

## The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

---

### Editorial

Peter Swaab<sup>1,\*</sup>

**How to cite:** Swaab, P. 'Editorial.' *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 2020, 19(1–2), pp. ix–x • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.stw.2020.01>

Published: 15 April 2020

---

### Copyright:

© 2020, Peter Swaab. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (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/10.14324/111.444.stw.2020.01>

### Open Access:

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

\*Correspondence: [p.swaab@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:p.swaab@ucl.ac.uk)

<sup>1</sup> University College London, UK

## Editorial

This double issue of the *Sylvia Townsend Warner Journal* marks the 50th anniversary of Valentine Ackland's death on 9 November 1969 and commemorates the remarkable personal and creative partnership between Warner and Ackland.

The first part of the *Journal* comprises a selection of writings mainly by Ackland, and partly about her. It begins with extracts from what remains her only non-posthumous, single-authored book, *Country Conditions* (1936), a forceful and powerfully evidenced socio-political analysis remarkable, among its other qualities, as a work of promise from a writer still in her twenties when most of it was written. The selection moves on to Ackland as poet, the literary guise in which Warner first encountered her. Serious, high-minded, literary by vocation, Ackland continued writing poetry and prose throughout her life, despite the poor reception of *Whether a Dove or Seagull* (1933), the volume of poetry jointly written with Warner. The Warner–Ackland archive, now housed at the Dorset History Centre, shows that Ackland carried on writing a huge amount of poetry and prose, and publishing a good deal, mainly in periodicals as against books. She is represented here as a political journalist by her 1937 article 'Guests of Spain', and as a versatile writer of stories by the 'The Flame of the Candle' (1950), with a Poe-like supernatural theme, and 'The Man in the Balloon' (1954). Warner paid tribute to the latter in a diary entry on 11 January 1954: 'It is as flawless as a shell and as insubstantial, able to hold life and endure oceans.' The Ackland section of the *Journal* continues with the first publication of a passionate, regretful exchange of letters between Ackland and Elizabeth Wade White in January 1951 marking the end of their affair – although not, as Ailsa Granne and Peter Haring Judd

show, the end of their friendship. The section concludes with two pieces by Warner that return to the Spanish theme, the high point of Warner's faith alike in the romance of their shared politics and the politics of their shared romance. First, Mercedes Aguirre introduces a previously unpublished booklet of six poems dedicated by Warner to Ackland, in which the Spanish Republic seemed a republic of love, including queer love. Second is Warner's charming wartime story 'My Shirt Is in Mexico', describing an encounter on board a train between a buffet attendant, our narrator and 'Valentine'. With sly tact and indirection the story suggests that the three share an understanding of generosity, romance and political solidarity.

My thanks to Frances Bingham for her helpful suggestions and advice about the selection of Ackland's writings. Society members will be pleased to know that Handheld Press are planning to publish her biography of Ackland in 2021.

The Warner part of the *Journal* starts with Judith Stinton's vivid account of the wartime years in Maiden Newton when 'Miss Warner' was a driving force in the Women's Voluntary Service in Dorchester, and in Maiden Newton's Civil Defence. It continues with the first critical article on *Boxwood* (1958), in which Michael Nott discusses and contextualises the collaboration between Reynolds Stone's woodcuts and Warner's short poems. Warner herself is represented here by two previously unpublished autobiographical articles. She wrote many such pieces for the *New Yorker*, some posthumously collected in *Scenes of Childhood* (1981). These two didn't find favour with the magazine, but it is hard to see why not. Beneath their wit and apparent lightness they each sketch a portrait of the artist beginning to emerge, even as a very young girl.