

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER THIRTY-SIX

AGM 2018 * Ursula Le Guin * Llewelyn Powys
Vivien Cripps * Leonard Woolf * *Genesis : Grasp* * J B Pinker
Jean Starr Untermeyer * Walter de la Mare * *The Akeing Heart*
letters * poems * appreciations and reviews

Thanks go to Mercedes Aguirre, Judith Bond, Kate Macdonald,
Linda Roberts and Judith Stinton for contributing to this issue.
Future contributions, suggestions and corrections are always welcome.

The position of Hon. Secretary is vacant. We hope all members will consider
volunteering to fill it. If so, please contact any of the officers.

If you haven't paid your dues for 2018, please send them to Jenny Wildblood.

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The **Annual General Meeting** of the Society will be on Saturday May 12 at 11.15 am,
at the Dorset County Library, Dorchester. After that and a light lunch, we will visit,
if there are enough automobiles, the Chaldon graveyard. Dinner will be at a
to-be-announced restaurant. Lunch at the always enjoyable Sailor's Return on Sunday
will conclude the festivities. If you plan to attend the Meeting and any of the associated
events, please contact our Events Organiser, Richard Searle, at 0771 285 7704 -
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While researching the writer Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Valentine Ackland
the poet, I discovered that they are buried together in the churchyard at Chaldon Herring
(East Chaldon). On their gravestone are the words 'non omnis moriar' which translates
as 'I shall not wholly die'.

It struck me that this is why I volunteer at Dorset County Museum; to keep the
memories of those talented individuals who make up Dorset's rich cultural history.
With Jon Murden's approval I have had these words placed at the top of the staircase in
Old School. Each time I climb the stairs to Fine Arts, I am reminded of what I am there
to do. Please take a look next time you are volunteering.

Linda Roberts



Haring Judd

The Akeing Heart

Letters between Sylvia Townsend Warner,
Valentine Ackland and Elizabeth Wade White

The Akeing Heart : Letters Between Sylvia Townsend Warner, Valentine Ackland and Elizabeth Wade White

Peter Haring Judd
(2018, Handheld Press)

Kate Macdonald
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When Peter Haring Judd self-published *The Akeing Heart* in 2013, he sent an email about it to Vulpes Libris, an online book reviewing collective, and I asked for a copy. The book was a revelation to me. I knew Warner's letters and diaries fairly well, and of course I recalled the existence of Elizabeth Wade White from Claire Harman's biography, but Peter's careful selection of the correspondence found in his late godmother's house was both a very good book, and a literary discovery of the first order. But it wasn't an excellent book, because it could, I thought, have been better edited, and the subtitle was pretty hopeless as it didn't even mention the names of the four women whose passions throb so powerfully through their letters. I reviewed the book enthusiastically on Vulpes Libris, and recommended that a publisher bring it out properly. Peter and I exchanged emails, and that was it.

Scroll forward four years. I was about to leave academia to return to my first career in publishing, and I was thinking about the books that I wanted to reprint with my new company, Handheld Press. *The Akeing Heart* was at the top of my list, but I was doubtful that it would still be available. Surely a publisher must have picked it up by now? Apparently not. Peter and I exchanged more emails, and a contract, he sent the images and the text, and I got down to editing. This took quite a bit longer than I anticipated, because I had to extract the digital text I'd been given from its very odd formatting, and correct it to restore it to the print copy I still owned. Then I edited away much of Peter's introductory material that prefaced each of the many sub-sections in the chapters, and got rid of many of his quotations, leaving the letters to speak for themselves. I verified references, overhauled the endnotes, redid the index, culled some of the photographs, and then left my designer, Nadja Guggi from Messrs Dash + Dare to wrestle with designing the book a new layout. This was the first really complex book that we've done, and what with Christmas and illness and selling a house, the process took about three months longer than anticipated.

But what a book! My favourite elements in it are Valentine's extraordinary modernist poem to Elizabeth, typed to be read in four directions, Sylvia's peremptory

telegrams to Elizabeth to bring her back to England, the raging passion in Valentine's letter to Evelyn demanding that she declare her intentions towards Elizabeth (so Victorian), and Evelyn's cool, modern refusal to do any such thing. Some of Sylvia's letters to Evelyn about the ridiculousness of wartime had me in hoots of laughter, and also mopping up a few tears: her remarks on caring for her mother in dementia are so true and so painful. As John Mitchinson from *Unbound* and the *Backlisted* podcast has already said, the book looks terrific.

Early interest from the STW and LGBT communities has been keen, and copies have already been sent to the US to fulfil discerning private pre-orders. *The Akeing Heart* will be published in hardback on 26 March 2018, and we hope that sales will justify a paperback edition in time for Christmas.

Kate Macdonald is a literary historian interested in British 19th, 20th and 21st-century literature and publishing. Her most recent blog at katemacdonald.net is on H.G. Wells, but an easily done search for Sylvia will render *The Corner That Held Them*, *Lolly Willowes* and our own Judith Stinton's *Chaldon Herring*. (JB)

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We note with sadness the death of **Ursula Le Guin**, long a member of the Society, regular contributor to *The Guardian*, and renowned author. She was a science-fiction trailblazer, and her honors numerous. In an appreciation in *The Guardian* (25 January 2018) David Mitchell (*Cloud Atlas*, *The Bone Clocks*) writes that though they met but once, her intelligence and graciousness convinced him "the gold was genuine". They talked of writing, their families and why cats are like dragons. Sylvia would have enjoyed that, and perhaps she and Le Guin did speak of cats when they met, also just once, in 1976. In Newsletter Number Nine Le Guin describes Sylvia as "old, and tired, and reserved, and kind, and keen as a splinter of diamond". For the influence of Sylvia's short poem, *The Sleeping Beauty* woke..., on her own work, see Le Guin's essay *The Wilderness Within* (*The Wave in the Mind* Shambala 2004).

The Sleeping Beauty woke:
The spit began to turn,
The woodman cleared the brake,
The gardener mowed the lawn.
Woe's me! And must one kiss
Revoke the silent house, the bird-song wilderness?

Genesis : Grasp – contributions from STW and VA

Genesis : Grasp was a quarterly magazine of American poetry (1968-1972) founded by Richard Meyers, later better-known as the punk rock musician Richard Hell. There were five issues, of which Sylvia and Valentine contributed to the first and third. One wonders how the connection from Dorset to New York's lower east side came about.

from volume one, number one, 1968

King Duffus

(*New Collected Poems* page 316, *Collected Poems* p 241, *Selected Poems* p 64)

In G:G, the penultimate and ante-penultimate lines read

"Why did you summon me back to a smoky hall
And a vexed kingdom from the midst of that meal?"

The Raven

(NCP 289 as ...As rivers through the plain, in *Twelve Poems in the Manner of Bewick*; untitled also in CP 246)

...The infant's hand is raised in wrath

(NCP 299 as 3 in *Fiat Pilula. Mitte 18. it.d.s.*; CP 249 as iii of [Four Poems])

...The Sleeping Beauty woke

(NCP 300 as 9 in *Fiat Pilula. Mitte 18. it.d.s.*; CP 249 as iv of [Four Poems])

In G:G, the poem is titled, and also, as in CP, line 3 reads 'woodmen'.

from volume one, number three, 1969

Sylvia's translation of Baudelaire's *Le Gouffre*

(*Journal* 2016 pp 20-23)

Valentine's poem **...Into this brief and angry place**

(*Journey from Winter* 191)

This uncollected poem by Valentine

Reflections at the Telephone

There's a Monk and a Mouse in every man:
A Mouse
Who only comes out when all's quiet in the house,
But when all is lost and his heart's treasure sunk
A Monk takes over the man.

Two Letters from Llewelyn Powys

1935 – Chydyok, Chaldon Herring

My two darling Children, – ...I am so very charmed by your head [a photograph of the death-mask of Akhenaton-Gar], night and day I admire it and of course it wins me to especial moods of twilight delights because it is remarkably like your own beautiful heads. Swans are of course the birds of Apollo. He was once a swan herd and Daphne a goose girl and they played music to each other across the meadow, he on the flute he stole from Marsyas and she on a horseshoe stringed with a wild otter's sinews.

It was very generous of you to send grapes. Alyse will enjoy them, they are not sweet enough for me. There is no fruit that English people are so fooled over. They should never be bought unless first tasted. All shop keepers cheat over grapes. They have a false value as symbols of conspicuous waste on the side-board of the bourgeoisie. They are seldom judged on their own merits. Often in this country the cheapest tub grapes packed in sawdust are the best. No child of Dionysos should consider a *sour* grape! They should be as sweet as sugar-cane or honey. . . It is wrong even to circulate these bitter globes, they suggest the thin lips of those who curdle life.

It is sad to me that so civilized a race as the French should be so cowardly and crafty. If they had come in strong and hearty this roguery could have been ended without a war and the League of Nations been made strong enough to ensure peace for a time and point to the way of rational settlements, and now see these bloody frog-eaters are going to play the _____. Your loving dying, but NOT YET DEAD

Lulu

1936

My dear Valentine, – I am returning the New Review which we all read with greatest interest... I was enchanted with the *Devil in the Flesh*. It seemed to me to be a tale purged of sentiment in that particular Gallic way that is so refreshing, as though this young springal had been born with the knack of life that comes with an essential detachment – wiser in babyhood than we poor Anglo-Saxons after fifty years! It is natural also. And how lovely that cry 'I would rather be unhappy with you than happy with him.' My reaction to Ernest Hemingway's *World's Masterpiece* was different. I shall never be able to understand the prevailing cult for this man's work. He seems to me to have an essentially commonplace mind and a commonplace sensibility. I cannot admire his facility for exhibiting his rude facetious reactions. He seems to me an utterly valueless writer – an ephemeral and unpleasant projection out of the waste land of the modern cocktail party world! His half ironical, blatant way of addressing the reader strikes me as silly and impertinent. God, I think he is a crude chap, a conceited, cock-sure, hard boiled regular b___!

How sweet you both were to come up last night, Sylvia so gracious to me, bringing that Apothecaries rose which it is my delight to know about and carrying such happy rumours of larks singing on the ground. It was a very dainty experience to have

her sit at the end of my bed – *for a moment* my fancy God-mother!

The wine nobody will allow me to drink yet. They all cry me down when I think of it. The beans were excellent. I eat them with relish, little grey gaberdines and all. The medicine I have found very useful. You certainly did look after me. I thought myself fortunate to have two such bewitched and be-witching maids walk over the green hill to my bedside. I thank you so much. I am getting better. We slept in the shelter last night but I found all had changed, the blackberries out and all overgrown. – Yours
LLEWELYN

The Letters of Llewelyn Powys

London John Lane The Bodley Head 1943

Country Diary

East Chaldon, Dorset – *The Guardian* – 19/2/18

A row of round barrows stud a Dorset ridge – five of them, although tumbled gaps suggest there were once more. From the old chalk trackway, trails lead through shaggy grass to the top of each. To the north, charcoal and dun in the wintry light, stretches a broad swathe of heathland; to the south, gentle green hills enclose the village of East Chaldon.

In the 1930s, the walk up to this bronze age site was a favourite with Sylvia Townsend Warner, her long career as a writer already launched. Her diary records a happy morning when she and her lover, the poet Valentine Ackland, lay on top of one of the barrows listening to the wind and discussing torpedoes. Today, there's no hint of things military, only a fly-past by two ravens whose cries sound more conversational than martial.

The light will soon fade, so we go south down the Drove road, passing the Sailor's Return, the hub of a buzzing colony of writers and artists between the wars.

Around the triangular village green, the cottages are quiet, closed in on themselves, perhaps fed up with literary tourists, perhaps just waiting for winter to end. One used to be the post office. There are no shops here now.

On a hillside, past banks starred with primroses, is the 14th century church. A swarm of rooks, cawing crossly, takes off from a tree, circles and lands again as we reach a modest stone building, formerly the school, now the village hall. Beside it, a path leads straight as an arrow through the churchyard to the church door. In the turf on either side are wavering lines of gravestones, some upright and unblemished – like the pub, this place at least retains its former use – others battered and angled, gloriously daubed with lichen, brown, ochre and cream.

But the stone that we're searching for is behind the church. We find it by a ragged hedgerow in the south-west corner. It lies flat in the rough grass, facing the sky, just as the two women whose names it bears once lay at the Five Marys, that older burial ground up on the ridge.

Vivien Cripps

The Breadwinners

(from the Spanish of Antonio Agraz)

Who will plough the field, mother,
when the swordsman wind comes down,
cutting through the tattered coat
and the shabby gown?

Whosoever that shall plough, child.
Whoso goes to plough: the plougher.

Who will sow the field, mother,
when the watchman wind goes round,
wrapped in fog goes round about
with a wheedling sound?

Whosoever that shall sow, child.
Whoso casts the seed: the sower.

Who will weed the field, mother,
when the break-clod shoot is seen,
stabbing through the wrap of earth
with a needle of green?

Who will pull the weeds and tares, child?
Whoso cleans the crop: the hoer.

Who will reap and reap the corn,
till the thirsty ground is wet
underneath the thirsty sun
with a raining sweat?

Who will reap and bind the sheaves?
Whoso reaps the corn: the reaper.
Who will drive about the ox
on the threshing-floor? The thresher.
Who will grind the rustling grain
into wheaten flour? The miller.
Who will turn the loaves within
the oven's fiery mouth? The baker.

Who will eat the bread, mother?
Whisht, my child! Some one or other.

Sylvia Townsend Warner
The Countryman July 1938

Romances, or ballads, were very popular during the first two years of the Spanish Civil War. These poems were printed in newsletters distributed in the frontlines and also appeared in political periodicals of both sides, including Rafael Alberti's revolutionary magazine *El Mono Azul* (*The Blue Overalls*). The first anthology of war romances, *Romancero de la guerra civil*, was printed as early as 1936. Warner translated several of these romances, some of which were collected in *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse*. A selective bibliography of the Spanish *romanceros* published during the war can be found in *Poesía de la Guerra Civil española* (Madrid: Akal, 1994).

Mercedes Aguirre

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Four Letters from Leonard Woolf

(Monk's House / Rodmell, Lewes, Sussex)

5/12/60

Dearest Sylvia,

Your letters are always the nicest in my post, and you are one of the rare people who thank when it is they who should be thanked. Certainly it is I who ought to thank you in every way, simply for coming here and the pleasure it was to see you here and then for your talk which was in every way superb and delighted everyone.

Yours / Leonard

She had spoken to the Monday Literary Club, a distinguished Lewes literary institution of which Woolf was President from 1954 until 1969.

25/7/63

Dear Sylvia,

Your letter gave me real comfort and pleasure and I had heard from Trekkie that your cat had died at the same time as Troy. What you say about being admitted into a cat's world is true. I have kept many different kinds of animals besides cats and dogs. Each after its kind has its own different kind of world, the dog's differing from the cat's and the cat's from the monkey's and so on. They will all, except the horse, I find, admit you into their world if you go about it the right way and I have never felt any reason for not having an affection for, say, dogs because one has it for cats and so on. But I have never known any animal like Troy.

Leonard

Troy was a Siamese cat of which Woolf was deeply fond. Warner had written: "It is the property of cats... that they admit one into their godless Saturnine Eden. And when they die, we are cast out of it."

4/9/64

My dear Sylvia,

It is always a delight to get a letter from you for it always contains what could only come from you. I approve of the Mormons' crazy logic, for after all if you believe in Mormonism, baptism, and an afterlife, why not baptise the dead into Mormonism back to Adam? It is unbelievable what the human race can believe. I don't know whether you have ever been to church – I go occasionally to a funeral when some Rodmell villager dies, and really what the Mormons believe is chickenfeed for the gullible compared with what the parson tells us to believe on the authority of savage Semitic tribesmen who wandered about Mount Sinai 3000 years ago and of a Greaculus esuriens called Paul who had some kind of an epileptic seizure 1900 years ago.

I read the following in bed this morning before I got up; it seems to me to have that strange touch of subterranean wisdom which goes with all real humor. In America school children have to write a criticism of books which they use in class. A small girl, in a low class, wrote: "This book tells me more about penguins than I care to know."

Yours / Leonard

She had written: "The Probate Office – so I was told yesterday – is constantly invoked by Mormons who want to trace English forebearers.. . in order to have them baptised as Mormons."

5/4/64

Dear Sylvia,

You always write the nicest of letters, being one of the nicest of persons – not that that is at all a common collocation. Your letter gave me a great deal of pleasure. If I had stayed in Ceylon, I should never have know you.

Today for the first time for 9 days the sun has shone upon the garden. Why does one live in an east wind under a grey sky; I can only murmur to myself from time to time Ben Jonson's complaint about an even more gloomy side of life, which at least one escapes in the east wind of Rodmell: "What a deal of cold business doth a man mispend the better part of life in; in scattering compliments, tendering visits, gathering and venting news, following feasts and plays, making a little winter-love in a dark corner."

Yours ever / Leonard

Having just read *Growing* for a second time, she had written, "I must not be sorry that in May 1911 you sailed for England. If you had not done so I should not have had *Growing* to re-read – reason enough."

Letters of Leonard Woolf
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1989

Walter de la Mare

In the previous newsletter, number thirty-five [Did you receive your copy? Please let me know if you did not.], there were some bits about Walter de la Mare. I'm happy to write there is more in your library, which perhaps, like me, you had not recollected. It is in Peter Tolhurst's splendid collection of Sylvia's prose, *With the Hunted*. Her review of de la Mare's collection from 1954, *O Lovely England* begins...

"A couple of hours ago, I mentioned during a telephone conversation that I had been asked to write about Walter de la Mare. At the end of the line, nothing happened. I waited, and a cautious voice crept out, saying, 'I remember a poem about a cat.' 'There is a poem in his new book,' I continued, 'about bindweed climbing over an old cannon and its dark mouth of woe.'

'Oh!'

It was the same note of ravished acceptance that I first heard forty or more years ago, when the readers of contemporary poetry in my generation were quoting from *The Listeners*, and *Motley*, *Peacock Pie* and *The Veil* – and a note remarkably similar to the Oh! uttered by people who look through a diminishing-glass and see the quiddity of an ivy-leaf or a coffee-cup or a shelf of folios..."

An Old Cannon

Come, patient rust;
Come, spider with thy loom,
Make of this enginery,
War's dateless tomb!

Frail bindweed, clamer, and cling,
And clog this motionless wheel;
Upon its once hot throat
Hoar-frost, congeal!

O, may its thunder have won
A last surcease,
And its dark mouth of woe
Ever yet hollower grow
In praise of peace!

Jean Starr Untermeyer

To Sylvia
(S.T.W.)

Who is Sylvia that she can see
The heart of winter gleaming
Blue in chemic ice,
That blocked our steps divining Spring –
Oh, can she have passed all seeming
To the heart of Verity?

Sylvia flies as Sylvia loves
For love is born of flying.
Faith feathered twice
The wings that soar so she might sing
The earth, unafraid of dying,
The song that only singing proves.

Jean Starr Untermeyer
Winged Child Viking 1936

In this same collection are *At Chydyok*, *Prayer on High Chaldon*, and *The Bee in the Bathroom* (for fun and for Valentine).

In the Biography, Harman writes that Untermeyer “had no reservations in her admiration of Sylvia and Valentine, and included some interesting observations of them made in the summer of 1934 in her book, *Private Collection* [Knopf 1965]”. Indeed she did, as well as of George Plank, Siegfried Sassoon, the Sitwells and many a Powys. In the chapter *Leaves from a Dorset Diary*, she also includes this letter from Sylvia, of May 1, 1937.

Dearest Jean:

... We also went over a good rich specimen of the deserted house. There was a queer old man, gentleman-farmer, called Cuddon Fletcher, who lived near Winterton till about four years ago. He was over eighty, and had a spade beard and a violent temper and used to drive about in a dog cart with a shawl around his neck. He left the house to a rather riff-raff elderly man, who had no desire to live in the Norfolk fens among the family remains, so the house has stood empty all this time. A Winterton girl, a white-faced red-gold-haired creature with a sharp nose and brilliant grey eyes like pebbles that the tide has just left, and a snarling barking Norfolk voice, who lives in sin with a very engaging suave rogue of a postman and has a most beautiful small boy by him, is caretaker of the house; and it was through her that we went over it.

It is an ugly house, with two vast Victorian bay windows, looking out on a vague lawn, and a couple of yewtrees and a sycamore. We went over it one afternoon, when it

was already growing dusk. The grand part of the house is the purest Victorian. The drawing room has one of those mushroom shaped seats where you sit tangentially to your neighbor and are called sociables (the seats are), lovely buhl tables with very large oriental china urns and coffers, and a complete series of family portraits, done in coloured chalks, about 1850, representing the plainest-headed family you ever set eyes on. We went round peering at them with an electric torch, pulling down books from the shelves, fingering the curtains and sofa covers. The two rooms of state are in good order, the rats have not really got at them yet; but all the rest of the house is a rat's paradise. There are dozens of small poky bedrooms, with desolate marble-topped wash-stands holding one tooth tumbler and a chipped basin, maybe: tall wardrobes and presses, stuffed full of mouldering clothes (“There's three funeral hats in there,” the rogue postman said in his gloating and half-mocking voice), more portraits, four-poster beds with ghostly limp curtains dangling from them.

“This is where old Mrs. Fletcher died. He never had the room opened again. The bed was just as she got out of it (had a stroke on the floor) till the rats pulled it to pieces.” And there was the bed, its great feather mattress torn open, the matted feathers bleeding out, rats' dung all among them.

Then we explored the cellars and the pantries. Lovely cellars, much older than the house, empty, draped in spider webs like black crape: a gunroom with the guns still there, and about two dozen pairs of mildewed boots on a rack. From the cellars we went up an incredibly steep narrow and twisted stair to the attics, which had been kept as the most macabre gobbet and bonne bouche. Eva went before with a candle, we followed and Claude came after, holding the child. It was extraordinarily moving to hear the child's delighted crowing laughter on those eldritch stairs, which would have daunted any heart.

As for the attics, there was dereliction unparalleled. Ruined beds, broken walls, dangling ceilings, rat-holes everywhere. And in the furthest attic, heaven knows how it had even been got up those stairs, a gigantic Empire daybed for two. Exceedingly beautiful, and long past saving.

What supplied the best, the grimmest, touch to this devilish house was its religious atmosphere. The Fletchers were raging Roman Catholics; in every room there were religious pictures, nineteenth century steel engravings of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, rolling their eyes and fingering their horrid little pincushion hearts; or broken Immaculate Conceptions, simpering on though the rats had fouled their white nightgowns; or little gimcrack grottoes in gold paper, with dust-coloured bouquets of cotton artificial flowers. Finally in the last pantry of all, amid a heap of chewed-up numbers of the *Veterinary Journal* we found a Synoptic Table of the Popes. Every single pope, legendary or authenticated, from the year A.D., his holy head in a little round, arranged in columns of sixteen all the way down an enormous sheet of paper, looking like some fantastic polka-dotted wall paper.

I can't tell you how romantic it was in this vile house, this rat-ridden fortress of religion and respectable living, with all its good gear, left heartlessly to waste, to see this disgraceful young couple, comely both of them, with their beautiful unabashed bastard

child. I have never seen a finer example of love among the ruins. Gay, cynical, full of fierce life, concerned only with the rats, and not much disturbed by them, they strolled uncorrupted through this house of corruption as careless as two foxes who might have jumped in through a broken window, hauling their cub after them by the scruff of its neck.

And so I send you them as my new year's present.

My love always, and Valentine's with it,
Sylvia

Private Collection contains another letter, about Gluck and singing, which is in *Letters*, 25:vii:1934, but without this preceding paragraph:

... From this is a natural transition, of course, to your singing! But seriously, I am so glad you are singing again. If one sings long enough one will spring too, no doubt of it. And I wish you the greenest leaves, the earliest windflowers, daffodils that come before the swallow dares.

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The literary agency of **J. B. Pinker and Sons** represented the cream of the British literary establishment, with clients including Joseph Conrad, Henry James, H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, T.S. Eliot, and James Joyce. Below are five brief post cards from Sylvia, held in the Berg Collection at The New York Public Library. All are sent from Frankfort Manor, save the last, from Maiden Newton, and all signed Yours sincerely.

21.viii.1933 (typed)

Dear Mr. Pinker

I am sending you another story, which I hope you may find easier to market. In England. It has already been published in an American magazine, which accounts for all the erasures of anything to do with drink or religion – neither subjects, as my American editor told me, that could be mentioned with safety to readers of any popular American journal.

But I suppose we are still slightly stronger-stomached, so I will ask you to handle it with all the original indiscretion.

24.ix.1933 (written)

Dear Mr. Pinker

Thank you so much for selling those two poems for me.

I am sending you two more... It seems, somehow, a poor return for your good actions.

7.xi.1933 (typed)

Dear Mr. Pinker

Thank you so much for disposing of The Drumming Girl. I now send you another qualified pot-boiler, which might, perhaps, stand a chance with *The Evening Standard*.

I am afraid you are having a dull time with me. It is very good of you to persevere.

19.ii.1934 (typed)

Dear Mr. Pinker

If they are available, would you very kindly let me have two stories, which are with you – Good-Morning, Sweep, and The Daughter of Zion?

29.ii.1940 (typed – this, a brief letter)

Dear Mr. Pinker,

Thank you for your letter.

I am afraid there are certain difficulties about the JBC proposal to broadcast The Sailor [*The Espalier*]. The poem has become too much of an anthology hack, and I have now been obliged to make it a rule to ask people who want it if they will make another choice. As the JBC suggest cutting it any how, which seems to me a bad plan, I wish you would ask them to choose some other thing of mine.

As an agent you well realise that it does an author no good to become known by one item only. Perhaps you could explain this to the JBC.

p.s. If it a question of recording, the B.B.C. have records of other poems besides The Sailor. I read them for the Western Regional in January 1939.

* * * * *

The Men In The Mountains

AND BLACKTHORNS, by Jim Phelan *Nicholson and Watson, 8s. 6d.*

Reviewed by Sylvia Townsend Warner

There is a kick left in the wisdom of our ancestors, and a novel that opens with a solitary traveller and leads him slap to a cross-roads, a group of men conferring there, and a wicked uncle, makes a beginning that will net the reader in one of two curiosities: what will happen next, or, how the author will handle it.

The solitary traveller in *And Blackthorns* is Arthur Curton, Irish-born, English-bred; and when he knocks the gun out of his uncle's hand he does it in the name of law and order. For he is a police officer to his trade. And for a story taking place in Ireland that is a good beginning, too.

The wicked uncle (a beautiful piece of characterisation, warm with the bonhomie of the bad, shining with the innocence of the vile), is a land-owner, and breeds cattle. The climate of Ireland, as we learned in our geography books, is ideal for ranching: the Atlantic winds bring in the rains that nurse the pastures that fatten the beasts that

enrich the breeders of the Emerald Isle. (This is the dog that chased the cat that killed the rat – a benign version, but just as soothing and symmetrical and expressive of the law of supply and demand.) But as one of the men at the cross-roads remarked, “Lands without hands fill nobody's craw.” Where bullocks fatten, men grow thin. As Sir Maurice Fernwort, another rancher, explains so tidily, “Two lots of people can't own the same land. Elementary mathematics. There's your agrarian problem.” And so young Curton instead of shooting grouse finds himself thinking about the antagonism between the thin landless men and the ranchers: an antagonism sharpened by this second European war which deprives the ranchers of much of the moral support they might otherwise expect from the British Empire, which encourages the landless men with the recollection of 1916 and the report that “America's agin' any trouble in Ireland.”

At first with the curiosity of the home-coming stranger, then with an awakening sense of justice, finally with deliberation, Curton ranges himself with the peasants against the ranchers. Simultaneously, they have been testing and sifting him, their convention of easy-going good manners yielding to scrutiny, liking, acceptance: everything (this is the knot of the action) except trust. So he joins them in their withdrawal to the mountain; for to take to the mountain is the Irish equivalent of being *au maquis*.

Just as the book's beginning accepts a traditional pattern of the novel of adventure, its development shows an interesting return to the classical canon. Curton is a hero, a hero almost after the style of Scott's Morton or Waverley: a young man who while appearing to be led by the nose and destiny away from his natural class and code adherence, is in truth propelled by his integrity, sense of justice, and, to use an old-fashioned word, chivalry. Constance is a heroine; and though I am myself not easy about her, for it seems to me that she shows the author's allegiance divided (as an author's allegiance should never be) between an imaginative creation and an imaginative reconstruction, she is in the book for more than the reader's sexual relaxation; she is charmless, exacting, and high-minded, and if she swears like a trooper is as dedicated as a Flora MacIvor. In fact, I am driven back on old-fashioned words. *And Blackthorns* is quite notably coloured with chivalrous feeling, romance, and honour. The fighting scenes in this book, the fierce compound of weasel cunning and courage with what I can only call moral high-breeding, reminded me of stories told by Peadar O'Donnell. And that should be praise enough.

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As spring's warm herald April comes.

John Clare