



# The Element of Lavishness: Letters of William Maxwell and Sylvia Townsend Warner, 1938-1978

*Sylvia Townsend Warner, Michael Steinman, William Maxwell*

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## **The Element of Lavishness: Letters of William Maxwell and Sylvia Townsend Warner, 1938-1978**

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An instant classic in the literature of friendship: the witty, affectionate 40-year correspondence between a great story-writer and her New Yorker editor. For forty years, until her death in 1978, Sylvia Townsend Warner (poet, novelist, and short-story writer) and her New Yorker editor William Maxwell (himself a fiction writer of great distinction) exchanged more than 1,300 letters. Their formal relationship quickly grew into a real, unshakable love, and their letters back and forth became the most significant and longest-lasting correspondence of their lives. As Maxwell told the editor of these letters, "Sylvia needed to write for an audience, a specific person, in order to bring out her pleasure in enchanting," and Maxwell was that person, both as editor and as correspondent. Warner brought out the best in Maxwell too. "I suspect that of all the writers I edited, I was most influenced by Sylvia...I think that what you are infinitely charmed by you can't help unconsciously imitating. " In these letters they wrote about everything that amused, moved, and perplexed them-the physical world, personal relationships, the New York City blackout, the Cuban missile crisis, their ceaseless reading, the coming of old age. Gratitude and love are on every page. Not to mention pleasure and delight.

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