

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,

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NEWSLETTER NUMBER THIRTY-EIGHT

Thanks go to Harriet Baker, Rowan Bright, Gill Davies, Ailsa Granne, Peter Swaab and Peter Tolhurst for contributing to this issue.

Getting in touch with the Society

The Society would be very pleased to receive any queries, opinions or suggestions from members, as we move towards our third decade of existence. There are various ways in which members can contact the Committee or start discussions with other members:

- View the Society's Facebook Page. This can be reached by a link from our website, townsendwarner.com, and you will find posts about Society events, interesting items that people have discovered, news about publications and lectures, and queries and answers from Warner admirers. You do not need a Facebook account to view this page, but if you want to add any posts yourself you will need to log in to a Facebook account. This is a good way of keeping up with what is happening in the Society between newsletters.
- Send an email. The Society's official email address is societytownsendwarner.com. All emails received will be answered by the appropriate member of the committee.
- Send a letter. Currently, letters can be sent to Judith Bond, Acting Secretary, The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society, Flat 3, Barley Building, 12 Copper Street, Dorchester, DT1 1GN. Again, all letters will be answered, either by the Secretary or another Committee member.

We are always eager to hear from our members so if you would like to contact us about anything, please get in touch. And do keep a close eye on our website, townsendwarner.com, as all important events and news are described there.

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The **Annual General Meeting** will be held on Saturday 11 May 2019 at the Dorchester Library and Learning Centre, South Walks House, Charles Street, Dorchester, DT1 1EE, at 11.00 for 11.15am. Our usual venue, the Dorset County Museum, is currently closed for refurbishment. There is a car park opposite. Afterwards we will lunch at a local restaurant, then, if weather permits, take a walk. The day will finish with an evening meal. Please let Richard Searle know if you need a restaurant place booked, at 0771 285 7704 or richardsearle486@btinternet.com.

Sylvia Townsend Warner Weekend

June 14 – 16

Charleston & Rodmell – Lewes – East Sussex

The annual weekend is planned for East Sussex, based around Lewes, from Friday 14 June to Sunday 16 June, 2019. On Friday 14 June we will have our usual opening get-together at the Swan Inn, (address 30A Southover, High St, Lewes BN7 1HU) with a table booked for 7 for 7.30p.m. It is imperative that you contact our Events Organiser, Richard Searle at 0771 285 7704 / richardsearle486@btinternet.com, in advance (by Monday June 3rd) to say you are coming and on which days so he may make the necessary restaurant reservations and confirm group tour numbers.

On Saturday, we will gather for coffee in Lewes (Robson's of Lewes, 22A High Street BN7 2LN), before driving to Berwick. There we will look at St Michael and All Angels Church, known for the extensive paintings which cover the nave walls, chancel arch, screen and pulpit, painted during the Second World War by the Bloomsbury artists, Duncan Grant, Vanessa Bell and Quentin Bell. From there a pub lunch at the Cricketers (not yet confirmed), before going to Rodmell for 3p.m. to visit Monks House, Leonard and Virginia Woolf's 16th-century country retreat. A visit to the house and garden normally takes about one hour. There is an admission charge but National Trust members or Royal Oak Members (USA) get into National Trust properties free of charge. Our evening meal is booked at the Limetree Kitchen, 14 Station St, Lewes BN7 2DA.

On Sunday we will drive to Charleston (West Firle, Lewes, BN8 6LL) from 10.00a.m. onwards for refreshments in The Threshing Barn cafe, before guided House tours at 11a.m. Again we have to pay admission fees with group rates for ten or more people with a deposit to be paid up-front. We are invited to walk in the gardens. Charleston was the home and country meeting place of the Bloomsbury Group. Our tour will explore the individually designed and hand-painted rooms in which the Group artists, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, lived their unconventional lives and entertained their influential friends and relatives which included STW's friends David Garnett and Stephen Tomlin. Light lunches may be had at Charleston or we may seek something more substantial in a local pub. It is normal to make the Sunday lunch event our farewell get-together.

June is a popular time to vacation, and accommodations may be tight. We suggest you book your b&b, hotel, etc., early as you can. Perhaps www.staylewes.org would be helpful. It is run by the Lewes Tourist Information Office – and is a source for "vetted" b&bs and guest houses in and around Lewes.

Promising Material

Ailsa Granne

I have often enjoyed the novels of Salley Vickers, so when I read that her latest book was about a children's librarian working in a public library in the 1950s, I bought *The Librarian* (2018). I grew up in working-class Tyneside in the 50s, and spent much of my childhood in the public library, borrowing books, and frequently returning for more. I enjoyed *The Librarian* not least because of its evocation of life at that time: Rose-Hip syrup, white sliced bread with chocolate spread, and Tommy Steele. In the 'Author's Note' at the end of the book, Vickers lists some recommended reading from 'East Mole Library' – the fictional setting of the story. All of the books make an appearance in *The Librarian*, many are old favourites of mine, and I resolved to do some re-reading. Then came the surprise.

T.H. White had taught English to Vickers' father, so when Sylvia Townsend Warner was researching her biography of White she came to interview him as one of White's former pupils. Salley Vickers, who was fourteen at the time and had already read *Lolly Willowses*, told the author that, as a child, she had wanted to be a witch when she grew up. Warner replied that she thought she was 'promising material'. Vickers, who describes Warner 'as warm, witty and sharp as her books' writes that Warner is a lifelong favourite of hers, and that she borrowed her name 'Sylvia' for the librarian in her book.

I am constantly surprised by the connections uncovered in a lifetime of reading, and would recommend Salley Vickers, *The Librarian*, and its children's book list, though possibly not Rose-Hip syrup.

Mr Anspaugh, a story, a parcel and some cats

Gill Davies

A few years ago, my husband gave me as a present a book with Sylvia Townsend Warner's signature inside. It is titled *American Cat-ologue: The Cat in American Folk Art* and it accompanied an exhibition at the Museum of American Folk Art in 1976. Warner inscribed it "from Jack Anspaugh New Year 1976". I wondered who Anspaugh was and how Warner had come to know him – and there were no references in the standard sources. Then a slim collection of documents in the Warner-Ackland Archive in Dorchester revealed all. It included Anspaugh's typed account of how he came to correspond with Warner and copies of her letters to him. (Judith Bond says it is likely that he sent these to William Maxwell when he was preparing the edition of Warner's letters, though none were used.) The correspondence began in 1972, and continued for nearly five years until her death. It was an intermittent connection – they never met – and produced only short letters, cards and odd gifts. But it throws a light on Warner's generosity and humour in her last years.

Jack Anspaugh owned a shop in New York and was a great fan of Warner's stories published in *The New Yorker*. He was prompted to contact her after reading "The Listening Woman", published in May 1972. It is a story in the series about Mr Edom, the antique dealer, and it features an old woman coming across a painting that she knew as a child and of which she was very fond. And when Warner was 75, Mr Anspaugh produced an object from her own childhood, full of poignancy. The story includes a passage about the resonance of lost objects, remembered in old age, such as "the blue and white mug with D on it, picturing a dog, a duck and a dairymaid" and "the stuffed printed-cotton cat, on whose oval base were four mushroom-coloured underpaws, a triumph of art and realism." Anspaugh explains: "At the time, I had a shop which was doing a brisk business in a faithful reproduction of the very stuffed, printed-cotton cat of which she wrote. Had I not been going to England that fall, I would probably not have taken the trouble to send her one. But the night before I left, I bundled one up and wrote a note to thank her for all the pleasure her stories had given me – and to offer this cat, in case the one from her childhood had not yet reappeared, to provide her with mild supportingness when used as a pillow." (That phrase is a quotation from the story.) He sent the parcel via Chatto and Windus, her publishers, and got the following reply:

It was the first of my many cats – cats of Nature, cats of Art – and by the time I was five my mother on some pretext of moth or loss of stuffing had taken it away; and time went on and I supposed I would never see its like again. Yesterday I unwrapped a mysterious parcel. The tip of an ear emerged from the tissue paper and I recognised it, seen before I could realise what I was recognising. I send you the thanks of a lifetime.

Yours sincerely,
Sylvia Townsend Warner

But suppose the *New Yorker* had not taken the story....

The following Christmas, Warner inaugurated an exchange of cards, gifts and notes; her first being an old postcard of a Manx lady with her cat; later, a copy of *The Cats' Cradle Book*; then two Christmas cards with poems by Valentine Ackland; and a photograph of her own cats with a comic poem about the "cat with mushroom-coloured paws". Anspaugh joined in the "foolish-present game" with a pin tray in the shape of a cat and the *American Cat-ologue* that now sits on my bookshelves.

In November 1973 Warner wrote to him that the cloth cat was an inspiration, sitting with her "siamese cat and a lead-coloured cat" while she wrote her "fairy stories". These were the *Kingdoms of Elfin* stories of which she says, "I am pleased you like them: I do myself."

That Christmas, 1973, Anspaugh was pleased to get a card with Ackland's short poem "Winter Illness". While thanking Warner, he commented that "the only Valentine I knew was one of the Two Gentlemen of Verona". In response Warner wrote,

Dear Mr Anspaugh,

Your cat with mushroom-coloured paws sits opposite my writing table, and for much too long its glance has been monitory – and tonight it positively glares reproaches at me. Valentine Ackland of the poem about winter birds is a she, not a he. And if you would like to read more of her poetry – I hope you will for it is the genuine article – a collection of poems by her called *The Nature of the Moment* is newly come out with NEW DIRECTIONS...

Other brief communications followed, all written with humour and sympathy. When some of the *Elfin* stories were published in *The New Yorker*, Anspaugh sent a copy of a *New York Times* piece on "the little people". Warner replied that,

It is sadly true that Hobgoblins (they are the local variant of Lars, house-spirits for which see Herrick who had several in his Devonshire parsonage) are growing scarce in this country. An electric mixer is enough to drive them away, even a coffee grinder can unsettle them. But there are still houses where people wash without washing machines, mix by hand, apply themselves to domestic arts without appliances; and hobgoblins dwell contentedly among them – provided they are never paid in coin, always in kind. I mention this in case you are thinking of being adopted by one of them.

Yours sincerely
Sylvia Townsend Warner
NB They are fond of milk.

Her final gift was a second-hand copy of a book by Bruce Marshall, *Thoughts of My Cats*, with the accompanying note that "This book has been about in low haunts like 2nd-hand bookshops, but I feel it needs a kind home, so it comes to you as a Christmas kitten – and I hope you will admire Sammy & Geddes Bijou as much as I do." (Two of the cats in the book.) This gift was sent in November 1977, just a few months before Warner died, and was the last communication that Anspaugh received.

* * * * *

Our own **Claire Harman** recently published *Murder by the Book: A Sensational Chapter in Victorian Crime* (Penguin/Viking). The indefatigable **Peter Haring Judd**, author of *The Akeing Heart*, has also published again, this time a memoir: *Figures in a Spare Landscape: serving in the twilight of empire, Nigeria 1959–60*.

For more information, see his website peterhjud.com

from the *Diaries*, 8 September 1963 : To Monks House, where Leonard proffered me a flourishing green branch of what I did not recognize: it was my cutting of spicebush which he had grown into a far finer plant than its parent... Leonard & I after dinner fell into a conversation, apropos of taking part in village life (my only contribution being the funerals of mauvais sujets), about St Paul, & what anyone is to make of him: type, I said, might be helpful: a break to italic when he goes off into rhapsodies, and perhaps Gothic for his saws and axioms...

* * * * *

In 1963, through Clare, Son & Co Ltd, Wells & London, Sylvia privately printed *Sketches from Nature*. A stapled booklet, it contains eight stories, all first run in *The New Yorker* and later collected in *Scenes from Childhood* (1981). The stories are *Wild Wales; Interval for Metaphysics; My Father, My Mother, the Butler, the Builder, the Poodle, and I; My Father, My Mother, the Bentleys, the Poodle, Lord Kitchener, and the Mouse; The Young Sailor; The Poodle, the Supernatural, Mr Wilson, Mr Tatos and My Mother; Shadows of Death and Fried Eggs are Mediterranean*. Similarly, in 1967 she printed, also through Clare, *Two Conversation Pieces*. These fifteen pages contain two stories: *Mr Mackenzie's Last Hour* and *A View of Exmoor*, ditto and in *One Thing Leading to Another* (1984).

Does anyone know why she collected and printed these stories?

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Reading Group

Harriet Baker

Since last November a group of dedicated and enthusiastic Warnerians has been gathering to read and talk about her work on the first Thursday of each month. The meetings are split between two venues: a classroom at University College London, and the delightful John Sandoe Books, very close to Sloane Square in London. The bookshop setting was hoped to encourage readers from different backgrounds and the wider world, and each month we've been joined by new readers including students, publishers and enthusiasts. Wine is shared and discussion lively.

The idea for a reading group arose after last year's conference, *Sylvia Townsend Warner and Modernism*, held at the University of Manchester, at which the desire to discuss Warner's writing more regularly became apparent. Though not everyone is based in London, it seemed the most convenient place to meet. After deciding on an initial group of texts for discussion (a list which will grow over the coming months), we settled on venues and began to advertise to readers through word of mouth and social media. At previous meetings, we have welcomed between ten and twenty readers. The group is open to everyone and we encourage anyone with an interest in Warner, and a desire to read more of her work, to attend.

We began with Warner's 'nice calm story about incest', 'A Love Match', alongside 'Mutton's Only House', and 'My Shirt is in Mexico', her tale of queer comradeship set on a train. There was a mixture of close reading and biographical curiosity, with Warner's life discussed alongside her work. On what would have been her 125th birthday, we raised our glasses and dove deep into her story of Lucy Ridpath's emancipation, of cats and bungalows, in 'At the Stroke of Midnight'. To ring in the new year, an impressive crowd gathered at the bookshop for *Lolly Willowes*, which proved that despite the novel being Warner's best-loved and most-read, exciting new ideas and perspectives can still emerge. Most recently, we read several of Warner's provincial wartime stories, selected mainly from *The Museum of Cheats* and *A Garland of Straw*, and, to keep in mind the range and breadth of her work. The next time we will read from her poetry.

The gatherings are hugely informative and friendly, and we've been delighted by attendance so far. If you would like to hear about forthcoming meetings (even if you are unable to attend) please email readingsylviatownsendwarner@gmail.com. The Organisers are Harriet Baker, Harry Daniels, Hester Styles and Peter Swaab.

Sin-Eating

Peter Tolhurst

The one piece of work regularly omitted from any list of Sylvia's literary output, for the simple reason it has never been published, is her one-act play 'The Sin-Eater'. This, her only experiment with the form, was written in the summer of 1922 during her time on the Essex marshes with Mrs May. The ms has however survived and forms part of the STW/VA archive although it would appear that, with the exception of Claire Harman, few, if any, have read its 'fifty-one small, handwritten pages.'(1) According to Harman Sylvia first learnt of this macabre death custom from the young sculptor Stephen ("Tommy") Tomlin who had it in turn from the Welsh artist Cedric Morris. Sylvia described it thus:

When anyone dies their sins are mystically set out on a plate in the form of cold scraps, potato pairings and locks of hair, strewed with salt. The sin-eater is then summoned to dispose of this mess, and when the plate has been cleared the dead man's sins are taken away in the stomach of the sin-eater. (2)

This, with local variations, neatly summarises the practice which, according to the antiquarian John Aubrey was once widespread in the Principality and the Welsh Marches. In his *The Remains of Gentilisme and Judaisme* (1685) he quotes the case of a Herefordshire woman who for many years kept a maplewood bowl for the sin-eater. On her death, having first eaten a loaf of bread over the corpse, it was filled with beer for him to drink. For his pains he received a sixpenny piece. In another case from South Wales in 1852 the sin-eater, having been paid for his services, left in a hurry for he was 'utterly

detested in the neighbourhood – regarded as a mere Pariah – as one irredeemably lost.’ Aubrey thought it likely that the custom derived in part from the Hebrew scapegoat as described in *Leviticus* chapt. xvi, verses 21-22:

And Aaron shall lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over him all ye iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting him on the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness.

Evidence for the survival of this archaic ritual well into the 19th century has also come to light from more remote parts of East Anglia where the sin-eater was often some unsuspecting poor person or tramp. Enid Porter, curator of the Cambridge Folklife Museum from 1947 until her death in 1976, has provided the most graphic account, one written down by a retired schoolmistress from Little Ouse in the Norfolk fens who died in 1906. She, in her turn, heard it from an elderly woman in the village. Even allowing for the kind of embellishment that is part of the oral tradition this remarkable tale is compelling.

As the mourners were gathered round the coffin waiting for the sin-eater to arrive, a half round of bread with a heap of salt on it resting on the shroud, one old woman explained how the sin-eater had come to earn her living in this way. Having once become so deeply intoxicated with poppy tea, a common remedy for ague in the fens, the parson concluded she was beyond recall and performed the last rites. Although the woman later recovered she no longer existed in the eyes of the church and so, absolved of all her sins, she was free to take on the sins of others.

The old woman had hardly finished speaking when a dog barking across the fen let us know that someone was coming along the drove. Then the latch of the door was lifted and a dirty old woman in a long black cape came into the room, reached for the bread and salt and ate it mouthful by mouthful. After making sure she had dropped no crumbs she held out a skinny hand and thirty pennies, which had been dipped in whitewash to make them look like silver, were handed to her on the ash shovel. One by one she picked them up and then, as silently as she had come in she departed. All of us sitting round the corpse stood up and one of us told the daughter that her mother was now in Heaven because, having no sin, she was freely admitted. We had more tea and gin as we waited for day to break – we were much too afraid to go home in the dark. (3)

Among the many points of interest is that the sin-eater is not just someone like a tramp, shunned by society, but an untouchable, paid with coins passed over on the end of a shovel: someone absolved of all sin and uniquely qualified for the task she undertook. The thirty pennies ‘dipped in whitewash to make them look like silver’ is an obvious reference to Judas, the most infamous of outcasts in the eyes of the church.

The custom should not be confused with that of the funeral feast, a ritual rooted in medieval requiems, when sweet meats or ‘corpse cakes’ were eaten by mourners and

washed down with wine before the coffin was carried to church. This communal way of celebrating the life of the deceased was, in tribal societies, a means whereby the qualities of the dead were transferred to all those partaking of the ritual as a way of uniting and strengthening the tribe. This, argued the anthropologist Sidney Hartland, writing in 1892, ‘can only be a relic of a savage feast where the meat consumed was the very body of the deceased kinsman.’ (4) Having raised the spectre of cannibalism he cites ‘the practice of many barbarous tribes’ described by both ancient writers and contemporary travellers. He suggests that in the early days of the Church in Wales the practice is likely to have been outlawed and those who participated in it liable to persecution. As a result the need for a sin-eater arose as the ritual changed from one of tribal celebration to the absolution of individual sin.

Sylvia’s play appears to have been written in response to a collaborative effort between Tomlin and T F Powys; a play of the same title written for their own amusement during long winter evenings at Chaldon. ‘Tommy’s share in this cheerful piece had been the dramatic mechanism, Theo supplying the dialogue and shades of night.’ (5) It was not until the play was finished that they discovered the title had already been used by Fiona Macleod – *The Sin-Eater and Other Tales*, 1895. (6) The collection is interesting not only as an example of ‘Celtic twilight’ literature but because its author, William Sharp, had chosen to adopt a female pseudonym. It is unclear whether Macleod’s *Sin-Eater* was among the books Sylvia sent for while at Drinkwaters with Mrs May or whether its title had dissuaded her from any thought of publication. In this, Sylvia’s first known work, as in her early short stories, she explores Powysian themes of sin and death and ‘her preoccupation with the distribution of innocence and guilt.’ (7) Harman goes on to remind her readers of Sylvia’s poem ‘The Scapegoat’, written two years after *The Sin-Eater*, that appeared in her first collection of poetry, *The Espalier* (1925).

*See the scapegoat, happy beast,
From every personal sin released,
And in the desert hidden apart,
Dancing with a careless heart.*

It may be no coincidence that her play was written in the year that saw an abridged version of *The Golden Bough*, Sir James Frazer’s hugely influential study in magic and religion, first published in 1890, and in particular its section on the scapegoat.

Notes

- (1) Harman, Claire, *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography*, p.54
- (2) Warner, Sylvia Townsend, *Theodore Powys and Some Friends at East Chaldon*, Powys Review 5, p.23
- (3) Porter, Enid, ‘Some Folk Beliefs in the Fens’, *Folklore*, Vol 69, 1958, p.119
- (4) Hartland, Sidney, ‘The Sin-Eater’, *Folk-Lore*, Vol 3, June, 1892, p.155
- (5) Warner, *Ibid.*, p.23
- (6) My thanks to Judith Stinton for drawing this to my attention
- (7) Harman, *Ibid.*, p.54

Mottisfont : Bloomsbury associations in Hampshire

Rowan Bright

Mottisfont is a village on the River Test in Hampshire, 54 miles north-east of Chaldon by modern roads, and a house of the same name. Now a National Trust property open to the public, the house was until recently known as Mottisfont Abbey, although before the Reformation, it was a priory of Augustinian canons.

After the Reformation, Mottisfont was granted by Henry VIII to his Lord Chamberlain, William Sandys. The present house was built from the nave of the priory church; many elements of the church building are visible today. The house remained in the possession of Sandys' descendants until sold to Gilbert Russell in 1934. His wife Maud, an art patron with connections to the Bloomsbury group, renovated the house and held many social gatherings there.

Cross-referencing Maud's wartime diaries (*The Constant Heart*, Dovecote Press, 2017, edited by her niece Emily Russell) with Sylvia's diaries and biography reveals some possible mutual social connections. The most significant seems to have been with Cecil Beaton, with whom Sylvia once escaped upstairs at a party; Maud entertained him at Mottisfont and visited him at his 'new pretty boudoir-like house' at Ashcombe.

The two diaries concur pleasingly regarding Beaton: photographed by him in 1941, Maud wrote: 'Detest being photographed though less so by Cecil than anyone else. I really like him very much.' Sitting in 1954 for the 'roughshod' photographer Mr Pickering, Sylvia 'looked wistfully back to that amiable, suggestible and complying young man, Cecil Beaton.'

Maud was friends in the 1910s with Nancy Cunard, whom Sylvia befriended from around 1943, which may not seem a promising connection: but when Cunard became ill in 1960, Sylvia wrote to Lady Diana Cooper, a lifelong friend of Maud's.

Some perhaps more minor mutual friendships include Duncan Grant (Sylvia dined with him in 1927; Maud did not meet him until 1940) and Cecil Day-Lewis; the sculptor Frank Dobson portrayed both women. With Stephen Spender, however, who had a considerable antipathy towards Sylvia, Maud was good friends, lunching with him on several occasions, once when the birth of his first child was occurring elsewhere. It seems quite possible, therefore, that Sylvia and Maud knew of each other: does anyone know whether they ever met?

Several 20th century additions reflect the monastic origins of Mottisfont: mosaics by the Bloomsbury-associated Boris Anrep, a lover of Maud, represent the Holy Trinity and Maud as the 'Angel of Mottisfont'. In 1939, Maud commissioned Rex Whistler (a close friend of Cecil Beaton) to paint the drawing room: the result is, due to Maud's directions, monochromatic and architectural, unlike the richly detailed landscapes typically depicted in Whistler's murals. Trompe-l'œil pilasters, ledges and pelmets alternate with motifs representing life at Mottisfont. A barely-visible inscription above a ledge announces the 'War on the Nazi Tyrants', in which Whistler died, at Cean, 1944.

Mottisfont was his last major work. Maud wrote: 'I knew he would be killed.... Lovely Rex; difficult, strange, rare, unhappy Rex.'

This room is now fragile and kept constantly under low lighting, which perhaps enhances the effect: it has taken me several visits to determine whether some elements of the room are illusionary. The curtains, painted with a mock-ermine edging, probably by Whistler, and thus unique, are down at present and undergoing conservation.

One beneficiary of Maud's patronage was Derek Hill, a landscape painter from nearby Romsey, and part of his collection, mostly on small canvases and including works by Duncan Grant, Walter Sickert, and Vanessa Bell, is on display in the sun room.

In 1972, Graham Stuart Thomas established the national collection of old roses in the walled garden. These were then unfashionable, although Sylvia grew roses of this type in her own garden at Frome Vauchurch (in February 1963 noting that 'Blanc de Coubert & Roseraie d l'Hay have small red buds on them.') As old roses are usually once-flowering, they are best seen in June, when the house and gardens are open until early evening.

Poem

Sylvia Townsend Warner

These long days lengthen out care.
Sorrow should be winter wear.

Sorrow should sit
By the unraveling fire, and knit;

Sorrow should walk
Over shed leaf and rotting stalk;

Sorrow, the dark stranger,
Silent should kneel before the Christmas manger,

And offer
The grief-foreshadowing myrrh.

But in these lengthening days trapped unaware
Poor Sorrow
Mopes like a caged owl – is Despair.

The New Republic, September 16, 1931

“The Adventures of the Little Pig and other Stories”

By F. Le Gros and Ida Clark * illustrated by Edith Simon * reviewed by
Sylvia Townsend Warner

The ‘Supplementary’ Book for November

“Train up a child the way he should go.” “Bend the twig and shape the tree”... These awful words, thundered through so many nineteenth century nurseries, carried their antidote with their poison. While Papa and Mama were bending and training for all they were worth to bring up a generation of little gentlemen and little ladies, other influences were at work in the nursery, bending and training to bring up a generation of little Socialists. Boots the Youngest Son, Jack of the Beanstalk, Cinderella, those representatives of the proletariat, were demonstrating the triumph of the proletariat; even Little Red Riding Hood, no Marxist herself, could teach a useful lesson against taking grandmothers on trust.

Where Grimm and Mother Goose had a say one was likely to grow up with a fairly shrewd impression of the making of the world one was going to live in. But with the turn of the century some dreadful people got into the nursery. The fairies that Peter Pan introduced into the bottom of the garden were, I suppose, the worst possible acquaintances for children, even worse than Weeping Ellen of the Wide Wide World, and the Ministering little Goodies of the Sunday School books; for Ellen and the Ministering Goodies had at least this merit, however wrongly they envisaged the grown-up world, they did envisage it, whereas Peter Pan and his tribe are nothing but escapists. Those of us who are old enough to remember a dictatorship of Peter Pans can appreciate the Children’s Stories of F. le Gros and Ida Clark. With them, one is back again in the sensible world where Blunderbore is dangerous, not merely grotesque or pitiable, where Little Pigs must use their wits and their best energies to outwit the Wolf, the Robbers, or the Duchess. These are stories which are no insult to the intelligence of children.

As for their charm, their liveliness, their invention, it would take a longer review than this can be to praise them adequately. But even in the shortest of reviews one must find room to give especial praise to the quality of honesty toward children which shows itself in all these stories, whether they are about Pigs, Fish, or the people of the Kingdom of Elfin. Here is a make-believe without a tinge of falsification or condescension; here is no belittling or exploitation of a child’s serious approach to life. The fantasy is a valid fantasy, rooted in the actual; and whether it is a snow-cat or a tabby-cat, the cats behave as snow-cats and tabby-cats would behave. “Then Willy came out and this time he had to make a snow cat. He gathered a little heap of snow and soon there stood a snow cat, quite white and shining and still. It was a very fine cat. Kitsy clapped her hands and Willy got two little blue stones and made eyes for it.

“Then out came the tabby cat again and when he saw the snow cat, he gave one mew and went for it for all he was worth. But suddenly the snow cat lifted his paw and

gave the tabby such an icy cold wallop across the side of the head, that the tabby cat ran for his life.” This salt of reality, this acknowledgment, even in make-believe, of the actual nature of things and beings, animates all the stories of this book. I cannot imagine that even the most rigorous test of the nursery, the re-reading and pondering and absorbed analysis to which children subject their books, will prove them wanting, will prove them the sort of books that “children grow out of.” Indeed, it seems to me that F. le Gros and Ida Clark have gone near to producing a classic in the narrowest, the most exclusive genre of classics.

The Left News, September, 1937

* * * * *

A review of the new edition from Handheld Press of **Kingdoms of Elfin**, *Wry and Mischievous Philosophical Stories* by Sophie Oliver, is in the 26 October 2018 issue of the TLS. Incidentally, five of the sixteen stories are set in Scotland:

The Five Black Swans, *The Climate of Exile*, *The Late Sir Glamie*,
The Occupation and *Foxcastle*. Is there significance in this?

The Changing Face of the Society : a view from the terraces

Peter Tolhurst

Once upon a time in the west, so the story goes, a small group of enthusiasts met one afternoon in Dorchester to discuss the idea of establishing a new literary society. Out of that initial meeting came the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society, formally launched in January 2000 at the Dorset County Museum with Ray Russell in the chair and Sylvia’s cousin Janet Machen as the Society’s inspirational patron. Its aim, according to the constitution, was ‘to promote a wider readership and better understanding of the life and work of Sylvia Townsend Warner’.

The foundations had already been laid; Warner’s novels, reissued by Virago, were followed by selections of her poetry, letters and diaries together with Claire Harman’s acclaimed biography, and the initial response was encouraging with 85 members in the first year. This healthy picture reflected a growing interest in Warner, not just at University level with new courses in gender studies and modernist literature but more importantly among the wider reading public.

The steady growth in membership over the years, reaching a peak of 144 in 2014 was also in part a response to the programme of events organised by and in conjunction with the Society; a heady mix of concerts, book launches, Chaldon walks, Warner-inspired meals and weekends in the wilds of Norfolk and Somerset. I have especially fond memories of Sylvia’s favourite *Gloire de Dijon* rose planted at Frankfort Manor to commemorate the Society’s visit in 2002, the Norfolk Coast Hopper bus named the ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner’, the thrill of finding the cottage at Idbury where Sylvia finished *Lolly Willows* and her signature in the day book at Idbury Manor, climbing the steps to the chained library at Wimborne Minster and discovering the Peculiar people on

the Essex marshes in a landscape awash with 'Vote Leave' posters.

With recent changes to the committee the Society is undergoing a period of transition, one that has also seen a decline in membership in the last four years, down from its peak of 144 to 125 in 2018. This may well be coincidental or a statistical blip but, in the light of the current hike in membership fees, up from £10 to £18 p.a., I fear that this downward trend is likely to continue, at least in the short term. The fee increase has been precipitated by the decision to produce the journal twice yearly when an enlarged single edition would have been more cost effective and could have avoided such a steep increase.

At the same time I am concerned at the increasingly academic content of the journal, often expressed in the esoteric language of the doctoral thesis that I, for one, struggle to comprehend. And all this for an extra £8 a year. If complex ideas cannot be teased out using the wonderfully rich language already at our disposal then they are probably not worth pursuing. In this context I would argue that the editorial board has a duty of care to *all* members including the great majority of us who are not academics. I am reminded of a remark made by Warner near the end of her life, 'I wasn't educated, I was very lucky,' and I wonder what she would have made of the academic industry that is growing up around her own eloquent legacy. I wonder too, in the light of falling membership and academics talking largely to each other, to what extent the society's stated aim is being achieved.

The Changing Face of the Society : another view

Peter Swaab

Not all changes are for the better, but I think Peter Tolhurst is being far too gloomy about the changing face of the Society. It continues to do what it's successfully done; it brings together enthusiasts, organizes events and outings, encourages publications by and about Warner, combines seriousness and fun. Some members have passed on, alas, and a few haven't renewed their subscriptions, but others have joined. The times they are a-changing, as they always have done. Peter has problems with several of the directions of change, but I'll address myself mainly to the section in which he criticizes and (I have to say) misrepresents the Journal. He raises some important points, and I'm glad to have the chance to respond to them and to reflect publicly – and I hope not too lengthily – on the development of the Journal.

In the editorial of the 2015 issue of the Journal (my first as editor) I said that 'the Journal aims for a crossover readership of generalists and specialists, both ordinary readers and fans and those working in academia. That seems very much in the spirit of Warner.' I stand by this aim, both sides of it, and I believe that the ongoing history of the Journal has kept faith with it. In simple statistical terms, to start with, there have been twenty-six articles in the four issues from 2015 to 2018. Ten are written by people with a university affiliation, three or four are memoirs of Warner that I commissioned, eight are by Warner herself, and the other four or five are miscellaneous. Ten out of

twenty-six doesn't seem an unreasonable ratio of specialists to generalists, and only a prejudiced observer could represent the Journal as 'academics talking largely to each other'. That's first because only a minority of these pieces were actually written by academics, and secondly because academics not infrequently aim to talk to non-academics – that's one of the reasons that a number of us have enjoyed being part of the Warner Society. But above all the number-crunching I disagree with Peter Tolhurst's implication that writing by academics is all of a piece, or that there is such a thing as what he rather high-handedly calls 'the esoteric language of the doctoral thesis'. One of the articles in the 2017 Journal, for instance, on Warner and Arnold Schoenberg, is from a doctoral thesis and it's not 'esoteric': scrupulously argued and well-researched, yes, esoteric, no.

Peter indeed sets more store than I think sensible on the distinction between academic writing and other writing. I think there's good writing and bad. Some of the faults of academic writing are over-elaboration, complication of vocabulary and technical jargon. I have tried to minimise these in contributions, while respecting the fact that different writers have different literary values and stylistic preferences. Other kinds of writing have their own characteristic faults too. And some of the readers who are seriously and passionately interested in Warner work or study at universities, as has been the case since the early days of the Society and the Journal. Nonetheless, contributors to the Journal will know that I'm obscurity-averse. When there have been sentences that (like Peter) I 'struggled to comprehend' (and there have been a few) I have insisted that they be changed until I myself find them comprehensible. But that's not the same as proscribing sentences that are difficult or demanding. Difficulty can be one of the pleasures of reading too. And when all's said and done, it doesn't require much fortitude if you find that an article is not to your taste to pass on to the next one.

Some of the recent changes result from the Journal's now being published by an academic institution. I'd like to stress the benefits of this. It has meant that we can produce copies not only in print form for the society membership, but also digitally as an open access publication freely available to everybody. UCL Press has enabled this electronic hosting of the Journal and it bears the full costs of the digital production and distribution. It also provides expert type-setting and proofreading. Previously the Journal belonged to its members; now it belongs to the members and a wider world too. The extended readership this has made possible directly meets one of the founding aims of the Warner Society, that of 'promoting a wider readership'. It seems to me that Peter's article is wilfully morose in casting doubt on that.

Even so, I concede that there are some stresses in trying to satisfy two sets of conventions and address several kinds of reader. These stresses apply to any journal with the ambitions I set out in the 2015 editorial, not just ours; they are intensified by a growing professionalization and protocol-mindedness in the university world. I have laboured hard to make the Journal fulfil both roles. The main way I did this was to negotiate with UCL Press that our Journal should recognize two kinds of submission, those designated as academic and others as non-academic. The academic articles are

peer-reviewed, which these days is crucial for anybody with a university affiliation, and the other articles aren't. That includes, for instance, biographical pieces, reprinted pieces, poems, and letters – a majority, in fact, of the pieces published in my first four issues as editor. I hope these numbers send a clear message that as editor I welcome contributions from all sorts of sources and readers, but I am glad to reiterate it here.

One further important point in this context is that the Journal is coordinated with other activities of the Society, and some of these have involved or attracted university-based writers. That's why the 2017 issue included the splendid Warner Lecture given by Maud Ellmann, who's based at Chicago University. It's also why the first of the 2018 issues included three essays submitted for the Mary Jacobs Prize. As editor I welcomed the fact that these submissions came from younger writers. It's not unnatural that their views and interests and their style of writing are of their own moment, perhaps not to everybody's taste, but a journal ought to be able to welcome diverse critical idioms.

Two of the three winners of the Jacobs Prize, brought into the society by this essay competition and published in the Journal, have since become two of the co-founders of a Warner reading group. It meets alternately at the John Sandoe bookshop and at UCL. That plan was made very deliberately to embody a crossover outreach to a general readership and a university one. To my mind this is a wholly encouraging aspect of the changing face of the Society. The role the Mary Jacobs Prize and the Journal have played in the initiative is just what a society like ours should do, and squarely in keeping with our founding aim 'to promote a wider readership and better understanding of the life and work of Sylvia Townsend Warner'. The entrants to the competition, moreover, have helped us to fill the gaps left by retiring committee members and to steer the society towards the future.

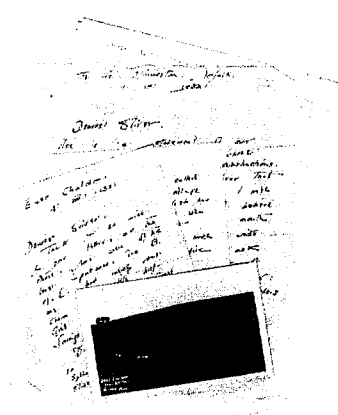
An editor exercises choice but also welcomes chance in selecting contents. One such chance was the conference on Warner's work held at the University of Manchester in April 2018. I was glad to open up the second of the 2018 Journals (belatedly in press now) to a selection of papers from this event, and I did so the more readily because we now have two Journals each year, opening up space for relatively specialised ones. Its contents, reflecting that origin and taking advantage of that opportunity, are indeed predominantly academic, while the contents of the 2019 Journals will revert to previous models.

The Society aims to meet its yearly costs, so the decision to publish the journal twice a year has of course played a part in the rise in subscriptions. The plan to do so was in place when I became editor, and it reflects two main considerations. First, the simple one that members might enjoy receiving a Journal twice a year instead of once; second, that there's a great deal being written about Warner and a great deal of her own writing yet to see the light of print. The subscriptions have gone up from £10 to £18 for UK readers and correspondingly for overseas ones. The raise was discussed at length at the AGM, with a consensus that though this was a substantial hike it wasn't an inordinate one after almost twenty years at £10. The internet tells me that your £10 in 2000 would be worth £16.50 now, so in those 'real' terms the rise after almost 20 years

isn't a steep one. The journal and newsletter page counts have gone up, too. Moreover, a reduced subscription of £12 is available for students and unwaged members.

Although Peter calls his piece 'A View from the Terraces', I ought to mention that he was in the directors' box until fairly recently, having accepted my invitation to be part of the newly-founded editorial board of the Journal. He wrote to me on 21 January 2018 asking to step down. This wasn't because of the complaints in his letter but because, he said, 'it appears to be a purely honorary position and therefore redundant.' I replied the same day: 'As for the editorial board, I intended it to be an honorific position, yes, but not an honorary one. My intention is for the editorial board to have general oversight on the running of the Journal, for members to suggest possible contributors as and when that may arise, and – the main role – to peer review the articles that aren't primarily of a biographical nature... So you will still be of use, as you say, if you stay on the board, but I'll of course remove your name if you'd prefer that.' He didn't reply to my email, and I was sorry that he didn't remain part of the editorial board to contribute to what he sternly calls its 'duty of care'. I'm very pleased finally to report here that Judith Stinton has agreed to join the editorial board, not exactly in Peter's place, but keeping up a continuity with the Warner Society's early days and representing writers outside the academy.

Peter Tolhurst wonders what Warner 'would have made of the academic industry'. Well, she had astonishing creativity but she liked industry too, and some of her tastes were academic. 'Oh, how I long to give it learned footnotes, and references', she wrote to Marchette and Joy Chute (about *Kingdoms of Elfin*), 'There is such heartless happiness in scholarship'. So here finally though not heartlessly is my own editorial undertaking that the Journal will carry on trying to combine happiness and scholarship.



Lot 204 of the 27 November 2018 sale of fine books at **Bonhams Auction House**, London, was a series of 64 autograph and typed letters from Sylvia, most to her friend and reader at Chatto & Windus, Oliver Warner, from 15 July 1931 to 20 December 1977, but including 18 to his wife Elizabeth and two typed letters from Valentine.

They are on a wide range of subjects, discussing her life in the country with Valentine, her writing, literature and family, war and politics, and from East Chaldon; Winterton, Norfolk; Frankfort Manor, Sloyey; Frome Vauchurch, Dorset, and elsewhere.

From the notes to the catalogue : "Spanning over forty years, with the majority from the 1930's and early 40's, the letters reveal a close and affectionate friendship which had begun in 1928 with their joint purchase of 113 Inverness Terrace, a house she refers to as the "Warnerium", an expedient arrangement whereby Oliver and his wife took the upper floors with Sylvia living below....

She sees the world through a writer's eye, whether it be talking of the weather and the beauty of nature ("...Alternate wild storms of rain and wind, and deceitful intervals when everything flashes with sun and wet...") or taking great delight in the characters she encounters. Her letters are peppered with amusing, sometimes merciless, observations - on strangers ("...she wears her spun-glass white hair in a black chenille net with a little soup-plate hat of 1870 above it...stomps briskly into the cathedral three times a day..."), her gardener ("...on the day when I gave him two cart-loads of manure he suddenly became a new being...") or a late local land-owner ("...His legs in particular were a pleasure to me...").

Passionate about the countryside, she keeps Warner up-to-date on work in the garden and orchard ("...Oliver, have you ever put on grease-bands?...the effect is admirable; and effect is almost everything... Today we had a most magnificent bon-fire...the cats sat round at discreet distances warming their paws..."), and discusses family news (she is much admiring of his daughter Bridget who is "Nothing short of an angel...She has a sly wit, too, and what will ripen into a pretty touch of malice when she is older"), finances and tenants of no.113, her animals, visitors ("...Katie Powys...stayed long enough to wear us out...") and mutual friends ("...Alis Moxon has had her hair cut short, and looks like a Giotto..."). She remains a supportive and loving friend, never more so than in 1934 when, after his wife's mental collapse, Oliver attempted suicide, ("...Even if you had to be helped off the field, the field was won before you quitted it...Do not reproach yourself...I have never written a letter with more passionate concern...").

Books and literature are much discussed - whether her own work ("...It's nice to think that my book comes out today...it is titillating to think that one has been read in Holland..."), his biography of Nelson ("...a near and dear success is best of all...") or the work of others ("...You know my passion for Byron..."). They both read *Cakes and Ale* ("...enjoyed it with the deepest satisfaction...what a happy life Somerset Maugham must have had while he had such a viper warming in his bosom. I wonder that Hugh Walpole has not challenged him to a duel..."), Cobbett ("...What a splendid prancing well-fettled Bull in a heraldic China shop he was...") and Eliot's *Practical Cats* ("...an entrancing work..."). In February 1935 she lunches at Max Gate ("...The present Mrs T.H., very properly, has altered nothing; there is a nice Hardyesque garden, too... It is exactly right, melancholy, respectable... grim and genteel... I saw some of his poetry manuscripts too. Very neat and clear-headed, few alterations, no unfinished expeditions in the margins...Mrs Hardy is charming... And I should like you to see that walk, so grimly reserved, so discreetly mossy that a ghost's footfalls would never sound in it...").

In September 1936 she announces she and Valentine are to go to the Spanish Civil War with the Red Cross Bureau and names him as her executor should she "get nipped off by a piece of shell or a bit of gas". A year later she visits the Congress of the International Association of Writers in Defence of Culture where she is "genuinely glad, genuinely unembarrassed at being a representative of culture - not, as in England, a mock and a scorning...this is the reception that we got from everybody". The same year she comments amusingly on the abdication crisis, and the choice between Edward with his Wallis Simpson and the future George VI with his Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon ("...I cannot decide in my mind which in the long run one should prefer... Why it should be worse, of course, to get sexual excitement from an American lady than from an old pair of fur bedroom slippers will remain a mystery to me. But apparently the church will bless the one little foible and not the other...").

In wartime, Sylvia and Valentine acted as ARP wardens ("...it is frightening to go out at night and stand in total darkness and hear the Wardens go tearing past in search of something to do...") and take in a family evacuated from London ("...guns bark around the house and we dug up an incendiary bomb from the artichokes..."), complaining of constant planes overhead and the lack of decent writing paper ("...in our de-civilianised stationers...").

The latter letters, mainly addressed to Oliver's second wife, Elizabeth, lose none of her exuberance, praising her on the manuscript of her novel *No Time to Cry*, and supporting her after Oliver's death in 1976 ("...Darling Elizabeth, tired toiling Elizabeth... try self indulgence... there is much comfort in caressing a cat...").

Fourteen [plus one to Elizabeth] of these letters have been quoted in William Maxwell's *Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner* (1982), but the majority remain unpublished. Also included in the lot is a collection of related papers, notes, correspondence and printed articles including Oliver Warner's draft obituary of Sylvia Townsend Warner for *The Times*."

These letters sold for £4,375, premium included. I wrote to Bonhams asking if an institution had bought them, and received the following reply:

Dear Jay,

We've just received your email through Bonhams.

Once fully catalogued, we intend to offer the letters to a couple of institutions that we know will be interested, but, in the mean time, if you would like to indicate in your newsletter that Blackwell's Rare Books purchased these, that wouldn't be a problem.

Best Wishes / Siân Wainwright

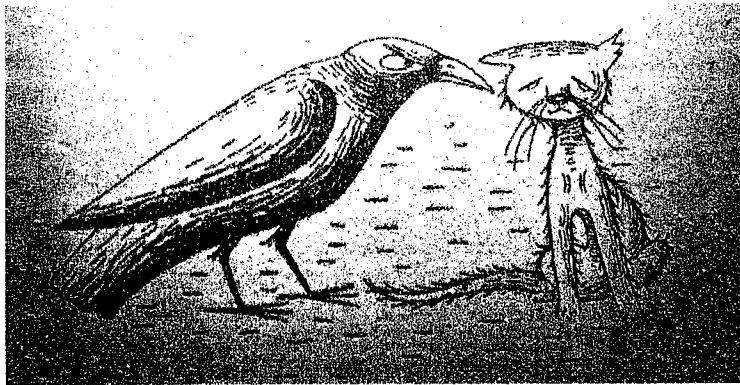
Blackwell's Rare Books / 48-51 Broad Street, Oxford, OX1 3BQ

+44 (0)1865 333 555 / blackwell.co.uk/rarebooks

Judith Bond states that photocopies of most of these letters are in the Archive, which is of course good news. But if your wealthy Aunt gives you some spondulix to buy them, perhaps there will be enough left over for this intriguing item from

Nangle Rare Books of Dorchester : "An autograph letter [from Sylvia], dated 22nd February 1969 to Philip Smith returning a book she had borrowed. 'Here, at rather long last, is the book of Eskimo Sculpture. I have looked at the illustrations with great interest and admiration, remembering what Gautier said: L'art sort plus belle / D'une forme rebelle. For I was comparing them in my mind some clay sculptures I had looked at recently, where the plasticity of the objects for the most part only reflects the action of rolling the cylinders between the palms: these Eskimo sculptures have so much authenticity, almost as if the figures had been implicit in the would [sic] or bone, waiting for the artist to reveal them; and this makes the artists much more significant than the roller of cylinders. Perhaps you heard from Aylmer Francis how we had to go to London for Valentine to have a further operation.' Two sides of A5, in fine state, together with the returned book *Eskimo Sculpture* by Jorgen Meldgaard. First Edition in English, Methuen, 1960 and very good in torn dustwrapper. Seller Inventory # 578729"

an illustration in *Time & Tide* by Barbara Richardson for *The Magpie Charity*



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Sylvia Townsend Warner @ Tanya Stobbs
The Society's website is townsendwarner.com

The Estates of Sylvia and Valentine are at sylviatownsendwarnerestate.com
and that email is estatestw@gmail.com

from *Black Bryony* by T. F. Powys (Knopf, 1923)
a woodcut by R. A. Garnett

