

The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

Editorial

Peter Swaab^{1,*}

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EDITORIAL

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After a hiatus of some years the Sylvia Townsend Warner Lecture series was re-launched in June this year. Maud Ellmann of the University of Chicago gave the lecture on ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner’s Spanish Novel: *After the Death of Don Juan*’ at a well-attended occasion at UCL in London. An extended version of her talk is the lead article in this issue of the Journal. Previous lecturers have included John Lucas and Janet Montefiore, and we are very pleased the series is underway again in such fine style. The next Warner Lecture will take place in 2019 and will also, we hope, be published in the Journal.

The editor is in receipt of an excellent gathering of essays submitted for the Mary Jacobs Prize. These are currently under assessment as the Journal goes to press, and the winning essay will be published in the next issue of the Journal. It was pleasing to be sent a variety of work by both younger scholars and freelance writers. The editor would like to encourage submissions to the Journal and also preliminary enquiries about possible submissions, especially as 2018 will be the first year in which we publish two issues, with the extra space which this makes possible. Contributions of an academic character are now peer-reviewed and overseen by an editorial board, so the Journal holds its own in today’s relentless atmosphere of accreditation. And the Journal’s open access online presence means that writings published here are widely and readily available to online viewers and can be freely disseminated.

The articles in this issue include biographical writing from both ends of Warner’s career together with two essays from the period in between, relating mainly to her left-wing commitments in the 1930s and the Second World War. Her early years as a novelist are represented

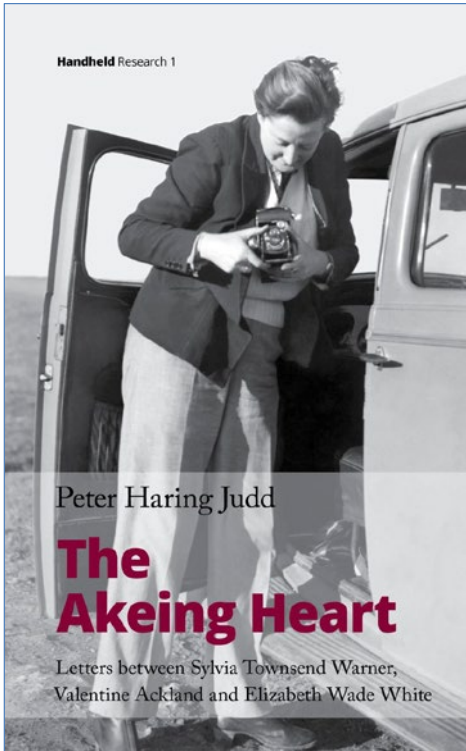
by an unpublished manuscript item from the Warner-Ackland archive, three pages of typewritten notes from around 1926 written by Ben Huebsch of the Viking Press, describing what sounds like a first meeting with Warner. They give a vivid sense of the restless mind of the young author, no doubt keen to make a good impression on her influential visitor. Huebsch records some of her remarks about the recently published *Lolly Willowes* and the work-in-progress *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, and also about her life in music as composer and musicologist (Huebsch had been music critic for the *New York Sun*). Lynn Mutti's article takes up one of the most tantalising of these remarks reported by Huebsch, concerning Warner's frequently cited plan to study composition with Arnold Schoenberg. Mutti's article subjects this plan to a sceptical scrutiny, exploring Schoenberg's reception in the England of the 1910s and looking into what we know about his pupils. She concludes that 'the evidence for the proposed pupillage with Schoenberg is thin and perhaps it is time that it is allowed to become doubtful or speculative rather than treated as substantive'.

Judith Stinton's 'Dorchester Chronicles' tells an extraordinary story. She describes how the *Dorset County Chronicle*, solidly reactionary from its early days in the 1820s, started printing what one of its employees called 'riproaring left-wing literature' in its final decade, from 1941 to 1951. The *Chronicle* was bought in 1941 by the communist *Daily Worker*, itself suspended because of wartime regulations. Stinton gives fascinating detail and nuance to this story and discusses Warner's and Ackland's connections with the *Chronicle* and other left-wing journals of the period.

The other pieces of a biographical turn in this issue look to Warner's later years. Roger Peers relates how Warner's books and papers came to reside at the Dorset County Museum of which he was Curator, and also how there were some manuscript casualties along the way. François Gallix has kindly made available the transcript of his interview with Warner in March 1974, when he visited her in connection with his work on T.H. White. Warner was impressed, as she reported to David Garnett on 8 April: 'He is charming: young, shy, enthusiastic and serious. A Burgundian by birth. He brought some of the translation of *The Goshawk*. I thought it was good. He manages to get some of the limberness, and almost some of the rant, of the original.' Sara Hudston's piece on her meetings with Colin House was first printed in 1995 in the now defunct *Wessex Journal*, and is here reprinted with an afterword bringing it up to the present day. She describes Colin House's long and poignant friendship with Sylvia, as her gardener and also as a writer

of poems and an expert spearfisher. Their friendship ended only as she herself ended, having requested that he should be present at her deathbed. Or perhaps it went beyond that too: Colin House has kindly allowed us to print a series of his letters from Sylvia in the 1970s, including an unforgettable one that imagines her own passing: ‘When the time comes, I should like *you* to carry my casket from the church, and place it in the grave. You have always been my dear gardener – and I should like you to plant me.’

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Peter Haring Judd's *The Akeing Heart* is the story of the tormented relationships between Sylvia Townsend Warner; her life partner Valentine Ackland; their American friend who invaded their happiness, Elizabeth Wade White; and Elizabeth's neglected lover Evelyn Holahan. Their correspondence over twenty years makes this book one of the finest collections of twentieth-century literary letters about love and its betrayals. This revised edition of *The Akeing Heart* brings this supplement to Sylvia and Valentine's story to a wider readership.

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