UCLPRESS

The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

Draft of a Preface to *Lolly Willowes*

Sylvia Townsend Warner*

How to cite: Warner, S.T. 'Draft of a Preface to *Lolly Willowes*'. *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 2023(1), pp. 9–11 • DOI: https://doi.org/10.14324/STW.22.1.03.

Published: 7 July 2023

Copyright:

© 2023, Tanya Stobbs. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC-BY) 4.0 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: https://doi.org/10.14324/STW.22.1.03.

This is a reprint of a manuscript originally found in the Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland Archive, Dorset History Centre, D/TWA/A05, STW.2012.125.1775.

Open Access:

The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

*(1893–1978)

Draft of a Preface to *Lolly Willowes*

Sylvia Townsend Warner

Abstract

These two short fragmentary pieces from the Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland Archive in the Dorset History Centre concern *Lolly Willowes* (1926) and *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* by Walter Evans-Wentz. One piece appears to be the unfinished draft of a preface to *Lolly Willowes*, and the other, the start of a review of a reprint of Evans-Wentz's book.

Keywords Sylvia Townsend Warner; preface; *Lolly Willowes*; *Kingdoms of Elfin*; Walter Evans-Wentz; Margaret Murray; fairies.

Editor's note: A folder in the Dorset History Centre's Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland Archive titled 'Notes by STW on her novels' includes a page on which are handwritten the two short pieces reproduced below. One side is an untitled page that seems to be the drafted opening of a preface to Lolly Willowes*; the other seems to be the start of a review of* The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries *by Walter Evans-Wentz.*

This makes the likely date of the manuscript 1977–78. Kingdoms of Elfin *was published in January 1977 to considerable acclaim, and might easily have led to Warner's being asked to review a book about fairies.* The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries *by Walter Evans-Wentz was first published in 1911, and it was reprinted in 1973 by Lemma Publishers and then again in 1977 by C. Smythe. No review of the book is listed in* Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Bibliography *by R.B. Russell and J. Lawrence Mitchell (Tartarus Press, 2020), so Warner may not have completed the piece (her health was poor and she died on 1 May 1978).*

Warner provided short prefaces for the 1978 Virago Press reprints of Mr Fortune's Maggot *and* The True Heart, *signing these 'Sylvia Townsend Warner, Dorset, 1978'; there was no preface to the Virago edition of* Lolly Willowes, *but the sentences below bring in details of Warner's life and reading in ways similar to the two other prefaces. The piece is short and fragmentary, but has a particular interest in the absence of any other authorial preface to the book.*

Lolly Willowes was my first essay at fiction. My ten years as a member of the *Tudor Church Music* committee had accustomed me to doing without much information, but I had had at least the name and works of biographies to go on, and those valuable stimulants of legend and misinformation to demolish. Now I had nothing except a wish to go on writing and a persuasion that I was best at home in times past. My interest in witchcraft had been evoked much earlier by the charm of spells and invocations quoted in Mackay's *Popular Delusions*,[1] and I had repeated them to my black cat. He listened, but did not comply; perhaps my Latin was not good enough. The solitary child had grown into the solitary young woman when I harked back to my Age of Faith, summoned by a remarkable book called *The Witchcult in Western Europe* by Margaret Murry.[2] Miss Murry, an Egyptologist I believe, had begun to read about witchcraft from curiosity. She had not been converted into believing in it, but she was convinced that the witches themselves did so. What was it those women had believed and were ready to die for? And what was it that their persecutors, legal and ecclesiastical, saw as such …

> *[The page ends here in mid-sentence. The draft review of Evans-Wentz is found overleaf, with word numbers in tens inserted in the text, suggesting Warner was writing a commissioned piece with a set word count. The last two sentences are only partly legible.]*

This exploration of a persistent faith was undertaken by Evans Wentz in 1911 and is now reprinted.[3] Wentz, an American, was a student in California when he met Yeats and was fired by his enthusiasm for Irish folklore. Moving to Oxford he was further influenced by Sir John Rhys, translator of *The Mabinogion* and R.R. Marett, reader in Social Anthropology.[4] Both these men encouraged him to continue his research, but his research was based not on what books said, but on belief; for he set out to discover what was actually held, or partially, about the fairy faith by people who believed in fairies – ministers of the Ch. of Scot., civil

engineers, town clerks, tailors, farmers, Old Woman crofters, clerics. The gentles, Welsh *Tylwyith Teg*, Cornish *Piskies*, the darker tribes of Brittany, hourigans [?] etc. All fictional fairies; but the practising fairy not necessarily fictional; he exists for pleasure, for fun, he is born from a locality…

[Script becomes illegible from here.]

Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland Archive, Dorset History Centre; DHC reference number 'D/TWA/A05'; previous reference number at the Dorset County Museum 'STW.2012.125.1775'

Notes

1 Charles Mackay (1814–1889), *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1841). Volume 2 has a section on 'The Witch Mania'.

2 Margaret Murray (1863–1963), author of *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A study in anthropology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921) and later of *The God of the Witches* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1933). Warner met her in February 1926, and wrote to David Garnett 'I wish I were in her coven, perhaps I shall be … She said things that would make the hairs of your head stand bolt upright' (Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Letters*, ed. William Maxwell [London: Chatto & Windus, 1982], p. 9).

3 Walter Evans-Wentz (1878–1965), *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (London: Henry Frowde, 1911), reprinted in the UK in 1973 (Lemma Publishers) and 1977 (C. Smythe).

4 Sir John Rhys (1840–1915), Professor of Celtic Studies at Oxford University; Robert Ranulph Marett (1866–1943).

Bibliography

Evans-Wentz, Walter. *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*. London: Henry Frowde, 1911.

Mackay, Charles. *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, 3 vols. London: Richard Bentley, 1841.

Murray, Margaret. *The God of the Witches*. London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1933.

Murray, Margaret. *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A study in anthropology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. *Letters*, ed. William Maxwell. London: Chatto & Windus, 1982.