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SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER AS POET

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In 1925 Sylvia Townsend Warner published her first book, a collection of poems to which she gave the title *The Espalier*. Over half a century later, two years after her death in 1978, *Twelve Poems* saw the light of day. From first to last, then, Townsend Warner can be thought of as a poet. But the publication in 1926 of *Lolly Willowes* and, a decade later, of *Summer Will Show*, more or less guaranteed that her abiding reputation would rest on her novels. I see no point in protesting against that. Townsend Warner wrote wonderful prose fiction, and her best (and sometimes her worst) work as novelist and writer of short stories is increasingly acknowledged and discussed. It would, however be a pity if the attention paid to her prose meant that her poetry was pushed into sidings and left there.

For Townsend Warner is a true poet. Yet to the best of my knowledge her poetry rates barely a mention in studies of twentieth-century poetry. This may be connected to the fact that whereas her major novels are in print or easy to come by, her *Collected Poems*, which Claire Harman edited for Carcanet, and which was published in 1982, has long been unobtainable. Moreover, it was published on paper so shoddy that it quickly became as discoloured and friable as wood-shavings, almost as though the publishers hoped the book might go up in smoke. Since then there has been a not very good *Selected Poems*, and Jane Dowson included six

poems in her 1996 anthology of *Women's Poetry of the 1930s*, among them verses Townsend Warner wrote out of her principled support of the Spanish Republic. Dowson also prints "Drawing You Heavy With Sleep", which ought to be in every anthology of love poetry but isn't. But then you will not find Townsend Warner represented in any of the recent anthologies of twentieth century poetry, no matter that they find space for poets who haven't an ounce of her talent.

Both Harman and Dowson make helpful remarks about Townsend Warner's poetry, as does Jan Montefiore in *Feminism and Poetry* (1987). There are also brief, illuminating essays by Donald Davie and Peter Scupham. Davie, who for all his pugnacious and, I think, wrong-headed defence of Poundian modernism, was, like Pound himself, capable of wide-ranging generosities, twice offered critical notes on Townsend Warner's poetry, both of which are to be found in his collection of reviews and more substantial pieces, *Under Briggflatts: A History of Poetry in Great Britain 1980-1988* (Carcanet, 1989.) In the first of these, Davie worries at the question of whether Townsend-Warner's style is better thought of as out of date or out of fashion, and perhaps not surprisingly concludes that it's now the one, then the other. On the whole, however, he thinks of her as a late Georgian in that her style is for the most part pre- or even anti-modernist. This can even be detected, he says, in poems whose matter ought to require a modernist approach. Thus in *Opus 7*, one of the fruits of what Davie calls "her long dalliance" with the Communist Party, "her village is, as never before, firmly a post-1919 village. And yet this new-found responsibility to the date on the calendar has the effect of highlighting more than ever the incongruity between the matter and the manner, the impression of new wine in old bottles."

In fact, *Opus 7* was begun in 1929 and published in 1931, four years before Townsend Warner joined the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). But Davie is quite right to understand the poem's radical politics. Whether he is also right to consider the politics undermined or anyway compromised by the poem's style is a matter to which I will

return. Here, I will only say that Davie deserves credit for acknowledging in what is essentially a three-page note that Townsend Warner's politics mattered very much to her.[1]

In his second, rather longer piece, called "Sylvia Townsend Warner, Posthumous", Davie is, however, concerned purely with matters of style.[2] Taking his cue from a remark she let fall about why Dryden appealed to her, Davie now suggests she is best understood if we recognise that her style is a matter of conscious choice and not something she simply fell into. He is struck by her suggestion that there is something "sublime" about Dryden's handling of the animal-myth in "The Hind and the Panther", his fable of Church and State, as evidence of which Townsend Warner quotes the line "The Lady of the spotted muff replied", and about which she comments: "Now that is a line which is purely nonsensical and yet Dryden is so stately in his control of the medium and so sublime that one hears it almost with awe." This, Davie suggests, is Dryden consciously making use of the only version of the sublime open to him, namely the baroque. It is a mannered style. By the same token, Townsend Warner's style is deliberately mannered, knowingly out of kilter with its subject-matter, maintaining an on-guard, even at times ironic distance, which can as easily modulate into social or historical distance, and in this sense Townsend Warner is to Georgian poetry as John Crowe Ransom is to Thomas Hardy. I am not sure that Davie sufficiently allows for the self-conscious comedy of Townsend Warner's procedure but he is surely right to insist that her style isn't a matter of hapless eccentricity, a blend of Miss Tox and Margaret Rutherford. On the contrary, it is intellectually and imaginatively astute (The OED definitions of the word include "shrewd, sagacious, *crafty*.") [My italics]. Sylvia Townsend Warner's poetry is both carefully crafted and full of craft.

Peter Scupham also focusses on matters of style.[3] His essay makes any number of deft suggestions about Townsend Warner's tactics, what might be called her poetic signature. Thus, having quoted a stanza from "The Story of a Garden", Scupham notes:

> The stanza has many of the marks of her style: the just-askew rhymes, the stresses that make artfully memorable cadences by setting up a threatening tremor in the heart-beat, the spare, unmetaphorical diction, the habit of ending a poem by introducing a cloud no bigger than a man's hand...

He also draws attention to her "unillusioned way of seeing, feeling, and thinking demonstrated in plain style—her poetic vocabulary never mines the more *outré* veins of the dictionary—her deceptive simplicities and occasional archaisms made enticing by a sure and strange fitness of cadence." We might jib at the phrase "plain style", if only because Townsend Warner's poetry is hardly that plain cooking made still plainer by plain cooks about which Auden complained. But for the rest, Scupham is spot on. As here, where, having quoted the opening stanzas of "Vale" with its listing of:

> Roxeth and Kenton
> Greenford and Mutton Lane,
> The gasworks and the canal:
> These were my ports of call
> Between the autumnal and the vernal equinox

he says: "There's a special pleasure in the taste, the saying of a poem like this: the tongue's lilt lightening the head, creasing out a smile."

Fitness of cadence, poetry on the tongue. Such phrases remind us, if reminder is needed, that Townsend Warner studied music, was a distinguished musicologist, and that from 1917 she worked for a decade as editor on the ten volume Oxford History of *Tudor Church Music*. Equally important—perhaps indeed more important—she became, as Arnold Rattenbury has pointed out, a familiar of the "New Elizabethans".[4] A composition student of Vaughan Wiliams, she was, as how could she not be, alert to the Royal College of Music's vivid interests in the folk song tradition and in the setting of poem-texts, interests which were to loom so productively in the careers of, among others, Herbert Howells,

Gerald Finzi, and Ivor Gurney. Rattenbury notes that "Elizabethanism of this sort was a love of newness, poetic invention, verbal and imaginative adventure, rather than something historically exclusive". None of this guarantees that Townsend Warner would herself be able to make use of those interests. On the other hand, given the qualities that Scupham rightly identifies, her grounding in folk-song and in the setting of Elizabethan poems was sure to be of immense benefit to her.

> With a wide face
> And an anxious nose
> The owl sits in the ash tree
> Thinking of all he knows—
> Thinking of all he knows,
> And his quiet feathers
> Sit duteously around him
> Like good scholars.

This may start from cliché—the wise old owl—but it took a rare poet to spot the "anxious nose", still more the possibility of transforming those fustian "quiet feathers" by the miraculous wit of "duteously". In addition, the wavering, or perhaps more accurately, undulant pulse of rhythm, together with the repeated line, "Thinking of all he knows", indicates just how much Townsend Warner's poetry profited from her musical background.

There is, though, another aspect to all this, one to which Rattenbury importantly draws our attention when he remarks that the new Elizabethans and their associates were socialists. "Vaugan Williams had been a socialist since his student days at Cambridge", and for him, as for others in his circle, radical politics were inseparable from art. Whitman, that seer of Democratic Vistas, was a key figure for all of them. Hence, most famously Vaughan Williams's *The Sea*. with its quotations from Whitman. Far less famous but worthy of note there is Townsend Warner's student "Requiem", a setting of Whitman for string quartet and voice. This is not to say that in any sense Townsend Warner writes like Whit-

man. She does, though, in *The Espalier*, frequently try on the loose-limbed couplets practised by Ivor Gurney, another Whitman devotee, whose influence is unmistakeable in such poems of hers as "The Vinery Has Been Broken", "A Man in a Landscape" and "Mangolds"—"unstirred the last/Flecks of the motoring soil. Day-long lumber past/Lorries and farm tumbrils with the mangold load,/And the cars spurn the spillings along the road." And the radicalism which so shapes the course of *Lolly Willowes* and which would eventually lead Townsend Warner into the CPGB is, from the first, stirring powerfully within her.

As Rattenbury has noted, a radical impulse is manifest in her writing about Rosa Luxemburg.[5] But it's also there in the anti-prudential sexual generosity of "Nelly Trim". This ballad about a woman who welcomes a cold stranger into her house and sends him, warmed, into the night, is remarkable for its entire lack of coy evasion, or of the reliance on stock effects that does, I find, limit the achievements of Robert Graves' strictly contemporary ballads about sexual love.

> With looks unwavering,
> With breath unstirred,
> She took off her clothes
> Without a word,
> And stood up naked
> And white as a curd.
>
> He breathed her to him
> With famished sighs,
> Against her bosom
> He sheltered his eyes,
> And warmed his hands
> Between her thighs.

Conventional opinion insists that the woman is "A wanton". The poet's answer is that Nelly Trim has behaved well, has offered comfort to "a stranger, bound/She knows not where./And afraid of the dark,/As his fathers were." I don't want to lay too much stress on what is after all a slight ballad, but it's to be noted that "Nelly Trim" acts as an

implicit rebuke to that encounter between house-agent's clerk and typist in *The Waste Land*, which was for so long taken to typify the sterility of sexual relations in the modern world. Nelly is in some ways an anticipation of Polly Garter. David Holbrook was outraged by Dylan Thomas's readiness to imagine and then celebrate Polly's sexual liaison with Captain Cat. "Is it likely she would have consented to sex with this drunken old reprobate?" Holbrook demanded to know. "Yes", William Empson wonderfully replied. "We love her for being so unlike Mr Holbrook."

Nelly is one of several outsiders in *The Espalier*. Her behaviour denies the propriety of utilitarian, prudential value. It alerts us to, or at least glances at the fact that in the 1920s many of the young rejected those values they associated with an older generation which, in the eyes of that generation's sons and daughters, had elected for and then rejoiced in the terrible destructiveness of the First World War. Down with the old, down with their morality. A new sexual candour, generosity, permissiveness—call it what you will—became almost a norm and was the more asserted the more it was identified by that older generation with the "decadent" or, even more horrendous, the radical.[6]

The long shadow cast by the war is also the subject of "Cottage Mantleshelf", one of the most unsettling poems in the volume. I am astonished that this poem isn't better known. Peter Scupham's reaction may, however, help to explain its neglect. "Almost an oddity in the richness of its bric-a-brac", Scupham says of it, although he adds, "How well I knew such mantelshelves (sic); how curious and how right seems her half-whimsical, wholly moving recreation of the paired marriages of black, pink-rose-painted vase and vase, flower-basketed dog and dog, stencilled fan and fan—and then the dissonance: the unpaired clock 'rocking its way through time' and the photograph of the dead young soldier." The sentimental Georgian clutter becomes electric, he goes on: "the last stanza with its risky re-write of Lawrence Binyon's 'To the Fallen', holds the scene in that mordant equipoise which is her trade-mark." All of which is well said, as far as goes. It doesn't, however, go nearly far enough.

Here is that last stanza.

> Uncomely and unespoused amid the espousals of beauty,
> The cats with their plighted noses, the vases pledging their roses,
> The scapegoat of the mantleshelf he stands and may not even cleave
> To the other unpaired heart that beats beside him and apart,
> For the pale-faced clock has heard, as he did, the voice of duty
> And disowns him whom time has disowned, whom age cannot succour nor the years reprieve.

The soldier who did his duty and is dead, is disowned in the sense that Ivor Gurney recognised and railed against in poem after poem of the post-War period. A "grateful nation" was all too quick to forget what debt it owed those who fought and died, fought and, more troublingly, survived.

> Where are they now, on state-doles, or showing shop-patterns
> Or walking town to town sore in borrowed tatterns
> Or begged. Some civic routine one never learns.
> The heart burns—but has to keep out of face how heart burns.
> ("Strange Hells")

The pale-faced clock is therefore doing no more than is habitual in turning its back on the unespoused soldier. He is dead, speak no more of him.

But there is more to it than just this. To understand why the poem is unsettling and, I would say, important in a way that Scupham doesn't acknowledge we need to have before us the two preceding stanzas. For it is just here that we are enabled to understand why the young soldier is a "scapegoat" who must go "unespoused." Townsend Warner has acknowledged that among all the clutter of "love and beauty" are "two uncomely whose sorrows/Isled in several celibacy can never, never be mated,/One of them being but for use and the other useful no more." The two are the clock and "young Osbert who died at the war."

> Against the crumpled cloth where the photographer's fancy
> Has twined with roses the grand balustrade he poses,

His hands hang limp from the khaki sleeves and his legs are bent.
His enormous ears are pricked and tense as a startled hare's,
He smiles—and his beseeching swagger is that of a nancy,
And plain to see on the picture is death's indifferent rubber stamp of assent.

As though through gathering mist he stares out through the photo's
Discolouring, where the lamp throws its pink-shaded echo of roses
On the table laid for supper with cheese and pickles and tea.
The rose-light falls on his kin who sit there with a whole skin,
It illumines through England the cottage homes where just such ex-voto
Are preserved on their mantleshelves by the living in token that they are not as he.

"His beseeching swagger is that of a nancy." So *that's* why he couldn't belong in the world of pairings, of espousels. *That's* why he's a scapegoat. "I am a tainted whether of the flock." Antonio's sad self-loathing in *The Merchant of Venice* is a recognisable variation on the dead soldier's "beseeching swagger", his being imaged as hare and scapegoat, hunted or banished animals. The obtrusive rhyme on "fancy"/"nancy", which can't possibly have been unintended, is there in order to draw attention to the young man's "unmentionable" sexual nature. The shock of that even manages to take away from the undoubted clumsiness of the line with which the following stanza opens.

Whether Sylvia Townsend Warner knew the poetry of Charlotte Mew I don't know, though it seems highly likely. *The Farmer's Bride* had, after all, been well received on its publication in 1916, and an enlarged edition appeared in 1921. Like Townsend Warner, Mew is interested in writing about those marginal figures who shun or are shunned by conventional communities. Hence, the title poem of her famous volume, about a woman who rebels against the confinements of domesticity. Hence, too, "The Changeling" and "Ken", whose eyes "looked at you/As two red, wounded stars might do", and whose "voice broke off in little jars/To tears sometimes. An uncouth bird/He seemed . . . / . . . arms

thrust out as if to beat/Always against a threat of bars." I bring in Mew, not to argue for influence, but to suggest common interests—ones that were shared by others at the time. And as that time was the 1920s, a decade when young writers were, not surprisingly, in revolt against their elders, the hope and/or need for change prompted much of what they wrote. Scupham implies that on the whole Townsend Warner means to endorse the worth of the cottage life she depicts. I am certain she means to do no such thing. The poem is about poisonous suppression, the denial of commonalty. The "norm" of this cottage life is as rigid, as deadly, as the town life of Lolly Willowes' family. Both cottage and town house are massively resistant to the change which can alone make for a good society.

But knowing that change is needed isn't the same as knowing how to achieve it. Eccentricity is all very well, but more is required in order to bring about new styles of architecture, a change of heart. Townsend Warner obviously realised this—it is there in *Lolly Willowes*—but in her early poetry the possibilities for change seem only faintly glimpsed or end in defeat. "Peeping Tom", for example, a long poem—it covers eight pages of the *Collected Poems*—looks as though it might be about a man's desire to be of "independent means" (that state John Clare so ardently desired), someone who, in radical Spencean terms, owns enough land to live by. Instead of working for the farmer in whose interest he has to rise up early and go home tired, Tom yearns

> To have some land of my own,
> To be my land
> And mine alone.
>
> Say, half an acre—
> More would outdo my means—
> To grow potatoes
> And a few beans.

This longing for land of one's own was not merely still common at the time, it had been turned to practical ends by, among others, the Whiteway Colony, which had set itself up as a kind of Tolstoyan community in the late nineteenth century, and which by the 1920s was located in the Cotswolds, five miles north of Stroud, where Townsend Warner would almost certainly have either come across it or heard of it. The community even attained a brief notoriety when it was investigated by MI5 agents in the post-War years, on the grounds that its members were "thought to be practising free love in the English countryside [and] were considered to be a Bolshevik threat."[7]

Whether Townsend Warner initially meant her Peeping Tom to become a communitarian, I don't know. But after a promising beginning the poem turns into a portentous meditation on the fatal lure of "the bride/Nature, hidden under her dark veils of Time and Space and Causation." That the poem should be dedicated to T.F. Powys is sufficient cause for alarm, at least if, like me—and Peter Scupham—you are immune to what Scupham calls "the welter of character, mystification and rurality of Powys-land." All too soon "Peeping Tom" traipses off into that land, to become, predictably enough, lost in the rhetorical wastes of "ah" and "parteth" and "brooketh" and "hearken", and a general tangle of deadhead blossoms.

At a casual glance *Opus 7* looks as though it might lie open to a similar charge. Not, however, because of the apparently coy, if mysterious title. The explanation for this is simply that *Opus 7* was Townsend Warner's seventh book-length publication. (Although we should not forget that at the time there was a taste for severe titles: Group X, Auden's *Poems* 1930, identified by number alone.) But as we have seen, Davie thinks the poem written in an out-moded style, and Scupham confesses that *Opus 7* "with its visionary alcoholic heroine Rebecca Random of Love Green is not for me—I find it too much a conflation of Powsyery and the Georgian trudge of such a poem as 'Miss Thompson Goes Shopping', by Martin Armstrong." I know what he means and I can also

understand Davie's feeling that the poem is improperly "quaint". Not that this is a word he uses, but it lies behind his charge that although the matter may be new, the manner creaks. If I also think there's more to the poem than either will allow it is because of elements to which they don't attend. And these need to be given due weight if we are to come to a fairer estimate of the poem's worth.

In the first place, then, we need to knock on the head the routinely-made and deeply misleading assumption that Townsend Warner's is somehow reminiscent of Crabbe's work. Crabbe is a great poet—a greater poet, to be blunt, than she is—but only someone who wasn't prepared to look steadily at either could think they had much in common. It certainly won't do to say that as both used couplets and were fascinated by social outcasts, he has her in his grip. Crabbe adapts his verse narratives from the heroic couplet of his great predecessors, Dryden and Pope. "Pope in worsted stockings" he was sneeringly dubbed, although Byron, a great admirer, rightly praised him as "Nature's sternest painter and her best." In his couplet poems each distich is complete in itself, run-overs are infrequent, and every verse paragraph is a free-standing block. In contrast, Townsend Warner's more fluid narrative couplets have an onward impetus which is derived from a very different tradition, one that starts with Shelley and finds a fit successor in Browning. It is true that Crabbe greatly appealed to nineteenth-century novelists, including Dickens, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaksell and Hardy, because from him they could learn ways to manage an intense scrutiny of individual lives and their social circumstances. Nobody has bettered Crabbe in "reading" a character through his or her domestic arrangements, ways of speaking, of dress, of decor, of all those involuntary revelations of who and what we are. For all I know, Townsend Warner may have learnt from him in this respect, but if you want to see how well she handles such material, read her prose fiction. *Opus 7* is about something else.

It is of course mostly about its heroine. "A visionary alcoholic heroine" Scupham calls her. Well, yes, but he ignores the significance of her name. It is inconceivable that

so self-conscious a poet as Townsend Warner could have been unaware of the resonances set up by "Rebecca Random". She would certainly have known that the rioters in South Wales of the 1840s who were protesting against unfair toll charges levied on public roads, and who were either led by women or by men dressed as women, took, less as their motto than as their inspiration, that moment in the Good Book where men "blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them." (Genesis 24 ix). Every band of rioters who seized possession of toll gates throughout South Wales was led by a captain called "Rebecca", and the members of the band were known as her "daughters". As to Roderick Random, in the words of one commentator, the hero of Smollett's novel pits his "furious small wits against the monumental and massively organised depravity of the existing social order."[8] Townsend Warner would have known that, too.

Still, Rebecca Random isn't a heroine of the people. That kind of romantic individualism belongs to an earlier moment. (Or ought to: but there would be intendedly radical novels of the 1930s which tried to reinstate the ideal.) Townsend Warner began writing her poem in 1929, the year that saw the election of the second minority Labour government and of the Wall Street Crash The previous year all women over the age of twenty-one had become enfranchised, but in that same year Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* was banned. "I would rather give a healthy boy or girl a phial of prussic acid than this book," James Douglas told his readers in the *Daily Express*. The best of times? The worst of times?

In addition to these confusing signals we need to keep in mind that 1928 and the following year saw the publication of most of the key writings about the Great War: *Death of a Hero*, *Undertones of War*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Journey's End*, *Goodbye to All That*, all belong to these years. That the aftermath of war matters in *Opus 7* is made very plain in the episode where an Anzac soldier asks Rebecca for some wallflowers and then tells her about himself:

'My great-grandfer
was bred up hereabouts, and here he courted
a girl, and married her, and was transported
for firing ricks . . .
When I was a pup
I felt to come to England I'd give up
all I could ever have—and here I am,
her soldier. Now, I wouldn't give a damn
for England. She's as rotten as a cheese,
her women bitches and her men C3's.
This silly soppy landscape—what's the use
of all this beauty and no bloody juice?
Who'd fire a rick these days?' 'Farmer Lee
fired his for the insurance once,' said she.
He heard not, and spoke on. 'I've come too late,
and stay too long. Ruin can fascinate
a man like staring in a cattle-hole;
that still, black-waterlook pulls down his soul.'

These lines surely indicate that the poem isn't the indulgence Scupham takes it to be. Nor is it, as Davie contends, an attempt to decant new wine into old bottles. Or rather, the narrative couplets are a perfectly effective means of conveying, among much else, the vigour of the soldier's speech. They also, and artfully, allow us to recognise that much as we might want to accommodate the poem to the Georgianism of which Scupham convicts it, what we are dealing with is a poisoned pastoral. Rebecca's is no idyllic village. It is deeply, you could say incurably, infected by greed, snobbery, bourgeois fear—masquerading as contempt—of any mode of living that challenges its own timid acceptance of Ruin. I use the word the soldier uses because it is certain that he is to be regarded not merely as one voice among many but as diagnostic of England's ills.

And to say this is to suggest that we do Townsend Warner and *Opus 7* in particular a great disservice if we fail to register the poem's concern with England at the end of the 1920s. Other poets shared the concern. "Get there if you can and see the land you once were proud to own," Auden was

writing at the same moment as Townsend Warner began work on *Opus 7*. There is a glee in his challenge to what he perceives as the waste land of post-War England that's very different from the dark pessimism of Eliot's poem. And this is to be accounted for not merely by the fact that "Get There If You Can" is a young man's work, an iconoclastic pastiche of Tennyson's "Locksley Hall", with its encomium to a glimpsed future greatness of Empire, but because whether that glee is sardonic or exuberant—and it is both by turns—Auden's glimpsed alternative to ruin requires new styles of architecture, a change of heart. Such an alternative is also tentatively present in Edgell Rickword's masque, "The Happy New Year", published in his 1928 collection, *Invocations to Angels and the Happy New Year*. But Rickword understands how difficult it will be to achieve the change of heart that lies beyond the confines of the waste land. Opposed to those who want Change are the powerful forces of reaction he characterises as "the Dexters". Moreover, Change, to be effective, cannot be merely cosmetic. Above all, it cannot be a retreat to some dream of rural England. This has a particular bearing on Townsend Warner's poem.

For at the end of *Opus 7* the couple who buy and renovate Rebecca's cottage and who think they'll be able to set it up as a "picturesque" tearooms—an image of olde-England—fail dismally.

> I passed the cottage some few weeks ago.
> Where once the flowers had been there was a row
> of tottering iron tables where no one sat...
> and at the inn I heard it told that these
> newcomers did so poorly with their teas
> that they had set out cots, one in the pantry,
> to house the well-dowered by-blows of the gentry.

Opus 7 is, quite deliberately, pastiche Georgianism, as the opening of Lolly Willowes is pastiche realism. It undermines the form's claim to present vitality. That Townsend Warner would have been persuaded of the need to confront such a claim becomes evident as soon as we note that in 1929

Longmans began a series of books on "English Heritage". Individual volumes were dedicated to Folk Song and Dance, the Parish Church, and Wildlife. The series carried an introduction by Stanley Baldwin in which he famously claimed that "England is the country", and, believe it or not, Longmans were able to induce a commendation for the series from Ramsay MacDonald. The following year Batsford began its own series, with volumes on the Countryside, Villages, Inns and Cottages, all those well-dowered infestations of the gentry.

Given such rottenness, such Ruin, it is clear that Rebecca Random, outsider though she undoubtedly is, cannot be a vehicle for change. On the contrary, her name is carefully chosen in order to remind readers that each generation must find its own fit image of protest against and opposition to rottenness. From now on, Townsend Warner will discover her fittest images in prose fiction. In particular, as Arnold Rattenbury has, I would hope definitively, noted, there is "her great novel of middle-class desertion towards revolutionary engagement, *Summer Will Show*."[9] But to say this is not to question the originality of *Opus 7*. If anything, it reinforces the poem's originality. She had done battle against Baldwin and MacDonald's reactionary appeal to rural circumstance as evidence of a still healthy England. Other battles had now to be fought.

Notes

1. Donald Davie, *Under Briggflatts*, Carcanet, 1989, pp.58-60.
2. *ditto*, pp.229-233.
3. *Poetry Nation Review*, vol 26, no 5, pp.63-5.
4. *London Review of Books*, 14 October 1999, pp.15-19.
5. Rattenbury, "Literature, Lying and Sober Truth: attitudes to the work of Patrick Hamilton and Sylvia Townsend Warner", in *Writing and Radicalism*, ed. John Lucas, Longman, 1996, p.210.
6. For a further discussion of these matters see John Lucas, *The Radical Twenties: Aspects of Writing, Politics and Culture*, Five Leaves Publications, 1997, and Rutgers University Press, 1999, see chs. 3 and 4.
7. See an article in *The Independent*, Friday, March 3, 2000.
8. Donald Bruce, *Radical Dr Smollett*, Gollancz, 1964, p.73.
9. *Writing and Radicalism*, p.209.