

The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

Editorial

Peter Swaab ^{1,*}

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*Correspondence: p.swaab@ucl.ac.uk

¹UCL, UK

Editorial

Peter Swaab

This issue draws on two fairly recent events of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society. First, we're very pleased to be publishing the latest of the Society's biennial lectures. There could have been no more fitting person to deliver the lecture than our speaker, Claire Harman, to whom everybody interested in Warner is indebted for her pioneering scholarship, especially her biography of Warner and her editions of the poems and diaries. Claire overcame illness and bad weather to come from Oxford to London to deliver the well-attended lecture, and we're most grateful.

The second event happened early this year when the Warner Society got together with the Thomas Hardy Society to host a 'study weekend' in Dorchester. This lively and successful occasion has been written up on the Society website by Janet Montefiore.¹ It included a series of papers on the two writers, readings from their own poems and from poets they influenced, and visits to Max Gate and East Chaldon. Three articles in the *Journal* arose from the event and all take their prompting from the weekend's topic of 'Affinities and Influences'. In the first of these I explore the subject of 'Sylvia Townsend Warner, Thomas Hardy and Music', starting with a previously unpublished letter of Warner's from 1919 thanking Hardy for permission to publish her song settings of three of his poems. In the second, Peter Robinson compares and contrasts 'Hardy and Warner Haunting Graveyards' and the third (my own more informal piece) sketches some thoughts about 'Life's Little Ironies' in the two authors.

Another series of articles bears on the currency and availability of Warner's works in the twenty-first century. Judith Bond and Sam Johnston discuss the Warner and Ackland Archive, from its setting-up in the Dorset County Museum to its future in the Dorset History Centre, including a plan to develop Judith's indispensable database into a fully

digital online catalogue. Kate Macdonald, the founder of Handheld Press, describes how she came to publish three volumes by Warner alongside Frances Bingham's biography of Ackland and a revised version of Peter Haring Judd's book about Warner, Ackland and Elizabeth Wade White. Warner's admirers owe a debt of gratitude to all three contributors, as also to the Society's hard-working Chair, Janet Montefiore, who contributes here a focused but wide-ranging assessment of the topic that underlies a lot of Warner criticism, namely the question of her feminism. And again we are indebted to Harriet Baker, a previous Editorial Assistant on the Journal, whose well-received and widely reviewed book *Rural Hours: The Country Lives of Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Rosamond Lehmann* is discussed at length by Scarlett Baron.

This issue also features three pieces by Warner herself, two of them from the Dorset archive. First, her short story 'Sas Agapo', a previously unpublished gem, one of her stories of loss and continuance, and one of the stories in which she unsentimentally imagines a love between humans and other animals. Second, the lecture on French literature that Leonard Woolf invited her to give to the Lewes Literary Society in 1960. And finally, partly with an eye to Claire Harman's 2023 biography of Katherine Mansfield, a review by Warner of the *Letters of Katherine Mansfield to John Middleton Murry*, edited by Murry and published in 1951. This piece alludes to Warner's own 1929 *New York Herald* article 'Death and the Lady', occasioned by a previous edition of Mansfield's letters; this was reprinted in *With the Hunted: Selected Writings*, but the 1951 article hasn't been republished until now.

Note

- 1 Janet Montefiore. 'Thomas Hardy and Sylvia Townsend Warner Study Weekend in Dorchester, 10–11 February 2024'. *The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* website (18 February 2024).

Bibliography

Montefiore, Janet. 'Thomas Hardy and Sylvia Townsend Warner Study Weekend in Dorchester, 10–11 February 2024'. *The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* website (18 February 2024).

<https://townsendwarner.com/thomas-hardy-and-sylvia-townsend-warner-study-weekend-in-dorchester-10th-11th-february-2024> (accessed 26 November 2024).