally tight in thought and construction', 'look neat', 'use few images', and 'mention death'. Ah, death, that hunter hunted in poem after poem of hers and Stevie Smith's. The programme has an air of the faux-naif, but Sylvia, daughter of a distinguished Housemaster and teacher of history at Harrow, was anything but that. Complex people like to tease themselves with simple prescripts; trail their coats with a rustic air....

.....Her places, those houses and gardens have an especial hold on my imagination. Perhaps the ruins and vanishings to be found in her poems have a greater desolation now, when so much of the physicality of rural living has changed out of recognition. Sexton, parson, gipsy, haymaker...the dramatis personae have become a game of cherrystones, names from an old tale. It's a great strength, though, in Sylvia's writing that the physicality of the natural world is never far away; neither is the considering intelligence of the educated one – or a sly humour, as in that brief companionship in 'The Visit', where the ghost

...conversed

As one in England's decent topics versed –
Birds, beasts, the Royal Family, this and that;
But nothing told
Me of the dead, save that they feel the cold.

Birds, beasts, the Royal Family...I like it.

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Two Bibliographic Sightings

In the collections of the Beinecke Library at Yale University is GEN MSS 26, consisting of 79 letters from Sylvia to Belfast journalist Robin Perry, dating from 1942 to 1977.

“Among the many topics Warner discusses: her own writing; literature and other writers, including Irish writers W.B. Yeats and Forrest Reid; philosophy; travelling; architecture and landscapes; and post-war conditions and politics in England and Northern Ireland”.

YCAL MSS 28 consists of 131 letters to Sylvia (and a few to Valentine) from George Plank and 182 letters to him from her, from 1957 to 1962. George Wolfe Plank (1883-1963), illustrator, was a self-taught artist and from 1907-09 an editor and printer of *The Butterfly Quarterly*, published in Philadelphia. In 1916 he moved to England, becoming a British citizen in 1945. He supplied illustrations for *Vogue* and for books of friends, such as *The Freaks of Mayfair* (1916) by E. F. Benson and *Hedgehog* (1926) by H. D.