

JANET MACHEN

1917-2008

Janet was born in 1917 to Arthur and Purefoy Machen, five years after her brother Hilary. I remember Janet revisiting the old Machen family home on the High Street in Amersham and saying that her childhood memory of her father was principally that of “a large presence; a noise”. Although his books were always on the shelves she was never encouraged to read them. The family had been forced to move from London to Amersham due to lack of money and although they were very sociable, many of Janet’s memories of her father were rather sad; she pointed out that she only really got to know him properly when he was an old man in failing health. His posthumous reputation gave her great pleasure.

Janet’s parents had been brought together by the stage (although they had met earlier), and when Janet announced in 1934, aged seventeen, that she wanted to tread the boards herself, they approved. It was not the start of a career in the limelight, however. Many people who knew Janet later through various literary societies were unaware of what she did with herself beyond the fact that she worked in some capacity in social services. The direction of her professional life may well have been influenced by her very close friendship with her older cousin, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Sylvia’s partner, Valentine Ackland. These two women writers had strong social consciences and during the Spanish Civil War Janet worked alongside Valentine, helping refugees. In the Second World War Janet travelled to Italy, again undertaking humanitarian work, this time with the Red Cross. It was in Italy that she met Roy Davis and they were

married in 1945. They had two children, Catherine and Matthew. She was to be married once more, in the 1970s, to Martin Pollock.

Janet later worked in a school for children with learning difficulties, and eventually trained as a social worker, qualifying when she was 55. In her time she worked for the mental health department of Bristol City Council and for Wiltshire Social Services. Even when she had ostensibly retired she still continued to undertake voluntary work for Cancer Care.

Janet was often able to give her cousin Sylvia emotional support, and I am sure that in her turn Sylvia supported Janet. I know that the founding of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society gave Janet as much pleasure as the earlier creation of the Arthur Machen Society and its subsequent incarnation as the Friends of Arthur Machen. Many members of these societies will be unaware that their Patron was more than just an honorary member. There were difficulties in the formation of the STW Society and the Friends of Arthur Machen and the founders of both societies would not have had the confidence to go ahead without Janet's encouragement and support. Many who only knew her in her later years will have memories of a kind, generous and very bright old lady, but Janet had a steely determination and worked quietly behind the scenes to make sure that each society was a success.

Likewise, Janet went out of her way to promote the work of both her father and cousin, and many publications—new, reprints and translations—have been the direct result of her efforts.

Those of us who knew Janet through these literary associations will remember her very fondly, and will want to thank her for the friendships we have formed as a direct result of her support. Our loss is considerable, but will be nothing to that of her family, to whom we extend our deepest sympathies.

Janet, we will all miss you!

Ray Russell