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The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Newsletter Number Forty-Six

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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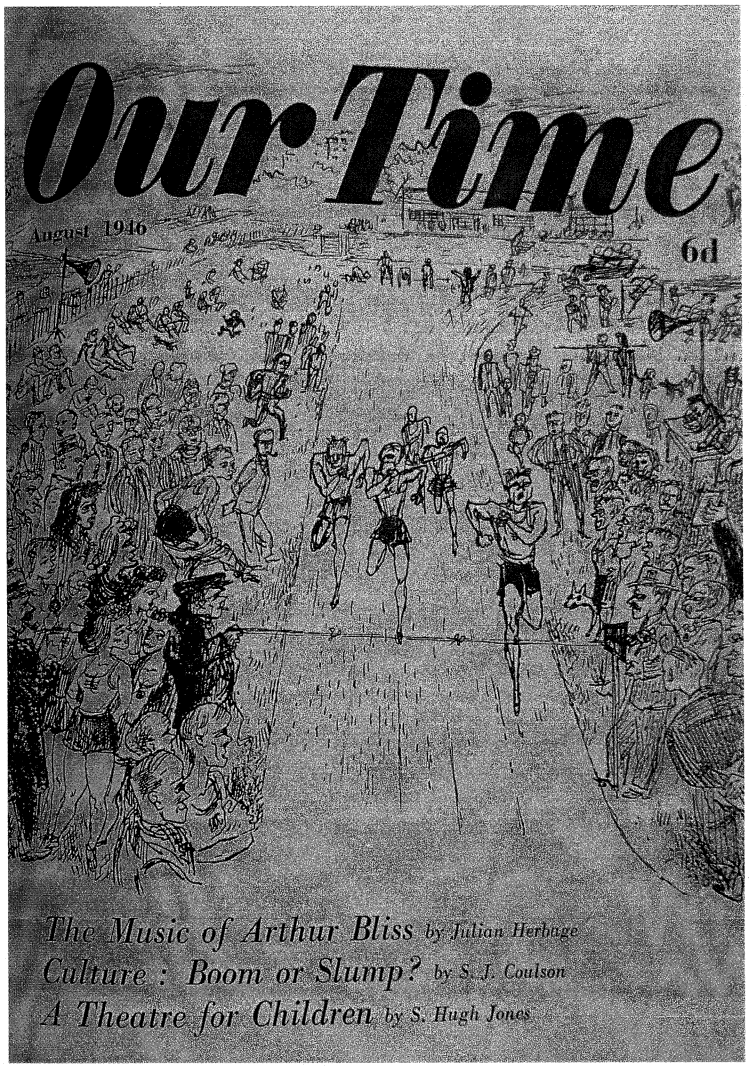
Sports Day – James Boswell



Pablo came running back from the trees at the top of the field. Now where the hell has he been? the Englishman thought. I didn't see him go. And then he turned to the business of dragging the log.

Pablo was happy. Yes, it could be, he was thinking. That could have been. He began his dreadful chatter again, to everyone, all of them Englishmen; but was thinking all the time behind his talk. Lucky I had my eyes half-shut, he thought. With them wide open she might not have looked so good. Just saw the black hair and the dark face and the coloured skirt and the white blouse. She might quite definitely have been one of ours. It was worth the waiting. And tonight he would see her. He had it all fixed now. He had fixed it cleverly, too, going to the side of the field—why, everyone has to go to the side of the field some time or another—and passing her a fag.

He turned to the Englishman.

"Gra?" he said. "That worrd. Wass gra?"

"No, you bloody ape. Grey. Grey. Grey."

"Gra? Grere? Gree? Gre? Grey? Gra?"

"Oh, mother," the Englishman said. "You had it just then. But you had to go and loose the bleeder. Oh, mother."

"Ah," Pablo said. "I hed it, eh? I hed it."

They began laughing, the lot of them, perhaps because they would soon be at the top.

"Ha," Pablo said. He was satisfied. Another of these barbarous lessons learned.

One of them stopped pulling, and then all of them stopped, wiped their sleeves across their faces. The Englishman looked ahead of them, across the field between them and where they were building the Assault Course, shading his eyes with his hand. It was very light up here after the wood, and the sun was hurting his eyes.

"Soon be up," he said. "Come on. Get going."

"Not se soon," Pablo said. "Not se soon. We hev another fild An whool other fild.' He began to laugh. "You chit," he said. "I sinne you. I sinne you. You chit. You hev close y'r eye." He was laughing big now, rocking about by the log. That was some joke, he was thinking.

"Don't get it," the Englishman said. "Don't get it."

"I joker you in y'r own lanewage, and you not unnerstann. Ha. Much longer. Moch way to go in fild. You chit widder y'r eye. I sinne you."

"Don't get it," the Englishman said. "Come on. Soon be there."

"Ha," Pablo said. "Ha."

All the bleeding miles of Spain, he thought. If only there were some girl you could tell it all to. He would tell her every word of it.

And of course there was a girl today. . . .

NEWSLETTER NUMBER FORTY-SIX

Reading John Lucas's Letter to the Editor in *Journal 2020:1* your editor remembered when at the Dorset Archive photographing two typed letters from and a poem by Arnold Rattenbury. Thinking Professor Lucas might enjoy reading them (and hoping for a gloss) I sent them on. He very kindly did so, and all are below. For those of us who would appreciate some background – the obituary from *The Guardian.*

Arnold Rattenbury

Realistic poet whose gifts found expression in words, exhibition designs and friendship

John Lucas – Monday 30 July 2007

I cannot imagine that anyone who saw the exhibition Arnold Rattenbury designed for the 1972 Nottingham festival will be likely to forget it. Young Bert recreated the life of DH Lawrence, from his birth in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire, to the beginning of the first world war and, in more attenuated fashion, his later years.

As you walked up the staircase of Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, you were confronted by a vast black-and-white panoramic view of the 19th-century city. You squeezed through the narrow entrance door and found yourself in darkness, with photographic panels of miners, stripped to the waist as they hacked at coal seams; from there, you progressed into a facsimile of a miner's kitchen, under the arch of a Congregational chapel, through a dimly lit schoolroom, then turned a corner and, in a blaze of light, were confronted with the picture-hung walls of the gallery itself – Lawrence discovering the liberating world of art, ideas, culture.

Like its creator, himself a poet of distinction who has died at the age of 85, the exhibition was, at once, entirely serious and wonderfully entertaining.

Arnold was born in China. His father was a Methodist missionary whose many children were sent to England for their education, which in Arnold's case meant Kingswood, the Methodist public school, in Bath, where his classmates included GM Matthews, the Shelley scholar, and the radical historian and campaigner EP Thompson. As sixth-formers, all three, who were to remain lifelong friends, were trying to sell the *Daily Worker* to fellow pupils.

His arrival at St John's College, Cambridge, coincided with the outbreak of the second world war. So, following the Nazi invasion of Russia, in 1941 he volunteered for the army, from which he was invalided out after "becoming involved in a little-known encounter between a tank and a bicycle in Trowbridge high street".

Work for the communist arts monthly, *Our Time*, where some of his early poems appeared, brought him into contact with such luminaries as Montagu Slater, Randall Swingler, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Jack Lindsay, the artist James Boswell, and, most significantly, the novelist Patrick Hamilton, to whose rooms in The Albany, Piccadilly, he was regularly dispatched for funds when money at *Our Time* ran out. Many of my research students benefitted from Arnold's willingness to share information about these figures, most of whom became his friends, and about whom he wrote in essays essential to any literary historian of the period.

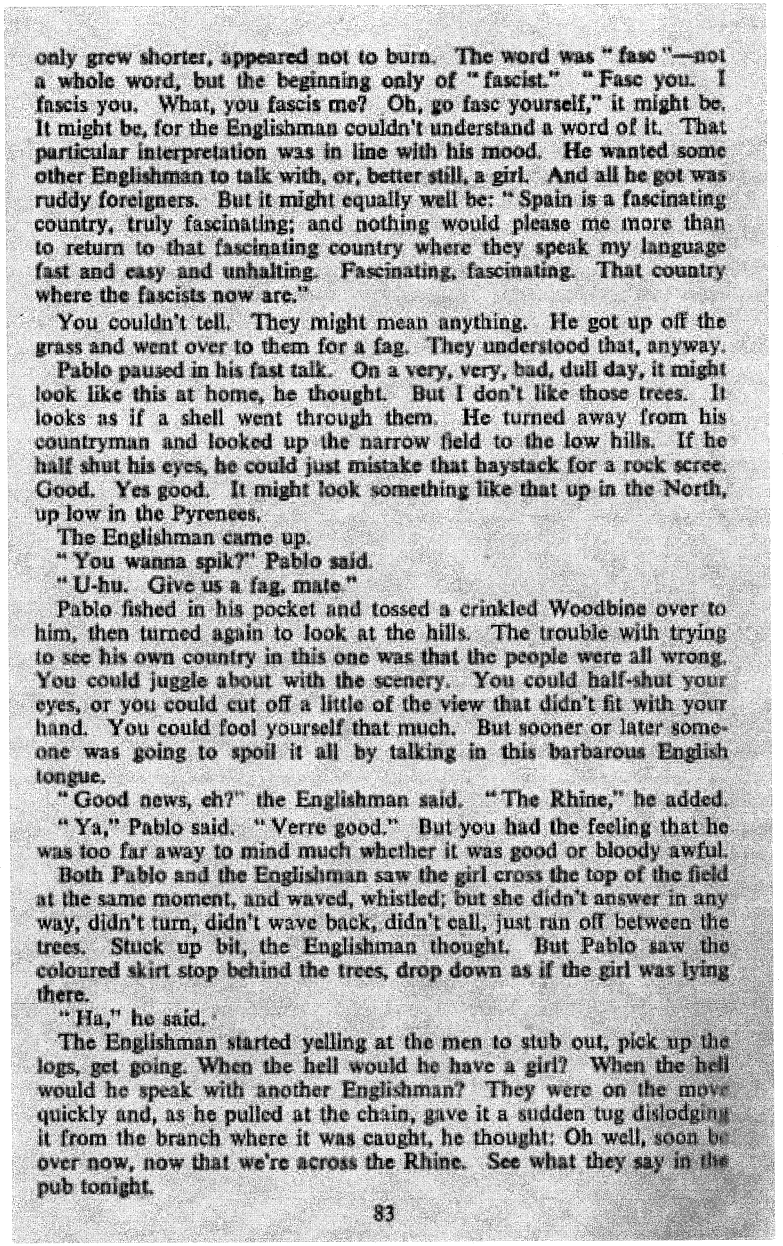
Our Time was succeeded by a brief interlude in Bristol, where Arnold, with his actor wife, Sim, had hoped to run a communist bookshop and keep pigs. After which it was back to London, where he began to develop his skills as an exhibition designer. To a keen visual sense – he had an enormously retentive memory for all kinds of pictorial images – he added literary flair, wide and deep reading, and a comic exuberance that could redeem the dullest of commissions. The wittiest man I have ever known, he had an unfailing ability to create a spirit of carnival, so that working with or for him was a kind of joy.

By the time Rattenbury came to Nottingham in 1971, which was when I first met him, Chatto & Windus had brought out his first collection of poetry, *Second Causes*, and he had another collection ready. I suggested he give it to me for the Byron Press, which I had started some years previously with a colleague in the university English department, and in 1972 *Man Thinking* came out.

Other Nottingham festival exhibitions followed: on Bicycles (the Raleigh factory was on the doorstep); on Wedgwood; and, a special favourite, on Clowning. During the planning of these exhibitions, Arnold would frequently stay with us, colonising our kitchen: pot of tea at one elbow, packs of Senior Service at the other – his heavy smoking eventually brought on emphysema – my *Guardian* propped in front of him; and while he smoked, drank cup after cup of tea, and completed the crossword, he would entertain our two young children with a seemingly inexhaustible flow of comic stories.

At first, he travelled up from London, but soon he was taking the train from north Wales, where he and Sim now lived in the medieval stone cottage they had restored, through whose lovely garden a rivulet made its way down to a small, boisterous river from which Arnold derived much of his imagery about the unpredictable course of change, its blockages and breakthroughs, and which housed some of his treasured artefacts, including a whoppingly heavy and useless slate fan. This was an example of a frigger: objects fashioned by craftsmen and women for their own and others' delight.

Arnold, whose 1996 illustrated collection, *Morris Papers*, indicates something of his passion for the arts and crafts tradition, loved such work, and in 1994 I published



only grew shorter, appeared not to burn. The word was "faso"—not a whole word, but the beginning only of "fascist." "Fasc you. I fascis you. What, you fascis me? Oh, go fasc yourself," it might be. It might be, for the Englishman couldn't understand a word of it. That particular interpretation was in line with his mood. He wanted some other Englishman to talk with, or, better still, a girl. And all he got was ruddy foreigners. But it might equally well be: "Spain is a fascinating country, truly fascinating; and nothing would please me more than to return to that fascinating country where they speak my language fast and easy and unhalting. Fascinating, fascinating. That country where the fascists now are."

You couldn't tell. They might mean anything. He got up off the grass and went over to them for a fag. They understood that, anyway.

Pablo paused in his fast talk. On a very, very, bad, dull day, it might look like this at home, he thought. But I don't like those trees. It looks as if a shell went through them. He turned away from his countryman and looked up the narrow field to the low hills. If he half shut his eyes, he could just mistake that haystack for a rock scree. Good. Yes good. It might look something like that up in the North, up low in the Pyrenees.

The Englishman came up.

"You wanna spik?" Pablo said.

"U-hu. Give us a fag, mate."

Pablo fished in his pocket and tossed a crinkled Woodbine over to him, then turned again to look at the hills. The trouble with trying to see his own country in this one was that the people were all wrong. You could juggle about with the scenery. You could half-shut your eyes, or you could cut off a little of the view that didn't fit with your hand. You could fool yourself that much. But sooner or later someone was going to spoil it all by talking in this barbarous English tongue.

"Good news, eh?" the Englishman said. "The Rhine," he added.

"Ya," Pablo said. "Verre good." But you had the feeling that he was too far away to mind much whether it was good or bloody awful.

Both Pablo and the Englishman saw the girl cross the top of the field at the same moment, and waved, whistled; but she didn't answer in any way, didn't turn, didn't wave back, didn't call, just ran off between the trees. Stuck up bit, the Englishman thought. But Pablo saw the coloured skirt stop behind the trees, drop down as if the girl was lying there.

"Ha," he said.

The Englishman started yelling at the men to stub out, pick up the logs, get going. When the hell would he have a girl? When the hell would he speak with another Englishman? They were on the move quickly and, as he pulled at the chain, gave it a sudden tug dislodging it from the branch where it was caught, he thought: Oh well, soon be over now, now that we're across the Rhine. See what they say in the pub tonight.

" Yesse," the Englishman said. " Gawblimey, 'e's gone all ruddy poetic."

" Nunno. You. Morer colorr. You hev wurrong me. It isse so dool. How you say?"

" Say what?" the guy said.

" Dool. You hev worrd ' gree?' "

" Grey."

" Gree?"

" No, you bloody ape. Grey."

" Oh." Pablo looked knowing, as if the correct pronunciation of this word was at the same time sad and an old joke and something secret between him and the Englishman.

" Gra," he said gravely.

The twenty men scrambled through the bushes at the top of the wood. There was no footpath at this point, only a few yards further down, when it suddenly started up again for no particular reason out of the bottom of a broken-up oak. There was an old woodman trimming in a thicket high up on one side of the men. They called to him, as he had been there the last three times they had been this way.

Much as in my country, Pablo thought.

They came to a dirty pond down in the wood bottom. It was propped up on one side with sheets of corrugated iron and the water was thick with weeds: it might once have been used for nesting. Behind it, up the slope, the trees were dreary, derelict, hidden in their rotten sunless corner; and from it, along the valley bottom, a narrow field ran down the centre of the wood. They walked along it now, following the hardened mud-ruts left by a dozen logs they had dragged this way in last week's rain. Pablo looked back once, a moment, stared at the dead timber. Too much like, he thought.

They had meant to clear this wood last week, but the rain had finally stopped them when there were only two logs left. So they took them now, chained them, and dragged them as far back as the pond before they stopped for a smoke where the sun hit up at them from the brackish water.

All ruddy foreigners, the Englishman thought. Coupla Spaniards, coupla Poles, coupla double-Dutch. Wish there was a drop of simple noisy Englishman. Do with that. He sat down on the wet grass, watching the others lazily—bleedin' foreigner in his own bleedin' country.

The two Spaniards were talking by themselves. They always talked very quickly and the Englishman had always laughed at their noise, though he couldn't understand what they said, except for the occasional recurrence of odd English words: " Woodbine " it might be, or " flick " or " girl," " fag," " Hitler "—anything, just a few English words. Today there was one word especially. The sun from the water and the sheets of old corrugated iron hit a bright light up in front of both of them, so that there seemed to be no light from their fag-ends that

The Frigger Makers, poems about skrimshaw, hookies, proggies, ganseys, and much else besides. Many of these artefacts found their way into exhibitions Arnold mounted in the north Wales he had come to love, especially the wondrous *Ardudwy: a Catalogue of Things Made by Hand on Farms,* in *Quarries and at Sea,* where, as he says in the introduction, "the exhibition wants to see how the bodies lived that had the hands." There were exhibitions further afield, among them one on Wilfred Owen, and, at Rockingham Castle, on marine paintings and the sea.

As a poet, Arnold thought naturally in sequences, and possibly the finest of these is *Mozart Pieces*, a series of sonnets which began life in the early 1970s and which he went on adding to for the rest of his life. They can be found in his last collection, *Mr Dick's Kite* (2005), while other sequences turn up in the earlier collections, *Dull Weather Dance* and *Living Here*.

A political poet who never propagandised, Arnold directed his deepest contempt at one-time Communist party members who, having reneged on their beliefs, chose to turn their backs on former friends. He himself inspired a rare degree of love and loyalty. He is survived by Sim and his children, Emma and Adam.

Arnold Rattenbury, poet and exhibition designer, born October 5 1921;
died April 26 2007.

* * * * *

Q(LBL)/1/R/3

Bodloesygad, Ffestiniog, Merioneth. Ffestiniog (076 676) 627 13.3.74

Dear Sylvia,

I may have sent you the enclosed before. But then you had sent me King Duffus before, and I had loved it and sent it to a friend, and now I need not go on asking for it back. Anyway, I send mine now, because perhaps I neglected to do so when it was new, because a poem near the end partly answers your question about larks up here, and because (unbelievably) it's going to be reprinted and I needn't clutch last copies to myself as I've been doing. And if it's a dupe, then you can send it to a friend.

Where else to begin about Bodloesygad ? It means, for instance, 'The dwelling of the cry of agony in battle'. The welsh is ancient and in doubt to the extent that 'battle' might be better 'duel'. The house is at a sort of elbow in the Cynfal, but well above it: you hear the river rather than see it. I suppose the river rises somewhere; but to all intents and purposes it drops into existence out of the sky down an enormous waterfall crashing from the point where grey sky is indistinguishable from grey Migneint – where Christ sat, where the larks are – a great wilderness sprawling away above us between here and anywhere east. Then it goes very poolful, dawdles, giggling a little where stones collect, as far as the elbow. From the elbow on it drives deeper and deeper into its gorge, goes in for drama of all sorts: falls, whirlpools, trumpets off, Pulped Llwyd – a

great flat rock in midstream where a nonconformist bard with a voice like a bull (it must have been) preached against enclosures – shrill entrance and exit. Above the elbow, in the quietness, are three houses as old as this – Brynkevergyd, 'the brow of the hill', Bron Goronwy, 'Goronwy's hide'; Llech Gronw, 'Goronwy's rock' – and a pasture where there is no longer a house but which has a name meaning 'the slope of the arrow'. After delivering the Cynfal to us, the Migneint rises across our south to become Mynydd Maentwrog, a long unremarkable mountain facing us, under which the Cynfal flows as far as this elbow, and away from which it bangs and harangues its way, across our west. Perhaps a mile along the shoulder of Mynydd Maentwrog from here is a coppice of old firs, not Forestry fir praise be, the other side of which is Tomen y Mur.

All these names are mabinogious. Tomen y Mur was the marital house of Blodeuwydd and Llew Llaw Giffes, Merlin's magical protegé. While her husband was off at the wars, she took a lover, Goronwy, into their bed. You'll know the story, I'm sure: how Goronwy went into hiding on Llew Llaw Giffes's return but continued to meet Blodeuwydd, learning from her the only way in which Llew Llaw's immortality could be ended; how they prepared the necessary poisoned arrows together, how Goronwy shot Llew Llaw from 'the brow of the hill'; how Llew Llaw rose with 'the cry of agony' that wakened all Ardudwy and was transmogrified into a bleeding eagle that flapped away into Caernarvon. Then – it is a long story – Llew Llaw is humanized again by Merlin, and returns to duel with Goronwy, granting his one last wish, which is to set up an impenetrable rock between 'the brow of the hill' and the target spot. Llew Llaw's arrow pierces its way through the rock and kills Goronwy, while Blodeuwydd runs in panic across the Migneint with her maidens, all of them looking backwards as they flee so that they fall into Llyn Merinion, 'the lake of the maidens', and drown; and Blodeuwydd, who Merlin had made of twigs and feathers, turns into a nesting owl. Lady Charlotte say 'blodeuwydd' is welsh for an owl even now; but that alone seems to be wishful thinking. It's a good story, worth reading again. And it seems to be our backyard. I mean: Bodloesygad seems to be the proper ancient welsh for 'here the eagle screamed, and here Gonorwy died'.

In the village are friends who won't call, for instance. The slate floor downstairs has one slab loose, and years ago now, our good friend Bet Ty Isaf was at last persuaded to come to tea and trod on it. O, how fast her departure was; and she's never been back since. Even Garry Parry, who drew the covers for my New Year card and is only 23 or so and loves the Cwm, won't stay here on his own. Last summer I ran a squad of kids making sideshows for the Carnival in the barn below the house. Garry was painting a saucy can-can girl on an old door out of which we'd pushed a circle, so that blokes could stand behind and poke their heads through and have wet sponges flung at them, 5 shots, 2P. At times I thought he'd never get her top half done, so frequent and mysterious were his disappearances as the Carnival drew nearer and nearer. And then he told me that if I stayed it would be all right because, being English, I was not party to the legends. So I stayed and the can-can girl got finished. Mostly people don't mind. There's a lot of fuss about the language, too little about the lore. But every now and

got it right." Her brow crinkled up a little in doubt, but then it cleared again. "Yes, I'm sure I've got it right. It's been going on in lots of places that you English hardly ever think of. You half shut your eyes. That's what the trouble is. You cheat. You half shut your eyes. And of course a shawl's for blowing noses. You don't need all this cloth for your hair, it's for blowing noses."

At the dinner table, just after Henry had said the grace, she said it again. "You half shut your eyes. And, mother, I want something. You know what I want."

"But not at the table, dear," Mrs. Dukes said. "Not at the table. You can't smoke at the table."

Susannah began to cry.

"Oh, all right then," her mother said. "All right." She raised her brow slightly, pained, and looked across at her husband as she passed a Woodbine to Susannah.

"Thank you, mother," Susannah said. "Thank you, mother. I'm sorry. But you will half shut your eyes all the time."

It was all so hard on Henry, trying to settle back into his old ways again now that it was all over. It was bad enough with that socialist brother of his But this. . . . To come back and find your daughter really mad, not simple.

* * *

Mrs. Dukes had been right. It had been one of those mornings when the bright light cuts all but the nearest hills out of view, and behind them only a hazy dropscene stood in the air.

Twenty soldiers were dropping down into the valley below the main white drive, going towards the woods, whistling. They were Pioneers billeted in the big house. In the lower grounds, out of sight of the house they belonged to, were the beginnings of huts they were building. The soldiers were just beyond them now, on their way down to the wood where they collected logs for the Assault Course every morning. Different parts of England had seen them at the same game for years.

Above, the hill curved round like a boomerang, bending from the home farm back to the big house. Along one side ran the white drive, and on the other, the higher side, were three green fields, one above the other, edged with loose-brick walls. And then, starting plumb in the elbow of the boomerang, was the wood, widening out until it filled a whole corner of the valley.

The twenty soldiers came to a gap in the hedge. This was the way through to the next field, the last they had to cross to reach the wood. Every day that they came down to this particular wood, they came to this gap; and every time, Pablo, who was always at the front of the party, said:

"Arserter you.

"Arserter you," the Englishman mimicked. They were through the gap.

"Iffe this wasse Spen," Pablo said, "there woode be morer colorr." He paused. "Yes?" he said.

the child. If she would smoke such common things, there was nothing you could do about it, it was imperative that she should not be crossed. She watched her daughter work the little cylinder of white into the corner of her mouth as she always did, and her own mouth curled with distaste as she watched. She turned away so that she could not see Susannah lift up her leg and strike the match on the sole of her shoe, but for all her turning she knew Susannah was doing it and felt just as repelled as if she had watched. The madness she could bear. If her daughter must be mad, she should and could bear it. The loud, unsuitable clothes she could bear. But these coarse, common gestures, they were too much.

And now, for another seven minutes, she would have to compose herself for nothing. Susannah would lie down with all her bright colours on the mucky ground, lie on her back and then roll over and look down through this little screen of trees to the pond until the cigarette was finished and say that awful, common thing.

"Nice fag, this," Susannah said. "I like a good draw."

Later, walking along the drive at the hilltop, walking into the wind, Mrs. Dukes remembered the first day she had said that.

It had been one of those mornings when the bright light cuts all but the nearest hills out of view, and behind them only a hazy dropscene stood in the air. Susannah had gone for a walk and not come back for a day; and when she had come back it had been with the words, "I like a good draw," on her lips. She had gone out, silly perhaps, a backward child; but she had come back mad, mad about Woodbines, mad about colour, mad about the pond. Looking at her daughter now, she had to admit a certain striking beauty in her, and wondered for the thousandth time.

"We shall have to get Ann to wash that blouse, darling," she said, "It's getting quite grey." And Susannah burst into tears.

"Grey?" she said. "No, it can't be grey. Not grey. Oh, mother, I'm not well. I shan't ever be well until the war's over. Mother, it's such a terrible war." She took the great shawl off her hair and blew her nose into it loudly.

"But it is over, my dear," Mrs. Dukes tried to explain. "It is over. Don't you see? We've moved back into the big house again. The soldiers have all gone away. Daddy's back again. Daddy doesn't wear a uniform any more. It is over." She had been looking across to the village and, turning now, saw Susannah tying the shawl on her head again.

"Su." She said it sharply, as she had done when they had all been children. "Su, you are not to put that back on your head when you've blown your nose on it. It's disgusting."

But Susannah tilted up her eyes at her, smiled craftily.

"Oh no," she said. "Oh no, mother. It's not over. It's much bigger than you think. And this is what a shawl's for anyway. What's the point in putting things on your head if you don't use them. Oh no. It's just as important in places you never read about. I'm sure I've

then – and its always the nicest and the welshest of them – someone does. Living here is being custodian of something only half understood. I like that.

Tomen y Mur became Castel y Mur in Roman times, and the archaeologists have dug a roman fort above an older fortification. The houses too, including this one, are about right for date – fourteenth century, when the nomadic habit became settlement and the oral tradition became literature. Guessing at such circumstances, you name places, I suppose, for the lore you live by. And the tale's topography is a possible one. There is a remarkable tump of a hill behind Brynkevergyd. The 'slope of the arrows' is conveniently close behind Bron Gononwy. If you ran helter-skelter from Tomen y Mur to Anywhere you would indeed fall into Llyn Merinion. Only Llech Gronw has got itself misplaced to the wrong side of the Cynfal, so that no arrow shot from Brynkevergyd to here could possibly go through a rock over there; and when Adam was young and he and I spent much of our lives hunting both sides of the river for it, we never found, I must admit, a rock heroic enough with a sufficient hole in it.

I have to go to Glasgow tomorrow on an exhibition job. I am ready in time for once, so can continue – if you can bear it.

Garry despairs of ever teaching me much about birds. Brownbird, blackbird, whitebird is about all I can manage, even in poems. About plants also. And mosses, and ferns. Edgell, when he comes here, shames me with his Countryman as well as his Latin for this and that. You'll do the same no doubt – or do you never travel from that beautiful house with the willow's shadow and the whole of Time gurgling beneath your desk ? Would you consider coming ? Long long ago I remember asking was there a pub where we could stay near you if we could manage to come your way instead ? Our friends at Powerstock moved alas, so a pub would have to be the way of it.

There are yellowbreasts and redbreasts and bluebreasts, you see. And two pairs of buzzards of whom we are fond, especially when the gulls mob them and they flap and flounder up there in embarrassment at an attention they really did nothing to seek. And things with green wings. Or long necks. Pheasants, of course. Now and then there's something I can put a name to. Custodianship is difficult. For all my Gilbert White and Bewick and Clare and Lolly Willowes, I do better with the legends than with Nature. And they follow me about, the legends. Even at Oswestry, we have the great earthwork, Old Oswestry; and while it becomes the only totally blue hill I have ever known, being covered all over with bluebells at that time of year, it somehow becomes totally distracting that its proper name is Caer Ogyrfan, and Ogyrfan was Guinevere's father. And that Ogyrfan invented Writing. How can you write where Writing was invented and not be cuckoo ? But there it is again: ignorance, a bird's name.

The play, since you were so kind as to ask, went badly. It's odd, sitting in on something others are making of you, and in a strange environment. I've never done quite that before. If I demurred at something cutting across the sense of the words, and

was told "Don't worry, it won't have that effect on stage", I thought that I must be wrong. They knew. I didn't. In fact, generally, I was right. Where I required a background of two groups of characters, mutually exclusive if not actually hostile, against which the foreground comedy could play, I got a homogenous muddle; and the thing was not allowed to work therefore.

But it's a good play, I think. I mean: it could work, if only because, here and there, where it was left free to do so, it did. When I've got my optimisms back, I'll clean the text up again and – if you can bear it – send you a copy. I learnt a lot. You can't write plays in isolation; and for that little patch I got out of it.

Looking back at your letter you ought, you know, to write a great treatise on white dresses: Dorabella, Fiordigli [sic], yes, but all those earlier insights about Miss Tilney, too, and Clarissa and what us men perpetually get wrong. And wouldn't Bunyan and even Blake – who dressed the men in a sort of muslins too – bear scrutiny ? Sam Palmer ?

Very much love – [signed] Arnold

Q(LBL)/1/R/1

Bodloesygad, Ffestiniog, Merioneth. Ffestiniog (076 676) 627 24.6.74

Dear Sylvia,

We too had been forlorn: the mountains still here of course, but no Sylvia in the foreground. However, I completed Byron and, stuffing the source books back on the shelves, had stumbled upon a Warnerwork I'd forgotten we possessed – Some World Far From Ours, the title caught up in a sort of hair-curlers which are also spattered all over the endpapers. "This is copy no. 409", it announces over a signature which doesn't appear to have changed one whit since 1929. So there's constancy, and foreground matter. (And we'll have the aconites and grape hyacinths and all in the Spring in any case.)

Today your wonderful parcel. What can I say ? We haven't deserved such gifts. We've read none of the books, so those I shall write about later. As for the patchwork, it is quite exquisite and of a Warneresque minuteness of detail I haven't seen before. I'm going to pick out its tacking stitches and frame it – mounted, I think on a quiet-coloured card (a grey ? a fern-green ?) to represent the deathless aunt you suggest. Among all its other beauties, it has a trick with striped material which hadn't occurred to me before: the stripes not running out like hubs, nor spinning round like rims, but paired to form three broad arrowheads; and even, bless the artist, one endearing mistake – her floret of blackcurrants has one piece stitched in the wrong way round. Do you know anything about it ? Where it came from ? Age ? Some of the stuffs argue well back in time.

Everything on the walls here has a little attestation sticker on the back, a finical habit of mine, and this one will read in part "a vail sent by Sylvia Townsend Warner after visiting Bodloesygad". Uncertain of the spelling of "vail" I looked it up and found, as I thought, that it means "a gratuity given by a visitor on his/her departure", but also,

PABLO CAUGHT IN OUR HILLS

by ARNOLD RATTENBURY

They were standing at the top of the field looking down at the pond, the woods all round screening them and the field and the pond in its bottom completely. You couldn't even see the big house from here. Susannah's eyes never winked, but were very bright like eyes that have been startled and will cry soon. Perhaps it was not quite the pond that held them, but some tuft of grass just this side of it, for they seemed to be focussed a little short of the grey water. You could never tell with Susannah, her mother was thinking. That was the annoying part about her. You could never tell why she would bring you here or why, when you had come, she would stand so still and look down towards the pond.

"It was the night after," Susannah said. "It was the night after," and her eyes never flickered. "He had Woodbines all the time."

So young to be mad, her mother thought. She looked again at her daughter. Almost foreign, you might say; and indeed she had heard it said by others often. Perhaps it was her choice of such peculiarly bright colours to wear that suggested the foreigner. Mrs. Dukes, had it not been that she was obliged to humour her daughter in all things, would have put her foot down and ordered tweeds firmly on their shopping expeditions. "My dear child," she might have said, "you simply cannot have colours like that in the country." But of course the child had to be humoured, she had to have her reds and blues and whites. The wonder was that, dressing as she did, she should always come to this drab bottom and stare down at that brackish water. Henry should have had it filled long ago, or dredged anyway. It was an absolute disgrace. Thank heavens it was too far away to be seen from the house. But then, of course, Henry had to humour the child too and leave the pond there.

"Come on, Susannah," she said. "We've been here a long time today." Mrs. Dukes began to move away into the wood-path.

"I want something, mother. You know I want something," Susannah said. "I always want something now."

Mrs. Dukes felt about in the big pocket of her tweed jacket until she found the package.

"Here you are," she said, holding it out. "It's all they had today." It was a package of Players.

"O, mother. You know that's wrong. You know I never have those. And there were two left from the other lot anyway. You know I never have those." Susannah's face puckered up like one much older.

Mrs. Dukes produced the Woodbines. It was no use trying to teach

Coming across this letter to William Maxwell, 25.iv.1962, in Michael Steinman's cache of photocopies given to me, I thought of Lynn. She would have enjoyed it. Those of us who knew Lynn Mutti will remember her with love and affection, for she was a loveable and loving person.

"This business of two against three. It is like learning to skate or to swim or all the other things one can't do till one can. But if you can suborn Kate, or Emmy, to play the one two three of the left hand, over and over, with unyielding regularity while you play the one two of the right hand forsaking all others and cleaving only to that; and then change places and repeat the process; and go on doing this till it is axiomatic as tieing your shoe-laces, it may get you into the way of saying feather. As for counting, I don't believe in it; it is merely adding a third process, when two is more than you can comfortably manage. I will only add that 16th cent composers thought it very doggy and called it sesquialtura; and presently it became no more than everybody's tag, so they went on to other and more complicated proportions; but mainly for two voices, not two hands. My method, you see, is from the 16th century, I am making the difficulty a duet."

from the *Daily Worker*, New York,
June 19, 1939

Thank you all for your support and
encouragement over the past eight years.
Making these sixteen newsletters
has been a great pleasure and a grand time.
Affectionately yours – Jay

The following story is from
SATURDAY SAGA : a collection of contemporary short stories
Progress Publishing Company Limited
2 & 4 Parton Street, London, W.C.1, 1946.

even more suitably, " a dole to one in an inferior position". We'll hang it soon, and then this house will have you forever both inside and out.

If you really don't think we neglected you – with our Byrons and the calls of teaching – come again soon, and be as taken for granted, as left alone, presumed upon.

I spent yesterday looking over old poems, since not many have been finished recently, with a view to the next New Year card. Because of your patience with an old play and lecture, and nice things you said to Sim about poems, and its ambience of gardening, and now the vail, accept the one enclosed with love. A poor exchange, but the handiest patchwork to give.

Adam banged over here yesterday to announce that he and Penny will marry on August 31. Life goes on indeed. The poem refers. All our love – [signed] Arnold

* * * * *

<u>On a Friend Liking Discarded Work</u>

For Sylvia

Beyond the window a gardener tends his plants,
Parents hoist up children on the grass:
What I perceive is what I too have done.

Images float to the daisy eyes of men
Until, through the layers they make and the glass,
Ourselves perceive ourselves in everyone.

The gardener snaps a stalk and sets aside
Its eyelash petals, loosening the pupil seed.
Children ? My own, the vivid girl and boy,

Are published now, and hoist themselves, and think
And act. The scale differs. Images feed
The mind down stems that stalk behind the eye

Like need, or as a self-sown flower will act
Though never cut and published in a bowl.
My children, at other windows perhaps, look,

Or lie on grass, plotting fresh families,
Or tend to other plants. But it is all
More tilled and ramified than plots in books.

Childless or not, issue is all one worth.
The scale differs, but flowers that die uncut
And unremarked remain perpetual.

We cannot list the miracles of earth
Or image them, but shake and spill out the dust
Of their intent, tending to other things.

Seed is a speck no naked eye can count.

We cultivate a bit, is all; and I,
Who delight, if possible, more in a fluke of weed
And mongrel things perceive, so am pleased by,

A speck long set aside from my intent,
Bloom on the stalk that is another's need;
And smile – considering things quite different.

* * * * *

Arnold Rattenbury : exhibition designer, poet, man of letters

John Lucas

As you can tell from the tone of these letters, STW and Arnold were good friends, both members of the CPGB, poets, musicians, writers etc. By 1974 Arnold and his wife Sim (Simonetta) were living in the cottage in North Wales so vividly described in the letters to STW. They had bought and restored it through the good offices of the architect, Clough Williams Ellis (famous for PortMerion), whose niece Sim was.

The Mabinogion is, as I'm sure you know, the Welsh medieval epic, most of it set in and around the area where Arnold and Sim lived – and which Arnold described so wittily and lovingly in his letters. Arnold draws on the Cynfal, the hilly, rock-littered river that tumbles beneath their cottage, in much of his poetry, using its geography, history and topography as metaphors for his sense of the complex, difficult, occasionally joyous, progress of human history through the ages, and which he acknowledges in a letter which reveals how intimate he was with the Mabinogion. Once, driving him around Snowdonia, and listening as he accounted for the countryside we were driving through, I became increasingly amazed how much he knew about it. There's nothing I can add to what he tells STW.

'I have to go to Glasgow tomorrow'. At the time Arnold was working on an exhibition commissioned by the director of the city's art gallery and museum, John Spurling, into which Arnold put much time and his usual ingenuity. He was furious

Dorchester Sylvia

Member Sarah Jane Pattison writes that Mark Chutte, Chair of the Hardy Society, presented a lecture on March 16th at Shire Hall Museum.

'This is the meaning of what Satan showed me in the vision!' Women and Witchcraft in *Lolly Willowes* and *The Withered Arm*

He [the following from hardysociety.org] explores how Hardy uses Gothic conventions in his text in order to present the position of women at the time, including Rhoda Brook who is living in nineteenth century poverty, and Gertrude Lodge who is (of course) rather more affluent. However, both are seemingly controlled and manipulated by Farmer Lodge and they are forced to operate within a patriarchal system.

The story is a series of tableau moments which structure the narrative, set in Casterbridge Prison, and the element of coincidence is particularly powerful for the reader at the denouement of the text. Gertrude Lodge – on seeing the dead boy – incites Rhoda to exclaim 'Hussy – to come between us and our child now – this is the meaning of what Satan showed me in the vision!'

In contrast *Lolly Willowess* – also known as 'The Loving Huntsman' – has been described as an early feminist classic. The text is a satirical comedy of manners with some elements of pure fantasy. This is a story of a middle-aged spinster – Laura Willowes – who moves to a country village to escape her controlling relatives and then takes up the practice of witchcraft. The novel ends with Laura acknowledging that her freedom comes at the expense of knowing that she belongs to the 'satisfied but profound indifferent ownership' of Satan.

This is the world of Hardy and Warner where women are presented in the context of gothic superstition and witchcraft – where there is coincidence, female jealousy and misogyny – where there is little value of them as women and their only empowerment is through folklore, superstition and ultimately Satan.

International Sylvia

Member Ann Torday Gulden notifies us of recent work, a dissertation by Kseenia Shmydkaya, the defense given at Tallinn University, Estonia.

"Revolution, She Wrote: Historical Representation in the Interwar Works of Stanisława Przybyszewska, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Olga Forsh"

The full text may be viewed at

https://www.etera.ee/zoom/199133/view?page=1&p=separate&tool=info

Ann also mentions that Ms Shmydkaya has discovered unknown correspondence concerning a translation into Russian of a Sylvia novel. This never happened, but there are letters about it in some Moscow archive. Dive in and go to, Slavophiles!

occasions I have so far seen the show and laughed myself tired. That is the point. We need more satire, much more; and need, too, to realise how immediately precious are the few fine satirists as we do possess.

With *What's Left?* Unity Theatre is back up to the level of its great pre-war successes, yet in some strange way seems unconscious of the fact. In those days a second company by this time would be alternating with the first and one of them would be free to tour the show beyond the limited confines of London. There would almost certainly been no inkling of a limited run as now, but a firm decision to let the show go on as long as people wished to see it.

My bet is that they will so wish for a long time yet.

Our Time, vol. 7, no. 12, p. 324, September 1948

* * * * *

Last, and by no means least, please read again, for you will do so with pleasure, **'Sylvia Townsend Warner as Poet'**, John Lucas, *Journal 2000.*

John Lucas with Arnold Rattenbury and Edward Blishen
26 April 1993 – at The Poetry Society

when Spurling, for reasons I've never understood, pulled the plug on the exhibition, not long before it was due to open. Years later, when I met Spurling by chance in Nottingham, he told me that he had decided there simply wasn't enough worthwhile material to justify the exhibition; but Arnold always believed that political considerations were to blame.

'Garry Parry'. A local artist and ornithologist, Parry lived in Ffestiniog. I sometimes felt there was no stone Arnold couldn't kick over without discovering someone underneath whose creative talents he could delight in making use of.

'Who drew the covers for my New Year card.' Each new year for several years Arnold produced a set of poems, which were printed as small pocket books, saddle-stitched, with cover illustrations by artist friends of his and sent as greetings to his circle of acquaintances. Of these, the finest is probably *Mozart Pieces* (1971) though I am very fond of *Cold Poems in Waiting* (1973), with cover illustrations by my wife, the artist, Pauline Lucas.

'Edgell, when he comes here …' Edgell Rickword, (1898 – 1982) marxist poet and critic, perhaps best known now for his *Calendar of Modern Letters*, a critical journal of which he was founder editor, and which had a very considerable influence on a later generation of poets and critics, including F.R. Leavis, as did the later *Left Review*. Rickword's second collection of poems, *Invocation to Angels,* is widely recognised as containing some of the best poems to have come out of the 1914-18 war. See *Edgell Rickword: A Poet at War*, by Charles Hobday, Carcanet, 1989, and *Edgell Rickword: Collected Poems*, ed. Charles Hobday, Carcanet, 1991. My published interview with Edgell can be found in *The 1930s: A Challenge to Orthodoxy*, ed. Lucas, Harvester Press/Barnes & Noble, 1978.

'The play, since you were so kind as to ask, went badly.' Arnold's play, *A Comedy of Good Intentions*, was staged at Crewe's Theatre in 1974, where Pauline and I saw it. It didn't really work, probably because it was dis-jointed (bits of Brecht, of vaudeville, of music hall, of straight drama); but it wasn't as bad as Arnold says.

As a young woman, Sim had begun professional life as an actor in various plays staged by the Communist Party's Unity Theatre in both Bristol and London, though her career did not prosper. But both she and Arnold who I think met while working for Unity in Bristol, thought of drama as an essential contribution to cultural life.

Letter of 24.6.74

'Adam banged over here yesterday to announce that he and Penny will marry….' Adam, Arnold's son, brother of the older Emma. After the deaths of both Arnold and Sim, Adam and Penny, who had for some years had run a restaurant in North Wales, lived for a while at Bodloesygad, making and selling a range of home-made pickels and chutneys.

Confirming Professor Lucas's 'note of regret' in the aforementioned Letter to the Editor, there is little mention of Rattenbury in Warner literature : one letter to him in *Letters*, and a few notices in Mulford's *This Narrow Place*, which does alert us to Rattenbury's article 'Plain Heart, Light Tether,' *PNR* 23, vol. 8, no. 3, 1982.

Plain Heart, Light Tether

Arnold Rattenbury

Just so, I think, your shade,
Alien and clear, was laid
Briefly on this plain heart which now plods on
In this plain house where progeny is none.
(*King Duffus and Other Poems*, 1968)

. . . for he spoke softly, and moved limberly, and had . . . an air of being only lightly tethered to reality. This last quality was especially reassuring to her.
(*The True Heart*, 1929)

Towards the end of her life – in a house the several outer doors of which stood open to all but the bleakest weathers, mostly alone except for cats familiar enough to share her tea, addicted to wandering at dusk in a garden adrift with herbs – Sylvia Townsend Warner took a pronounced dislike to *Lolly Willowes*, her first novel of 1926. 'It seems', she said, 'so poor a welcome for the General Strike – though I had begun it long before' – in 1923/4, the Preface to the 1978 reprint suggests. 'Also, people persist in thinking it a piece of self-portraiture. But I was never a witch, you know. Why, Lolly (who was) might not have seen that she must of course support the miners! I hope sincerely she would have had the sense, for she was meant to be likeable.'

The point is salutary – as were most that she made in fact or fiction. However bewitched her pen, however bewitching, she lived wholly in an unambiguous world where the only dignity lies in taking sides. The books as well as the author are always partisan, and consistently so, though critical fashion – juddering away as it has of late from any useful mundane engagement – has mostly disguised this blatant fact or blatantly ignored this author. 'It all depends', she used to remark was a phrase to be avoided. It all depends nonetheless on what partisanship means; and that in turn depends upon when this fastidious lady wrote what she did, on the way that history shaped itself around her, on why she chose the literary forms of poem, novel, short story, and in that order....

The rest is firewalled.

This excerpt is from Andy Croft's obituary in *The Independent*, 3 May 2007.

At Kingswood, the Methodist boarding school in Bath, Rattenbury was a promising poet and a gifted pianist. His music teacher, the composer John Sykes, introduced Rattenbury to left-wing politics, modern poetry and modernist music. At a school speech day the assembled staff and parents were suitably outraged by a performance by Rattenbury of Bartók's *Allegro Barbaro*.

The Time for Satire

by Arnold Rattenbury

What's Left? **London Unity Theatre**

The new review at Unity Theatre deserves every line of praise which it has received in papers even as far to the Right as *The Times* and the *Evening Standard.* It is quite the wittiest review London has seen this side of the war – thanks chiefly to the work of two brilliant satirists, Geoffrey Parsons (lyrics) and Berkeley Fase (music), and the speed of John Spag's production.

But worth more attention here is the fact that *What's Left?* gives final proof for those who have not found it yet in history, that satire is always the prerogative of those who hate profoundly the society in which they live and who would point that hatred out.

Relatively speaking, there has been a good deal of revue on the stages of England this last two years and it has been poor, weary, unfunny stuff because, not hating, merely petulant, it has done little more than peck at the superficial characteristics of a weary, petulant bourgeois behaviour. To do more than that would have been tantamount to being revolutionary.

Hence Bea Lilly, Hermione Gingold, Joyce Grenfell and others in the profound politeness of middle-class existence, have been rude only in a friendly way or have parodied habits and manners already largely dead. The whole basis of satire, its sting for the living enemy, has gone out of their work just as working people have gone out of their audiences. By such usages satire had become about as dangerous and telling as *The New Statesman.*

Which is not to say that any Left–Wing writer is *ipso facto* a born satirist; or that any actor can play the part with a long enough tongue and a sufficient largeness of gesture. The hatred must still be pointed with technique – and with how subtle a technique may be seen from a study of the *Oklahokum,* text by Geoffrey Parsons, printed in this issue, or the brilliant performance of another song in the show by Noreen Callaghan (or, for that matter, by reading Sylvia Townsend Warner's story in the last issue). [*The Jungle Blossom*, reprinted in *Journal 2000*]

But it is the prerogative of writers like Parsons and Townsend Warner, and indeed has been natural throughout history to such, and applauded as naturally by their clamorous audiences of working men and women. Unity Theatre audiences have applauded every bite and thrust by Geoffrey Parsons and Berkeley Fase on the three