

EDITORIAL

Peter Tolhurst

2003 has proved the most eventful twelve months since the Society's inauguration four years ago. The highlight of the year was undoubtedly the STW weekend in May which culminated in the 'Celebration of Sylvia' concert performed by the Chydyock Singers in Chaldon church to commemorate the 25th anniversary of her death. It was a joyous occasion and will live in the memory of all those fortunate enough to attend. The Summer Weekend, now a regular feature in the Society's calendar, was held this year in Suffolk. Members were treated to a feast of Craske paintings and needleworks from the Peter Pears collection and the STW bequest. On the Sunday we were entertained by Ronald Blythe's recollections of Sylvia at his home near Colchester surrounded by wonderful John Nash landscapes.

Membership now stands at almost 100, an increase of 30 since the beginning of the year. This welcome expansion is a measure of the Society's coming of age and the interest that Sylvia's life and work continues to attract. The Society's own website, made possible by a generous donation from our Patron and online early next year, should bring us to the attention of an even wider audience.

The Society now has a new Chair in the shape of Stephen Mottram who brings a wealth of experience to the post from his time on the committee of the Hardy Society. The other change is that I have agreed to become editor of the Journal in what I trust is a seamless transition from Rosalie Parker. We all owe a huge debt of gratitude to both Rosalie and Ray

Russell for establishing a standard of excellence in both the content and production of the first three issues. The least I can do is ensure that both the style and quality are maintained.

This edition is devoted largely to Sylvia's non-fiction, in particular her work as biographer and literary critic. Her *T H White*, published in 1967 to wide acclaim, was followed a decade later by the prologue to White's lost *Book of Merlyn*, the final volume of his Arthurian epic. Sylvia's introduction, a dispassionate summation of the author's career and a fascinating 'Story of the Book', is reproduced alongside an abridged version of Janet Montefiore's intriguing essay on Sylvia and *The Biographer's 'Moral Sense'* from her collection *Arguments of Heart and Mind* (reviewed in last year's Journal).

I am most grateful to Susanna Pinney for drawing my attention to the four articles written by Sylvia in 1929 as guest editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*. These perceptive and highly original reviews include *Death and the Lady: The Letters of Katherine Mansfield* in which Sylvia highlights the rich immediacy of a writer 'sitting in her shadow of death'. Sylvia's assertion that 'lonely, unhappy people write the best letters' is not however born out by her own correspondence. *Bathrooms Remembered*, one of Sylvia's few pieces of non-fiction to appear in the *New Yorker* (Jan. 1964), is a delightful vignette that transforms the mundane into a hugely entertaining autobiographical sketch.

Shelf Lives, the concluding piece by the poet Peter Scupham marks a return to more familiar territory. This incisive East Anglian perspective on Sylvia's poetry opens with the poem from *Boxwood* that had, quite coincidentally, been chosen to illustrate the cover of this year's Journal.

I should like to express my thanks to all contributors.

If anyone would either like to submit an article or review for next year's Journal or draw one to my attention, then please contact me at the editorial address. Feedback in the form of letters is always welcome.