

The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffuse, Twelve Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's Maggot, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After the Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flint Anchor, The Salutation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cradle Book, A Garland of Straw, The Museum of Cheats, Winter in the Air, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, A Stranger with a Bag, Swans on an Autumn River, Two Conversation Pieces, The Innocent and the Guilty, Kingdoms of Elfin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's Maggot, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After the Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flint Anchor, The Salutation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cradle Book, A Garland of Straw, The Museum of Cheats, Winter in the Air, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, A Stranger with a Bag, Swans on an Autumn River, Two Conversation Pieces, The Innocent and the Guilty, Kingdoms of Elfin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's Maggot, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After the Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flint Anchor, The Salutation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cradle Book, A Garland of Straw, The Museum of Cheats, Winter in the Air, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, A Stranger with a Bag, Swans on an Autumn River, Two Conversation Pieces, The Innocent and the Guilty, Kingdoms of Elfin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned, Opus 7, Rainbow, Whether a Dove or Seagull, Boxwood, King Duffus, Twelve Poems, Lolly Willowes, Mr Fortune's Maggot, The True Heart, Summer Will Show, After the Death of Don Juan, The Corner that Held Them, The Flint Anchor, The Salutation, More Joy in Heaven, The Cat's Cradle Book, A Garland of Straw, The Museum of Cheats, Winter in the Air, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, A Stranger with a Bag, Swans on an Autumn River, Two Conversation Pieces, The Innocent and the Guilty, Kingdoms of Elfin, Scenes of Childhood, One Thing Leading to Another, The Music at Long Verney, Dorset Stories, Portrait of a Tortoise, Somerset, The Espalier, Time Importuned,

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Newsletter Number Forty-Three

Poems, The Flint Anchor, The Winter in the Air, A Spirit Rises, Sketches from Nature, The Flint Anchor, 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, The Museum

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a newly discovered photograph by Janet Stone

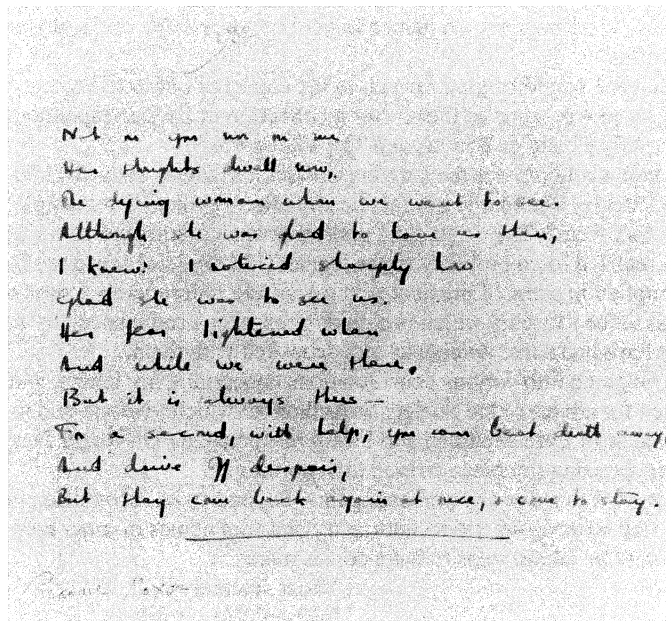


The file continues with a letter to Roger Peers, and ends with a letter to *The Times* to accompany an addendum to her obituary. They did not print it, but it seems to have turned into the memoir appearing in *London Magazine*, new series, November 1979, volume 19, number 8, which ends

... Sylvia Townsend Warner's contribution to literature, which I have only briefly touched on, has been an enlargement of that peculiarly English world of the imagination, exemplified in the works of fantasy from which I have quoted. There, as in all her other work, reason is firmly in control. She has an intuitive feeling for words but she handles them with fastidious yet pleasurable care. If all her books are not at present in print, I am sure they will be again. They should not be neglected. Her faith in their worth is expressed perhaps – obliquely as usual – by a character in *A Long Night*: 'Art is long and tough and never loses a tooth.'

* * * * *

from the Dorset Archive, a handwritten poem by Valentine [R(FR)/1/564(605)]
The faint annotations '1932' and 'Grannie Moxon' are in Sylvia's hand.



NEWSLETTER NUMBER FORTY-THREE

Chesil Beach : a peopled solitude * Janet Stone
Valentine Ackland : a Transgressive Life * AGM 2021
A. E. Housman * Walter J. Strachan * two poems & a letter

Thanks go to Gill Davis, Ann Torday Gulden, Judith Stinton and Peter Swaab for contributing to this newsletter

* * * * *

Local History

This morning I took the Coasthopper from Burnham Overy Staithe to Sheringham, boarded breathless, had to run.

The driver said *next time put out your hand. The 'George Vancouver' stops for everyone! Our buses start from Lynn.*

They've all got names, one's call 'Black Shuck' after the dog who spooks the coast.

'Fanny Billingham; was hung in Norwich. 'Sylvia Townsend Warner' rented Randall's folly on Salthouse beach.

I moved closer, told her I'd met STW, but fixed on roads, she didn't care to stretch Coasthopper lore.

As usual Cley was bottlenecked. *Take it easy, she meant the car blocking our path. Just reverse dear. Now we're there!*

Sally Festing
The Spectator, 3 July 2021



Members of The Society at Norfolk, 2009

See newsletter 19 for the letter from Rob Bennett, Commercial Manager of Norfolk Green Buses, telling the Society of the inauguration of the Sylvia Bus

A new book by Judith Stinton



Most of us know Judith as friend, founding member of the Society, historian, poet, author, researcher, museum curator and under-appreciated Dorset notable. You may not remember that early in her career she wrote children's books.

The beginning of *The Apple-Tree Man* :

"In Somerset, long years ago, there lived a long, long family. Six of them there were, five brothers and a sister. At the time of this story they were all grown up – scattered around the flattish, marshy, border land and the now lost village of Nether Abder.

Only George, the eldest, still lived at home with his father, down the bottom of a long, long lane. His young daughter, Nancy, lived there too, in the half-hidden cottage with brambles tumbling over it and a jackdaw's nest in the chimney-stack. This made the fire smoke terribly, of course.

"This fire smokes something terrible," Nancy often said, as she poked up the chimney with her broom.

"'Tis only a bird. Leave the poor thing be," her dad replied, and Grandfather, coming in from his afternoon walk, would nod agreement.

"No one likes their nest disturbed," Grandfather said. And so the fire just went on smoking.

The three of them were very happy in their cottage. Grandfer slept in the living-room, while George and Nancy each had a room upstairs. Mostly, though, they lived in the kitchen (smoke and all). Slap next door was the slant-roof shippen, where the old ox and the even older donkey were stabled. They were so close to the kitchen that on quiet evenings you could hear the rustling of the straw and their slow, soft breath."

But back to the moment :

Chesil Beach : a peopled solitude in now available.

Slowly flying against the West
A heron goes, and the cloudy far
Distance is grey as a bird's breast,
Is deep to shelter a star.

From the white swan flying invisibly,
Shoe wing-beats matched the heart-beats of the night,
Fell the light scatter of feathers, transient and bright,
Now spread like a cloak over the naked evening.

Brief notes follow, then an empty envelope, in French, sent to Valentine in Angle-terre, with Sylvia's writing "Posted (has? By whom?) on the day of her death March 17th 1965". The next few entries were 'closed', followed by photocopies of letters appearing in *The Living Curve*, and a copy of Sylvia's obituary in *The Times*. Then a letter from Strachan, 2/4/26/18 :

26th November 1979

Dear Mr. Maxwell,

Your letter of November 10 about my memoir of Sylvia Townsend Warner was very gratifying. I had hoped to do justice to her both as a writer and a personality to the best of my ability.

In principle I would be glad for you to see copies of her letters to me with a view to your using them – or some of them – for a collection of her correspondence to be published possibly Chatto & Windus and The Viking Press.

I note you would pay for the copying (in fact it involves about 10,000 words and twenty-three letters). Would there in fact be any other payment for example in a number of copies or other form? The originals, I gather, have a commercial value, but I should like any sum realized to go probably to the Dorset Country [sic] Museum, Dorchester, for reasons implicit in some of the quotes in my article. More likely I should pass them (the originals) to the Museum which is already preparing a room specially for Sylviana. They already have had some notebooks etc. deposited with them.

I shall be going into various considerations concerning my letters, and in fact have already written for advice to the Society of Authors to which I belong and to my son, managing director of Eyre-Methuen and I shall be contacting Dr. Roger Peers again. A letter from him praising my piece arrived this morning.

I do not want to make any personal gain – beyond some recognition in your enterprise. I will write again and meantime try and find names of other correspondents for you, and shall be taking steps to have copies made.

Yours sincerely

[signed] W.J. Strachan

Walter J. Strachan

At the John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester, in The Walter Strachan Collection, there are several files concerning Sylvia : letters, notes, clippings, etc. WJS 2/4/26 is particularly and pleasingly miscellaneous, beginning with a color postcard of a Klee painting glued to hand-made paper inscribed with best wishes from STW. Next, 2/4/26/2, a written note from Sylvia to Strachan offering some books of French literature. Then a letter from 19.ix.1955 :

Dear Mr. Strachan.

It was a great pleasure to hear from you, and to be glad that you enjoyed *The Flint Anchor*. So did I; it was a difficult book to control, for some characters were continually usurping more space than the balance of the book could warrant, and preserving the relative ages of the Barnard children was an arithmetical night-mare; but I enjoyed writing it... You will be sorry to hear that Norman Lupton died some years ago – soon (?) after his sister. The chief part the pictures has gone to a Leeds gallery, I think; or it may be Sheffield. The house is sold. It is sad to drive past it and know that those beautiful things and those kind hosts are no longer within it.

Yours sincerely
Sylvia Townsend Warner

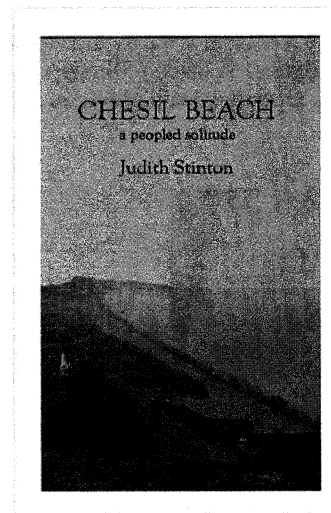
The file continues with a hand note to accompany a clutch of letters from Nancy Cunard (not in the file). 2/4/26/5 is a new year's card 'with best wishes for 1975 from Sylvia Townsend Warner' (written). The printed poem is by Valentine.

Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter

Gentle and feeble, the first days of spring
Creep like a batch of new-born kittens, blindly
About the place, exploring everything:
Until a hand uptakes them, firmly and kindly
And drops them back into their blanket covering.

He sings in the first thunderstorm of April,
The thrush on a thorn-tree already cloudy with blossom,
And the storm mumbles and the hail scolds, while gentle –
Smooth like small rods of silver – the bird's song shines.

While I slept we crossed the line between May and June;
The morning came, gently walking down from the hill,
And by the time I stirred it was full day
And she had brought summer with her into my room.



Chesil Beach is unique - a bank of pebbles stretching for sixteen miles along the Dorset coast, from the Isle of Portland to West Bay.

It looks a lonely landscape, deserted and unchanging. Yet there have always been people living here, concealed behind the shingle barrier. Poaching, smuggling and wrecking were common practices, but it has also sheltered undercover agents, experimental communities and hush-hush weapon testing. D-Day soldiers left for France from this coast, and the Spanish Armada battled in its waters.

The sea provides rich pickings, but can become an enemy, a devastatingly destructive force. The seabed is crowded with shipwrecks, and in 1824 the villages of Fleet and Chiswell were swept away overnight, in the worst disaster ever to hit Lyme Bay. Chesil Beach itself is vulnerable – to exploitation as well as weather.

While the geology, and the birds, beast and flowers of Chesil Beach have been closely studied, that other species, the human, has received far less attention – until now.

.....

Chesil Beach : a peopled solitude

is a 264 page illustrated paperback,
price £12, post free inland. Please send cheques to

**Harlequin Press, 21 Cattistock Road, Maiden Newton
Dorset DT2 0AG**

**Tel : 01300 320778 email : harlequinpress.net
judithstinton@mypostoffice.co.uk**

Janet Stone

Member Ann Torday Gulden sends us news from Twitter : a post from June, by illustrator Ian Back, married to Reynolds and Janet Stone's daughter Emma. A batch of Stone's negatives (including this image with Reynolds Stone) have recently been discovered and Beck is gradually working through them.



“She worked almost entirely in black-and-white. Most of her best portraits were done at Litton Cheney, with one of her three cameras, a Canon, a Yashica and an old Rolleiflex, the product of hours of patient observation. Some have an extraordinary spiritual depth - such as those of Iris Murdoch, David Jones and John Piper - as beautiful in their way as those of the four Stone children taken in childhood and youth; and humour runs through many of her images - of John Bayley, Professor of English Literature, lying happily asleep on a railway line; and of John Sparrow, Warden of All Souls, reading absorbedly, with a teacosy on his head”. (from Stone's obituary in *The Independent* 22 October 2011)

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October 18 : Dear Peter - The malfunction wasn't with BT but I'm afraid with my efficiency as a correspondent. Please do accept my apologies, which are the more sincere as I was fascinated to receive your account of Sylvia's markings in *Last Poems*. I wonder if the dates for XX and XXV relate those poems to Sylvia's marital misery at that time (she had in 1949 moved out of the home she shared with Valentine Ackland to let Valentine pursue her affair with Elizabeth Wade White). The link to the poems isn't too clear, but the underlying emotions might be connected.

I wrote a piece for the Warner Society Newsletter [#41] about the books of hers and Ackland's that I bought at an auction, and am attaching it here in three pdf pages, first by way of apology, second in case you're interested, and third because I wonder if you'd agree to the next Newsletter (about March 2021) including your description of *Last Poems*, or some version of this? The Newsletter is a nice mixture of snippets and longer pieces, so there'd be no need to develop it further unless you felt like doing that.

with all best wishes, and hoping your abdominal woes are well and truly a thing of the past – Peter

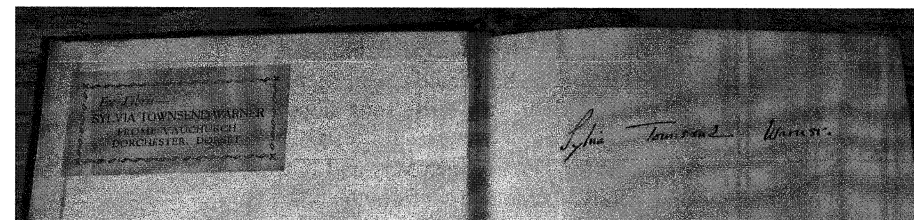
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October 21 : Dear Peter - Absolutely no apologies are called for and my only concern was that something had gone astray. Thanks for the attachments. I know so well the adrenalin rush that occurs when I discover some Housman rarity and I suspect that you experienced the same with this STW material.

I'd be very happy for you to use, or edit, or expand anything in our email correspondence for inclusion in your forthcoming newsletter. I don't think that I personally could add much to what I have already said but you are welcome to use these bare bones as you will.

Thanks for your kind enquiry and I'm pleased to report that my abdominal problems are now a distant memory.

With very best wishes – Peter



hotel, which turned out to be the place where Henry and Thomas Vaughan had been taught in the 1630s. A lovely spot, appropriately far from noise and danger. It has an orchard which supplies apple juice to HM the Queen, which might have pleased Vaughan too.

I bought a few of STW's old books at an auction this year and have been scouring them for marginalia. I wonder if she made any markings in *Last Poems*. I'd feel more scruple about marking up a book of poetry than prose, especially imagining Housman's disapprobation, but I wonder if Sylvia did.

One of the Warner circumstances I'm pleased and intrigued by is her warm friendship in the 1930s with William Empson, another Housman admirer. But they seem to have lost touch after the 30s.

all best wishes, and -- if you haven't already -- get well soon! - Peter

*

September 14 : Dear Peter - Thanks for your enquiry and I'm pleased to say that after a couple of weeks of rest and my 'new normal' sensible diet I am restored to health and the evil abdominal pains are now a passing memory. I applaud your choice of Wales for avoiding noise and danger.

The copy of *Last Poems* that I acquired does not, I suspect, hold much interest in the way of annotations or markings but I list what I see.

The book is the third imprint of the 1922 first edition printed in November of that year. The STW bookplate is affixed to the pagedown and her signature to the adjacent free endpaper. There are three further markings :

On page 17 which prints *LP V* 'Grenadier' and level with line 8 'And I shall march no more' is a pencil marking, tight to the gutter, which reads either 'a5' or 'CL5'.

On page 43 which prints *LP XX* [The night is freezing fast] underneath the poem is written in blue ink what I read as either 'A105 : 1950.' or 'H105 : 1950.'.

On page 51 which prints *LP XXV* 'The Oracles' underneath the poem is written in blue ink '1949'.

I believe that the three markings are all in the same hand, the two in ink definitely so.

So, I will let you make of that what you will and hopefully the information will prove useful. I think that now I am up and running again I will get a copy of the STW biography - unless you think there is a better place for me to start.

With very best wishes - Peter

*

October 12 : [query from Peter Sisley if the mails are going through]

Frances Bingham – *Valentine Ackland : A Transgressive Life*
(Handheld Press : Bath, 2021). 978-1912766406, 344 pp., paperback.

Readers of Warner and Ackland will be delighted to see this long-awaited biography of Valentine. It is a remarkable book about a remarkable woman. Valentine Ackland (1906-1969) was “transgressive” in so many ways. She was a cross-dressing lesbian; a communist from a privileged upper middle class family; in later life briefly a Roman Catholic then a Quaker; a pacifist who would have liked to fight in Spain; a woman with a love of shooting and driving fast cars; a journalist and a sensitive poet. She had affairs throughout her life including one that almost destroyed her and her life-long partner. That the partner was Sylvia Townsend Warner has defined Ackland to a large extent and been the source of her limited fame. Frances Bingham’s excellent biography restores Ackland to her deserved place as a fine writer and a fascinating woman of her time. Previous books (including of course those by Claire Harman and Wendy Mulford) largely concerned Warner although they did cover her partner’s life. Nevertheless, she remained to some extent in the shadow of the better known and more successful writer. This biography puts Ackland legitimately in the foreground, not only for her “transgressive life” but also for her poetry which is given serious and thoughtful examination. Valentine was, as Bingham says, “an inveterate self-mythologising autobiographer” who chronicled and analysed her own life in vivid and compelling detail. Bingham has drawn extensively on the resources in the Ackland-Warner archive in Dorchester, and her use of this primary material deftly illuminates the life. We are taken from a privileged but loveless childhood, through political and emotional transformations, her commitment to communism (which brought her to the ludicrous attention of MI5) and the Spanish Republic, war work, mid-life crises, and a search for spiritual meaning. All of this is accompanied by Valentine’s trenchant self-examination, frequent despair and self-doubt - but also by her wit, humour and clear-eyed commentary.

At the centre of the book, inevitably, is Valentine’s second great love. In 1938, she met the American Elizabeth Wade White, with whom she conducted a tortured affair for much of the rest of her life. We know a great deal about it because both Valentine and Sylvia wrote their lives relentlessly in diaries, journals, letters (including letters to each other while they were living in the same house) and poetry. As a result, there is an unusually full and detailed account and the raw and anguished personal material (from all parties) can sometimes be difficult to read. The conduct of the affair has long been a source of disagreement among Sylvia’s readers, some of whom (myself included) have deplored Valentine’s behaviour. But as Bingham explores the progress of, and the chorus of commentary on, the affair she deftly connects it to the troubled formation of Valentine’s personality.

While the book recounts Valentine’s many affairs, it sensitively examines her background and upbringing to show how much her active sexuality was part of her

search for identity. Seduction and love-making were elements in her self-affirmation. This was also manifested in her self-presentation - her clothes (trousers and ties) and interests (mechanical things, guns, and cars). Her need for love and acclaim as lover and poet both derived in part from an upbringing with a father she could never please and who rejected her because of her sexuality. The family dynamic is at times horrific with a mother who was largely passive and a cruel, manipulative older sister. The damage to Valentine's self-esteem led, among other things, to a dangerous dependence on alcohol for much of her life. Her life-story was always in process - writing it, living it, reflecting on it. Thus, her other dominant feature was her intense drive to write, to be appreciated as a poet, read and admired. This too would be a source of self-doubt and anguish, as she did not fulfil her aspiration despite having great ability and determination. It was perhaps her professional, if not personal, misfortune to spend her life with the incomparable Sylvia Townsend Warner.

I like the way that Bingham structures her biography. Her use of chronology is creative - instead of just running from birth to death she opens with an episode demonstrating Valentine's self-invention. The reader is intrigued by two women who turn up in rural Dorset in 1925 with cropped hair and wearing trousers. "The taller of the two, Mrs Turpin, had come to the country to recover from a recent operation to remove her hymen. Her friend Mrs Braden thought this was tremendously funny." This is also a good place to start because she goes on to describe the landscape and community that would become home to Valentine and Sylvia for most of their life together. One feels that the whole life is always in this biographer's grasp, she knows where she is going and is an astute and sometimes ironic commentator on her subject. In her Introduction, she writes that biography "should be a kind of time-travelling co-operation between the quick and the dead; an exploration of one character by another, completed by the reader's participation." That is exactly what she achieves here.

Frances Bingham has been researching Ackland for at least twenty years. Carcanet published her selection of the poetry with a critical and biographical commentary in 2008 as *Journey from Winter*. She has had to wait longer to see her biography in print but it was worth it. And what a very well-written, measured and sensitive evaluation it is. Handheld Press are to be commended on producing such an attractive book with well-chosen photographs and a striking cover. For readers familiar with Ackland, the book gives insightful and significant new assessments of the writing as well as the life. For those encountering Ackland for the first time, it is both an intriguing biography and a differently angled view of social, cultural and political life in the first half of the twentieth century.

Gill Davies

adapted from a review of May 20, 2021 in shinynewbooks.co.uk

though it could just about refer to the prose; but Claire H may have seen some record of Housman's admiration that I haven't. You might enjoy this extract from a letter to David Garnett dated 4 March 1976 : 'Today I wanted to look up "The Spartans on the sea-wet rocks" and took out Housman's *Last Poems*. And finding I was right about the Spartans I read on; to the last page. And on the last page was THE END. As you might expect. But I suddenly had a vivid sense of the goblin pleasure A.E.H. must have had as he wrote those words, in a neat scholar's handwriting, licking dry lips, slamming that noiseless door.' (*Sylvia and David*, ed Richard Garnett, p. 206)

Paul Robichaud makes reference to Housman in an article on STW's 1920s poetry in the Warner Journal 2018 : 2, pages 40-17 [in the correspondence a web-link is given].

If I come across anything else more clinching I'll let you know. But I imagine Archie Burnett would be the person most likely to know.

all best wishes - Peter Swaab

*

August 31 : Dear Professor Swaab - Many thanks for your response and my apologies for not acknowledging earlier but a week ago I was whizzed into Worcester Royal Hospital with severe abdominal pains and violent vomiting. There, together with other humiliations, I was successively starved, drugged, flushed and discharged so that a more deserving soul could inherit my bed. I now commence my recuperation period with my outstanding emails.

So, thank you for your detailed response which is most interesting and I was bound to smile on reading the extract from the Garnett letter - "goblin pleasure" - is delightful, and "licking dry lips" encourages me to spend some time on STW. I am a serious Housman collector and amuse myself by obtaining 'collectors copies' of his work and recently I picked up AEH's *Last Poems* with the bookplate of Sylvia Townsend Warner at Frome Vauchurch, Dorchester, Dorset, which prompted my interest in a little research, which I shall now continue.

I do have a couple of manuscripts to show Archie and I'll ask him if he has any thoughts on STW, and, if he does I'll let you know.

And, if ever you found a sticky problem on Housman I'd be pleased to try and help.

Thanks again and very best wishes - Peter Sisley

*

September 12 : Dear Peter (if I may) - My turn to apologize for being slow to reply, and I do hope much you've got over that very nasty-sounding illness and not much less nasty treatment. My own slowness came mainly from the much happier reason of a week's holiday in Wales. The poetic highlight for me was staying in an old rectory, now a

A.O.B.

[a] **The next Warner Society Lecture** will be given by David Trotter on 21 October 2021 at 5.30pm. It is hoped that this will be a live occasion, but zoom is a fallback option, and the possibility of a dual presentation is being investigated.

(b) A date for **the next Society weekend** was discussed, Covid permitting. It was agreed that the first or second weekend of September would be best. Agreed that Peter Swaab would investigate possibilities for a Dorset weekend and liaise further.

Action : PS

(c) It was agreed that the Society would once again run a Mary Jacobs Essay Competition, with a first prize of £300 and a total prize fund of up to £500. **Action : PS and JM**

The business part of the AGM was concluded and followed by a brief programme of readings.

* * * * *

Sylvia Townsend Warner & A.E. Housman

Our Man in London sends us this email exchange with Peter Sisley of The Housman Society. If anyone has further AEH/STW news, suggestions, excitements or sightings, please contact Peter [Swaab].

*

16 August 2020 : Dear Professor Swaab - I was hoping that as Editor of the STW Society Journal you could assist me with a query regarding the oft-repeated claim that the *The Espalier* was praised by A.E. Housman. No-where can I find a source for this claim and I was hoping that you might be able to throw some light on the matter.

With very best wishes - Peter Sisley, The Housman Society

*

25 August : Dear Mr Sisley - Thanks for your very interesting question. The link between Housman and Warner has a symbolic appeal which has no doubt fuelled the repeating of this claim. I've checked in Warner's letters, diaries and biography and the most relevant thing I've found is this, from STW's Diary, 28 May 1929 : 'Ian Parsons wrote to tell me of a friend of his dining with A.E. Housman. He (the friend) deplored modern novels. A.E. said : S.T.W. writes good novels, and added that mine were the only modern novels he cared to read. Such a compliment left me feeling perfectly quelled.' (*The Diaries of STW*, ed. Claire Harman, p. 36)

But that refers to the novels. On the poetry Claire Harman says in her discussion of *The Espalier* in her biography (*STW : A Biography*, 1989) that 'As the book settled down, she began to acquire a few influential admirers : A.E. Housman, Louis Untermeyer, ... Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch.' (p. 62) This sounds as if AEH was an admirer of the poetry,

Dearest William,

Here we are. I hope I have now knocked Mr Benson about a bit – my mother's drawing-master's comment on nicely-finished water colours, Can't yer knock it abaht a bit? – and I am very grateful to you and Mr Shawn for making me do so. When I came to consider him, he was indeed awful.

And thank you and bless you for the cable to say you liked the story about Mrs Cullen. Between you and me, I think Mr Laver's letter is a diamond. I was as pleased with it as I was with the single-speech clergyman in The Fourth [sic] of November.

I am sorry that having torn up the first page of Mr B. revised, I entangled it in Scotch tape instead of re-copying it. Not laziness, though. Visitations.

Love,
[signed] Sylvia

3 : ix : 1959

This typed letter, courtesy of Michael Steinman, is unpublished, for obvious reasons. But we cognoscenti now have an excuse to read again three stories, all gathered in *A Spirit Rises*. Mr Benson appears in 'A Dressmaker', Mrs Cullen and Mr Laver in 'During a Winter Night' and the clergyman in 'The Fifth of November'.

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THE SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER SOCIETY

Annual General Meeting 2021

Held online via Zoom on Saturday 8 May at 3.30 pm BST

AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of AGM 2019, documents and Chairs report from 2020
3. Matters Arising
4. Chair's report
5. Membership Report
6. Treasurer's Report
7. Website report
8. Publications report – JSTWS and Newsletter
9. Any Other Business : a) Society Lecture b) Society Outing c) Mary Jacobs lecture

Present at the meeting : Jan Montefiore, Mercedes Aguirre, Jay Barksdale, Harriet Baker, Helen Jones, Peter Swaab, Judith Bond, Rowan Bright, Gill Davies, Diana Wallace, John Sanders, Kate Macdonald, Ailsa Granne, Ann Torday Gulden, Annie Rhodes, Ren Draya, Mary Joannou

There were apologies for absence from Judith Stinton, Miranda Cuming and Jenny Wildblood.

The Minutes of the 2019 AGM were approved, along with the documents and Chair's Report for 2020. There was no AGM in 2020 owing to Covid-19.

Matters arising. It was agreed to rationalise the different email addresses associated with the Society. The address 'society@townsendwarner.com' will now become residual and 'info@townsendwarner.com' will become the main current address for inquiries.

Chair's report. Jan Montefiore spoke to her report, noting the welcome number of Warner-related publications in the last year. She noted also the thoroughly international zoom meeting in January 2021 : this event included over a dozen readings from Warner's works and was arranged to celebrate the new website, the completion of the digitisation of the 2000-2014 Journals and the uploading of pdfs of all the Newsletters.

The Reading Group had reformed electronically on 18 March 2021 for a lively discussion of *Mr Fortune's Maggot*. Another meeting was planned on *The True Heart*. **Action : HB**

JM thanked the Society's Officers for their continuing good work.

Membership report. Mercedes Aguirre spoke to her report. She noted first that membership of the Society had been holding up better than at first feared following the raising of the subscriptions and the move to take payments electronically wherever possible. It was agreed to shorten from 18 to 12 months the period of grace allowed to members to renew their membership. There was a discussion about again raising the subscription, but it was felt that this would be too soon after the last raise, and that other fundraising possibilities should be explored.

Treasurer's report. Helen Jones presented her report. She had brought all figures for the Society up to date, including the sum owed to the previous treasure, Jenny Wildblood, to whom the meeting sent thanks. Jay Barksdale was warmly thanked for his extremely generous financial support of the Newsletter. The Society remains in credit; but even with our increased subscription, our annual spending budget exceeds our income. Although the margin is small, this is not sustainable in the long term, and a number of possibilities for fund-raising were discussed.

(a) The option of non-print membership. It was generally thought that this would have only a small effect.

(b) Gift Aid. Since the Society was for non-profit educational purposes and its income below £5000, it might be eligible for Gift Aid, which does not require the onerous procedures involved in applying for charitable status. **Action : HJ**

(c) Diana Wallace said that the Association of Welsh Studies offered the option of a 'Supporting Membership' subscription at a higher rate. She agreed to liaise with HJ about this idea, which the meeting supported. **Action : DW, HJ**

(d) Gift Memberships. Mercedes Aguirre agreed to bring in a user-friendly and visible option of buying somebody a Gift Membership on the membership renewal forms. **Action : MA**

(e) Student memberships at a lower rate. The meeting was keen to recruit more students, but Mercedes Aguirre reported that we have only five student members at present so the likely effect on finances would be small and the idea was set aside for now.

(f) Publication method : Given rising levels of print and postage costs, Jan Montefiore suggested the possibility of adopting a new model in which both yearly issues of the Journal would appear digitally but there would be only a single print version, comprising the contents of both issues. There was a good deal of support for this proposal, but several members also had qualms about the move, especially so soon after the change to subscriptions. It was agreed to continue thinking about this option and if possible to consult the membership for views. For the present the Society would see if the new Supporting Membership rate would bring in further income, together with the savings made by bringing the postage and packing of the Journal inhouse.

Jan Montefiore thanked Helen Jones again for all the work she has done to bringing the Society's accounts up to date, which is very much appreciated.

Website report. Harriet Baker spoke to her report, thanking the Society for its patience and announcing that the website was complete and up and running. The possibility of a blog function on the website was discussed, but it was agreed for now to limit additions to the website to news items and roundups. It was agreed that an email would be sent to the membership to announce the completion of the website.

Harriet Baker was thanked again for all her work on the new website, which looks splendid.

Publications report. Peter Swaab spoke to his report on the Journal and Jay Barksdale to his report on the Newsletter. There have been some delays in getting the second Journal for 2020 printed; it will appear as a double number with 2021(i) in October 2021. JB said how much he would like to meet up in person again, and the meeting warmly concurred. Both editors were thanked for the publications, which the members have greatly enjoyed.