

The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

Letter to the Editor

Ruth Williams*

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Abstract

A letter clarifying two points in Lynn Mutti's article on Sylvia Townsend Warner and Peter Pears, 'Sylvia Townsend Warner and Peter Pears: Loss and Friendship', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* 21(1): 62–85. <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.stw.2021.7>.

Keywords Sylvia Townsend Warner; Peter Pears; Benjamin Britten; music.

Dear Editor,

I've spent the winter break catching up on a pile of Warner Journals – a thoroughly enjoyable pursuit. This week I finally reached Lynn Mutti's delightful article on the correspondence between Warner and Peter Pears ('Sylvia Townsend Warner and Peter Pears: Loss and Friendship', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* 2021:1, pp. 62–85). She has pulled many disparate threads together to illuminate this relationship, but found a couple of references which she could not track down. As someone who enjoys working out a puzzle, I had a look for them and I attach the results. Perhaps speedier readers have got there before me: if so, my apologies for wasting your time with repetition.

'I have read your *Artemisian Holiday*' (p. 66)

Warner mentions this work by Pears in her letter of 19 May 1970, but Lynn can find no trace of it in Christopher Headington's Pears biography. The text of this letter was previously given in Peter Tolhurst's article on

Warner's letters to Pears in *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society 2004* (pp. 33–44), but the title appears here as 'American Holiday': a title also unknown to Headington.

However, what Headington does list, under 'Diaries and Travel Diaries' by Peter Pears in his 'List of Sources', is an 'Armenian Holiday', privately printed in 1965, after Britten and Pears had spent a month as guests of the Rostropoviches. He quotes extensively from it on pp. 216–21 and the excerpts include many wonderful meals and picnics, along with unusual alcoholic drinks – the point of reference for Warner's comment and perhaps a more convincing reading of this letter.

'A piece for two violins' (p. 70)

Warner mentioned this new work in a letter to Pears of 9 October 1972 and attached a document with a paperclip. Now only the rusty mark of the paperclip is left; the attachment has been lost. Lynn expresses surprise at Warner's apparent return to writing music – something she is not otherwise known to have done for many decades – and suggests it is one result of her increasingly close friendship with these two eminent musicians.

However, the correspondence between Warner and William Maxwell of the *New Yorker* shows that in October 1972 she was working on the story 'Four Figures in a Room. A Distant Figure' – and indeed posted it to him on the same day as she wrote to Pears (see *The Element of Lavishness*, pp. 238–40). This story, later collected in *The Music at Long Verney*, features two sisters who are professional violinists rehearsing a new piece, while a little boy listens from under the grand piano. This could well be what Warner was referring to as her 'composition for two violins', and perhaps the paperclip held a pre-publication typescript of the story for Pears to enjoy.

Many thanks to you and all the Journal contributors for providing such a varied and interesting diet. I'm very much looking forward to the next issue!

Best wishes,
Ruth Williams

Note

The Editor is sad to inform readers that Lynn Mutti died on 12 April 2022. A tribute will appear in the next issue of the *Journal*.