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### Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Possibilities of Freedom: The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Lecture 2019

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# Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Possibilities of Freedom: The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Lecture 2019

*Peter Swaab*

## Abstract

This article considers why Warner's writing has been undervalued, in particular taking issue with the argument that her works are too radically disparate to be discussed as an oeuvre. It argues that one path through her writings – a 'handle to get hold of the bundle' in William Empson's phrase – is the idea of 'the possibilities of freedom', a topic broad enough to address a good deal in Warner's writings but specific enough to bring some focus. 'The possibilities of freedom' – as against 'freedom' alone – points both ways, both to what *is* possible and conversely to the limits of the possible. The essay follows this theme and some of its variations through the six decades and several genres of Warner's writing life, discussing in particular 'The Young Sailor', *Lolly Willowes*, *Opus 7*, 'To Come So Far' and 'Oxenhope'. It concludes that we should see her as in no way a quiet, removed stylist but instead as a figure of vigorous cultural engagements, an intellectual contemporary of writings such as Bertrand Russell's *Proposed Roads to Freedom* (1918), Sartre's *Les chemins de la liberté* (1945–49) and Hannah Arendt's essay 'What is Freedom?' (1961).

**Keywords** Sylvia Townsend Warner; freedom; irony; reputation; short stories; *Lolly Willowes*; *Opus 7*; 'The Young Sailor'; 'To Come So Far'; 'Oxenhope'.

My thanks to the UCL Institute of Advanced Studies for hosting this event, to UCL Press for providing the reception and above all to the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society for the invitation to give this biennial lecture. It's an honour I appreciate very much.

In an Oxford Handbook chapter in 2016 Maud Ellmann, my predecessor as Warner Society lecturer, wrote that 'Most scholarship on Sylvia Townsend Warner begins with a kind of ritual lament about the critical neglect that has condemned her writing to obscurity.' She continued, ruefully, that 'Unfortunately the present survey is obliged to echo this refrain.'<sup>1</sup> Rituals are there to be observed, so I will join the lament, but along with an upbeat qualification that's been more common in recent years, a sense that things have been changing even since 2016, that possibly a Warner moment is arriving or has arrived, confirmed in the last year or two by rumours of screen adaptations of her work in the pipeline, editions of her fiction by major publishers and by her name appearing more frequently now in – for instance – academic conferences and syllabi. All these are to the good, at the cost only of the glow of insider pleasure from being in the know when the wider world seems not to be.

Nonetheless, for those of us who feel Warner should still be better known it's worth thinking in some detail about reasons for her neglect. Several are possible. First, she was too long-lived to stand as a helpful example of a literary moment. As with other long-lived writers such as Rebecca West, Christopher Isherwood or Barbara Comyns, continuingly responsive to their changing times, literary periodisation is hard to apply cogently: they belong to more than one moment, decade, paradigm, -ism. Writers such as Warner, born in the 1890s, should be 'modernists', but can it really make sense to discuss her books written in the 1960s and 1970s under that heading? The last book of her lifetime was published in the year that *Never Mind the Bollocks* was released; her first was read by A.E. Housman and W.B. Yeats, born in the 1850s and 1860s. Secondly, she was too invested in mid-status genres such as short stories and historical novels to be a natural candidate for literary critical prestige. A critical account of Warner needs to rethink these genres in their time and assess the condescension often visited on them by literary criticism. Thirdly, although she was partially recovered by feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, her work was too elusive and non-moralistic to be comfortably represented as a proponent of gender progressivism. Fourthly, anti-communism and anti-lesbianism may have played a part in alienating some readerships, while from another angle anti-gentry prejudices may have come into play against a writer who published under the name Townsend Warner (even though it

has no hyphen). Maybe, too, it didn't help to be confusable with the New Zealand novelist Sylvia Ashton-Warner.

A further reason for her relative neglect is that Warner did not fit readily into the story of avant-garde modernism that for a long time dominated our sense of literature between the two world wars. This was at times a polarising literary historical narrative that placed experimental modernists on one side and all the unadventurous rest on another. Writers not manifestly modernist were diminished by such a narrative, for one reason because the category 'modernism' has been capable of doing tendentious double service as partly a chronological and partly an honorific category (in this respect like 'Romantic'). In response to such a narrow conception of literary history a good deal of recent criticism has looked to think of modernism both in fresh and in less exclusive ways. There have been books such as *Rethinking Modernism*, in the title of an essay collection edited by E. Thormaehlen in 2003, *Paranoid Modernism* (David Trotter, 2001), *Green Modernism* (Jeffrey Mathes Macarthy, 2015), *Queer Modernism* (Robert L. Caserio, 2010) and *Romantic Moderns* (Alexandra Harris, 2010). The term *Intermodernism* (essays edited by Kristin Bluemel, 2009) has opened out a further literary historical perspective. Our understanding of twentieth-century writing has been usefully enlarged by work such as this, looking beyond the extraordinary achievements of the writers most associated with an idea of experimental modernism. But there is a risk that the word 'modernism' has come to mean everything at once and nothing in particular, and to have become more useful for search-engine visibility than for serious thought about literary culture.

One final cause for Warner's neglect – and the one most frequently cited – is her diversity. Her prolific, unpredictable oeuvre has often been thought unassimilable into a single account. In 1999, for instance, Carmen Callil and Colm Tóibín suggested that 'Every novel Warner wrote was entirely different from its predecessor in subject, period and story.' David Carroll Story is among others to echo the thought, in a comment in 2010: 'Each of her novels is an unprecedented world, and each of them looks, at first glance, as if it were written by a different author.'<sup>2</sup> 'Entirely different', 'an unprecedented world': these characterisations seem to me exaggerated and not entirely plausible; but there is no doubt that the half century of Warner's multi-genre writings is hard to generalise and aggregate. How, for instance, should we relate her historical novels to her animal fables, or to the dry sparkling fairy stories of her final years, or to the hundreds of short stories with settings in contemporary life?

## Warner and freedom

In response to such questions Eleanor Perényi suggested in 1985 that ‘If a convenient pigeonhole could be found for her ... we would be in the flood of a Warner revival.’<sup>3</sup>

What then might be such a ‘pigeonhole’? A different metaphor was once offered by Warner’s friend William Empson, like her a gentry-class bisexual communist atheist with wide horizons and polymathic talents: he talked about the need when engaging with an oeuvre for ‘the right handle to get hold of the bundle’.<sup>4</sup> Here I come to my own handle and bundle, ‘the possibilities of freedom’, a topic broad enough to address a good deal in Warner’s writings but specific enough to bring some focus. ‘The possibilities of freedom’ – as against ‘freedom’ alone – points both ways, both to what is possible and conversely to the limits of the possible.

Freedom was central to what mattered most in Warner’s life and literary career: politically, her adoption of communism in the mid-1930s; sexually, her decision to love and live with another woman, Valentine Ackland; professionally, her abandoning a life in music as a composer and leading musicologist to dedicate herself to poetry and prose fiction; ethically and philosophically, her living through the major period of existentialism, with its call for courageous self-fashioning. Artistically, too, her work insists on its right to non-conformism. In generic terms the novels move unexpectedly away from what seem to be their narrative determinations, for instance in *Lolly Willowses* from family saga to supernatural fantasy and in *After the Death of Don Juan* from comic fable to political tragedy. Their starting-points belie their destinations.

A common thread in Warner’s books, especially up to 1936, is their fascination with momentous decisions. The protagonists leave their given lives for elected changes of place, and the books set the reality of these individual choices alongside the weight of historical circumstance. None of these changes of life in the early books is represented without a cooling humour and irony of character, but the romantic affirmations of the later work – which we might date from the dissolution in 1939 of the Second Spanish Republic – are more muted, more contained. (I take *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938), a ‘parable ... or an allegory ... of the political chemistry of the Spanish war’,<sup>5</sup> as Warner called it, about a defeated popular uprising, as a pivotal moment in her work.) The late masterpieces *The Corner That Held Them* (1948) and *The Flint Anchor* (1954) set human projects and obsessions in longer vistas of historical change during the Black Death and the industrial revolution. These

quietly avant-garde narratives, entirely unpredictable in their multiple trajectories, set the purposes of strange individuals amid the larger indifferent movements of an epoch. The canvas has become broader, its political centre of interest the ironic representation of disunited communities and divergent class interests.

This is partly because Warner's romantic commitment to emancipation and individuality is increasingly balanced by a classicist's understanding of constraint and the larger patterns of history. Her writing gets depth and force from its responsiveness to these contending currents. She is an ironist as well as a romantic, an admirer of Austen and Voltaire as well as Colette. 'There is pleasure in watching the sophistries of mankind,' she writes in *The Corner That Held Them*, 'his decisions made and unmade like the swirl of a mill-race, causation sweeping him forward from act to act while his reason dances on the surface of action like a pattern of foam.'<sup>6</sup> Such a view of human choice is essentially an ironic one, capable of the bitter and dispassionate sublimity of this sentence but also capable often of being very funny in the Jane Austen tradition. It generates a narrative mode in the later novels that you could reasonably call modernist or experimental; the storyline itself swirls around in unpredictable patterns.

The rest of this lecture will consider prospects and experiences of freedom in a broad range of Warner's writings, from six decades and three genres. The aim is partly to bring out their variations on the theme of freedom and partly to suggest a trajectory in which the late 1930s mark a key transitional moment.

## Scenes of Warner's childhood

Like Katherine Mansfield, Warner intended in her early years a life in music; and she was a composer and a musicologist for many years in the 1910s before she became primarily a writer. One of her unpublished essays, titled 'Pianos and Pianolas', remembers her first, unpromising piano lesson:

My hands were set on the keyboard and coerced into playing scales in unison – a hateful proceeding – and in contrary motion which was enjoyable. ... I hated the whole thing. ... I progressed from sheer boredom and exasperation, till the day when my first teacher left and a new one arrived – a lady of very different notions, who

took me by the scruff of my neck and dropped me into a Haydn Sonata. To this day I can recall every circumstance of the moment when she broke in at a double bar to commend my bravura arpeggio approach to the cadence in the dominant. She stayed long enough to enter me to Bach before she went to a teaching post. Bach at that date was considered dry. I did not find him so. He seemed to sanction my first penchant for scales in contrary motion.<sup>7</sup>

We could find much here that's suggestive for Warner's long life as a writer: she finds coercion hateful, she has a bravura approach to the dominant, she has a liking for combining different notations at the same time, she is able to discover the contrary within the classical and she has a deep-rooted penchant for contrary motion – and more generally for contrariness.

An important contrary and non-conformist moment from her early life is recorded in 'The Young Sailor', a short story published in the *New Yorker* in 1954.<sup>8</sup> In it the 60-year-old Sylvia Townsend Warner looked back to the day when she was confirmed in St Paul's Cathedral. 'I was sixteen at the time, and not in a state of religious exaltation.' During the service she reflects on conformity – 'flocking, I felt, was the main thing' – and also on gender inequality, though not entirely from the point of view of female disadvantage: 'I glanced across the central aisle, which sexually differentiated the candidates, and thought it was hard for boys not to be granted veils.' During the bishop's address (on the teen-unfriendly theme that 'The Wages of Sin Is Death') 'a new ingredient' arrives. This is the young sailor of the title, who decides in the middle of the service that he has to leave right away. Edging past knees and hassocks, he suffers the 'contained, unwilling woe that designates the truebred Englishman when he knows he is making himself conspicuous. Once disentangled, however, he looked cheerful, and walked lightly and briskly down the aisle and eventually out of the building'<sup>9</sup> – across all sorts of conjured thresholds, religious, national and perhaps naval too. You can almost hear the clack of shoe on flagstone.

Speculating later, Sylvia's mother conjectures that the sailor was a sightseer who had stumbled into St Paul's by mistake; her father's view is that the expansiveness of the bishop's address had put an intolerable strain, despite his youth, on the sailor's bladder. As generally in her *New Yorker* stories of personal reminiscence, she finds her parents interesting and unusual, and here even calls them 'remarkably

emancipated'. She is on agreeable terms with them but is pleased all the same that during the service they were some way away, 'well to the back of the building, in, as it were, a sort of hallowed pit'. It's a threshold story, but far from a Freudian agon with either parent; Warner entertains their views sceptically but amiably. The story does not hinge on a rebellion against their parental authority or traditions, but nonetheless it describes an importance distance from them both. She interprets the situation not as an accidental or bladder-centric non-conformity but as an existential one. 'In my view,' Warner tells them, 'the young sailor decided that he did not care about being confirmed, and had the courage of his opinions.' This seems to be reported as part of the shared humorous musings with her parents, but the narrative then withdraws in a new paragraph to a more private voice. 'I did not add ... that the young sailor's action had filled me with such admiration for his independent mind and such shame at my own sheepish conformity that though I went on being confirmed, I was to all intents and purposes unconscious of it.' In this aptly religious setting she has a not exactly Anglican revelation confirming her own future: 'One can never know beforehand what isn't going to happen to one, or, as a hymn expresses it, "Sometimes a light surprises the Christian while he sings." A light had surprised me. ... I knew that I would follow the young sailor out.' Such an inner light is at home in the protestant tradition, even when as here it leads her *ex cathedra*.<sup>10</sup>

'I would follow him out.' But where to? We don't know what the decision leads to, only what it leads from. It's a vivid sketch of freedom *from* a sharply evoked geography of Anglican culture, and freedom *to* – well, to walk into the daylight and away. Striking out for this freedom belongs to the tradition of 'the truebred Englishman', but the sailor's courage here is rather likeably the overcoming not of a foreign foe but of a national tendency to embarrassment. This decision to leave is a prediction of the future and a gamble on it. For this story, that's enough – enough to sustain its buoyant comedy and the brio with which the author (alike the narrator at 60 and the narratee at 16) finds an inspiring solidarity across the sexually dividing aisle with somebody from a different gender, line of work and probably social background.<sup>11</sup>

George Eliot is a figure closer to Warner in these respects, so it is telling that her 1952 review of a biographical study of Eliot also chooses to focus on how George Eliot, like the young sailor, braved social disapproval and walked out on her regularly mapped future. Warner



discusses an early portrait of Eliot that expresses ‘an obstinacy that could become obtuse’ together with ‘timidity and sensibility’:

if it had not been for what that expression denoted, the large-headed woman might not now be attached to the edifice [that is, ‘the temple of English literature’]. Instead, her name would be recorded in some crypt or lean-to: Evans, Marian. Journalist: translated Strauss’s *Life of Jesus* and Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity*. Obstinacy, and a sullen resignation to being saddened at the bidding of the intellect, took her just so far. Then obstinacy, and no doubt the bidding of the intellect, but also the bidding of the flesh, and the ambiguous bidding of the world, which while demanding female chastity jeered at old maids, took her across a Rubicon, and she left England with G.H. Lewes, a married man without even the hope of a divorce to cover his nakedness.<sup>12</sup>

‘Obstinacy’ is the subject of both the final sentences, and is the protagonist in this crossing of a Rubicon into artistic power. George Eliot’s decision, or rather Marian Evans’s, stirs Warner to a novelistic evocation of her own, looking inward into her complication of motive, and even giving us a touch of George Eliot-like free indirect style at the end. Such a choice as Eliot’s, in this account, entails a consciousness of society’s standards and double-standards and expresses a commitment to the body. These are and remain part of Warner’s sense of the necessary assertion of an artist.

### ***Lolly Willowes and Opus Seven***

Warner is especially interested in such moments when people ‘decide’ and have ‘the courage of their opinions’. She often evokes these decisions ironically as well as romantically, as a matter of costs as well as benefits. This is the case even in the story of emancipation that is *Lolly Willowes*. In leaving her London life as a spinster aunt and put-upon childminder to become a singleton witch in rural Great Mop, Laura liberates herself from gendered, familial and marital disadvantage; at the same time the book throws off its groundings in the family saga mode and becomes a fable-like supernatural tale. The affirmation of these choices is a central part of the appeal of *Lolly Willowes*. Even so, we may wonder what Laura’s freedom is *for*, enigmatically expressed as it is in an elusive conception of witchcraft.

The question can be approached by going back to a moment near the start of the book.<sup>13</sup>

London life was very full and exciting. There were the shops, processions of the Royal Family and of the unemployed, the gold tunnel at Whiteley's, and the brilliance of the streets by night. She thought of the street lamps, so impartial, so imperturbable in their stately *diminuendos*, and felt herself abashed before their scrutiny.<sup>14</sup>

The consciousness here is that of Laura, anticipating the move from Somerset to London following the death of her father. Like almost the whole of the first section, it evokes with subtlety and unobtrusiveness a psychology of traumatic grief, characterised by – and even as – her indifference about any assertions of the self.

Within this state of mind we could hear something dutiful and muted in the perception that 'London life was very full and exciting'. By comparison Laura's mind turns with more inward feeling to the unloving scrutiny of the street lamps, their impartiality evoking by implication the loving partiality of her absent father. But what about the list of features of London life?

Laura imagines 'processions of the Royal Family and of the unemployed' without apparently seeing any category difference between these 'exciting' spectacles or any awkwardness in applying the word 'processions' to both: momentarily the syntax may have us glimpsing the Royal Family and the unemployed processing together. The setting is 1902 and we can get an idea of the context from a contemporary reminiscence of the London of 1902–3 in Jack London's 'Author's Preface' to *The People of the Abyss* (1903):

To such an extent did the suffering and positive starvation increase that society was unable to cope with it. Great numbers of the unemployed formed into processions, as many as a dozen at a time, and daily marched through the streets of London crying for bread.<sup>15</sup>

*Lolly Willowes* was published in February 1926 in the months leading up to the General Strike of May that year, so the hardship of workers and unemployed was both urgent and topical when Warner wrote the book. British seamen had gone on strike in 1925, and the cutting of miners' wages in June 1925 gave strong indications of further workers' protests

to follow. The allusion to the unemployed shows some of Laura's limitations; she is and remains partly the daughter of her sublimely torpid mother, who had 'a temperamental indifference to the need of getting married – or, indeed, of doing anything positive': 'Mrs Willowes grew continually more skilled in evading responsibilities, and her death seemed but the final perfected expression of this skill.'<sup>16</sup> Warner writes with a Browningsque relish for the oddity of human character, but the discourse of 'responsibilities' does enter the picture here, and Laura's mother doesn't score high.

Laura's own political consciousness evolves during the book, to the point where she sees her own oppression as inextricably connected to the whole apparatus of Western capitalism;<sup>17</sup> but quietude remains powerfully attractive to her. It is subtly unclear how far Laura and the narrator take the same view about the appeal of quiescence. Warner's narrative never decisively dissociates itself from Laura, and the warmth and clarity of the book come from its siding so loyally with her. The idea of her self-discovery is the key to the narrative; the devil in the book encourages Laura 'to talk, not that I may know all your thoughts, but that you may',<sup>18</sup> as he puts it with psychoanalytic aplomb. The conception of witchcraft in the book is anarchistic in the respect that each person's pact with the devil is tailor-made for his or her own nature (similarly in her next book *Mr Fortune's Maggot* each islander on Fanua fashions their own god). Laura's access to her own voice moves her away from an engagement with the wider world. She may tell the devil that women become witches 'to show our scorn of pretending life's a safe business, to satisfy our passion for adventure', but her own is a reclusive and unexuberant plan of happy life, 'rooted in peace'.<sup>19</sup>

The book grants Laura what she wants, but doesn't press her into socio-political exemplariness. There are various indexes of this. First, Laura was born in 1874, a generation before her author (1893), and she has a difficult family heritage to deal with; like Woolf's Mrs Dalloway, she can go only so far towards realising a 1920s conception of socio-political progress. Secondly, the author's tactful distance from her protagonist is measured in the distance between the narrator's voice – dry, energetic, laconic, worldly and fun – and Laura's. Indeed, we hardly hear Laura's for a long while. In the 73-page first section of the book Laura is the central consciousness throughout, but she speaks only four times (71 words in all). *Lolly Willowes* has much more animus and satirical aggression than Laura Willowes. The focus of Laura's story lies in her discovery of freedom to heed the self and express its promptings, and in Laura's

case this entails a freedom from relationship, and freedom, too, from the intrusive contemporary world beyond the dreamily fantastical village of Great Mop.

In her early books Warner had juxtaposed contrasting locations and her protagonists had contrived to escape towards riskier and happier lives. The vigorous and coolly brilliant *Opus 7* (1931), Sylvia Townsend Warner's third volume of poetry,<sup>20</sup> carries such juxtapositions and contrasts as possibilities within its single setting of Love Green, evoked with complexity and modernity as for better and worse a contemporary version of pastoral – in the phrase William Empson used in the title of his 1935 book *Some Versions of Pastoral*.<sup>21</sup> Even those few critics who have written well about her poetry (notably Donald Davie, John Lucas and Jan Montefiore)<sup>22</sup> have had almost nothing to say about *Opus 7*. It is a strange poem indeed, as perhaps signalled by the anomalous hybrid title. Here is how Warner herself described it in a 1939 essay:

it was about time to do for this date what Crabbe had done for his: write a truthful pastoral in the jog-trot English couplet. And I wrote a narrative poem called *Opus 7* about a comfortless old woman in a village who turned a random flower-patch into a commercial success in order to buy drink to warm her old bones. I wrote it in London, but by the time it was published I was a cockney no more. As casually as I had gone to Essex I began to live in Dorset.<sup>23</sup>

As she intimates here, Warner's own life was changing course when she wrote the poem, between London and Dorset, between an affair with an older man, Percy Buck, and a younger woman, Valentine Ackland.

In setting out to write 'a truthful pastoral' Warner implies the possibility of false ones. The poem is strewn with echoes and allusions, for instance to famous lines by Shakespeare, Marvell, Gray, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats; it is partly a sceptical meditation on how some of the more celebrated moments of English poetry have dealt with country life, partly a way of making these precursors new – an expression, then, of freedom at once within and from the tradition.

The central figure, like Laura Willows solitary and botanical, and to that degree also a kind of witch, is found among her flowers:

Rebecca, stooped and stout and red of face,  
moved like the guardian goblin of their race –  
herself no flower.<sup>24</sup>

She is no Perdita, then, and no Eve, but her mode of gardening has an unfallen side:

And should some wilding outlaw, long decreed  
by due botanical consent a weed,  
to her tilled ground come interloping back,  
let it but bloom, she would not bid it pack.  
Bloom did they all, the bond beside the free,  
true clove carnation neighbouring succory,  
Ishmaelite poppy with delphinium;  
it seemed the Eden or Millenium  
of flowers, how all at peace together grew:<sup>25</sup>

There is something fanciful in this utopian vista of a togetherness of recognised and outlawed plants, putting a question of how far the problems of law and community it heals *can* be healed by a bit of gardening. What imaginative reach does a woman with her garden have as a world of freedom?

The question comes up the more sharply because the poem dramatises social poverty and need starkly. Love Match is a grittier site than Great Mop. At the start of the poem 'Rebecca lived on bread, and lived for gin'. Her indigence is seen as part of the economically depressed aftermath of 1914–18: 'War trod her low.' Warner includes a powerful first-person passage about the effects of the Great War:

I knew a time when Europe feasted well:  
Bodies were munched in thousands, vintage blood  
so blithely flowed that even the dull mud  
grew greedy, and ate men;<sup>26</sup>

The narrator's anger about cultural decline, social injustice and the disastrous world war is echoed through the figure and denunciatory words of 'a crippled Anzac' soldier, whose great-grandfather, he tells Rebecca, was from the area and 'was transported / for firing ricks'.<sup>27</sup> These pointed details give us a historical glimpse into an earlier period of postwar desperation. In the post-Napoleonic year of 1830, according to the Irish historian and liberal politician Justin McCarthy (co-writing with his son), 'The distress which prevailed throughout the country had in many districts called up a spirit of something like desperation, which exhibited itself in a crime of almost entire novelty, the burning of hayricks

on farms.<sup>28</sup> McCarthy adds that William Cobbett wrote an article in 1831 ‘vindicating the conduct of those who had set fire to hayricks and destroyed farm buildings’. This ‘Anzac soldier’, in Britain but not exactly of it, continues a spirit of protest. He has both a practical and a symbolic importance for the story. He is the first to buy flowers from Rebecca, and the pound he gives her sets her up with several bottles of gin and with the idea that selling flowers can be good business. He has no time for the picturesque:

[‘]This silly soppy landscape – what’s the use  
of all this beauty and no bloody juice?  
Who’d fire a rick these days?’ ‘Farmer Lee  
fired his for the insurance once,’ said she.  
He heard not, and spoke on.<sup>29</sup>

But he is too prompt to pronounce the spirit of English protest dead and doesn’t have ears to hear that modern protest may take new forms, and not only masculine ones. Here it involves first insurance fraud and then perhaps the ‘juice’ that Rebecca drinks, a spirit that gives her spirit, in a seriously irreligious redirection of the Hopkins line echoed here, ‘What is all this juice and all this joy?’<sup>30</sup>

The soldier’s purchase of her wallflowers inspires Rebecca. ‘As some on liquor, some on flowers were set’, she reflects in Popeian fashion.<sup>31</sup> She finds she has commercial skills to back her skill with flowers. She goes to town and buys seeds from Woolworth’s, sowing them by lantern light in a wonderful passage of supple modernist rhymed couplets.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile Rebecca, placid as the core  
of jostling whirlpool, grubbed and grunted on,  
bedding Sweet Sultan by Miss Wilkinson,  
larkspur by mignonette and arabis.  
No ears had she save for the sliding hiss  
of seed released into her horny hand –  
a drowsing multitudinous murmur, scanned  
with tiny lapse and check – nor any care  
for other life than that implicit there;  
her being so much in future fixed that she  
inhabited an anonymity  
of time, an ambiguity of day  
hollowed from midnight. And as dreams convey

their own penumbra of oblivion, so  
she moving with her lantern to and fro  
pulled darkness after her, and with such sleight  
reshaped her wavering world elsewhere, one might  
think 'twas her dream, not she, that walked the night.<sup>33</sup>

Where the promiscuous planting of flowers expressed a democratic freedom, this planting has an erotic richness and comedy, with its 'sliding hiss / of seed released' and plant names that contrive an improper bedding of Sweet Sultan by Miss Wilkinson. We might think of Rudolph Valentino in *The Sheik* (1921). Beyond this playfulness lies a serious tribute to gardening as an activity as absorbing, prospective and creative as poetry. It offers a temporal sublimity, and a transcendence delicately and lyrically evoked. The last lines involve a beautiful elemental idea of Rebecca pulling the darkness after her as she moves with her lantern, and they imagine quite in the romantic tradition that Rebecca like a poet is reshaping the status of dream and reality.

Warner based the story, she said, on a 'drinking old lady ... a neighbour for many years, and I had the greatest esteem for her because she knew what she wanted'.<sup>34</sup> 'Knowing what you want' is a bare but intelligible criterion for esteem; it is committed to the value of individual wishes but is not necessarily interpersonal. In this case Rebecca wants to be left alone to grow flowers and drink gin. Quite how fully these wishes respond to the postwar depression and the cultural traditions of British pastoral are questions the poem leaves us with. *Opus 7* ends with Rebecca drinking herself rhapsodically to death in a churchyard, in an extraordinary passage that's both a Burnsian or Byronic seizing of the alcoholic day, expressed also as a blasphemous challenge to the gods. For perhaps the first time in British poetry *Opus 7* celebrates a female drunk who is not the object of pity or sociological concern.<sup>35</sup>

The moments of epiphany in *Opus 7* and its strangely triumphant ending are quite unusual affirmations. Rebecca's freedom is creative, disobliging, canny, withdrawn, reckless of gain, prudence and the future. The poem affirms freedom to be what you wish to be, a value of its own, perhaps a *folie*, standing alone independently of its consequences. There's altogether an absence of condescension in the poem about this heroine who 'grubbed and grunted on', got her hands dirty and drank herself to death. But it ends elegiacally, as if doubting its own currency in the contemporary world, with the narrator passing Rebecca's cottage to find it transformed into a not very flourishing

tea-shop. Rebecca is gone, and the poet ends with a doubt about her own future vocation:

Now from the page the picture blurs and dims,  
wavers, discolours, perjures itself, dislimns.  
The flowers are withered, even from my mind,  
their petals loosed, their scent gone down the wind;  
and she, to whom they such allegiance bore –  
I knew her once, and know her now no more.<sup>36</sup>

Warner's word 'perjured' includes a fierce accusation to her misremembering self, giving an edge to the doubts about poetic fidelity suggested by the allusion to Wordsworth's lament for his visionary powers in the 'Immortality Ode': 'The things which I have seen I now can see no more.'<sup>37</sup>

### 'To Come So Far' and 'Oxenhope'

*Opus 7* was a venture into extended poetic narrative that Warner never repeated, and such doubts as these may have played their part in a change of direction in her writings of the 1930s. The later stories in *More Joy in Heaven* (1935), for instance, represent a move away from the influence of T.F. Powys and the fable tradition and towards social realism. The years from 1935 up to the start of the Second World War were the main years of her activities as the leading member in the Wessex branch of the Communist Party, activities to which she brought vigour, resourcefulness, courage and energy.<sup>38</sup> These were enough to get her included among the 2,820 names on the Nazis' Sonderfahndungsliste GB, their list of British citizens to be arrested immediately following an invasion. In these early years of her membership of the Communist Party, Warner's writings dramatise convergences between political liberation and personal freedom. *Summer Will Show* (1936), in particular, coordinates its discovery of lesbian romance with the incipience of European communism. So too do some of Warner's writings about the Spanish Civil War, for instance the sequence of six poems published in the previous number of this Journal.<sup>39</sup> Though I will not be discussing them today, these are manifestly works that are indispensable to any extended account of Warner and the possibilities of freedom.

We could see a partial withdrawal from the hopefulness of Warner's political aspirations in the darkly pessimistic *After the Death of Don Juan*



(1938) and the terse Brechtian political fables of *The Cat's Cradle-Book* (1940). In the postwar years I believe that Warner decided not that her socio-political commitments of the 1930s had been misguided, but that her writing had been too directly in the service of those commitments. The perspectives on freedom in her writing become correspondingly less direct and unambiguous. As examples I would like in the remainder of this lecture to discuss two short stories from these postwar years.

It is a striking fact in the literary life of so prolific a writer as Warner that for almost a quarter of a century after *The Flint Anchor* in 1954 she wrote no more novels. She found novel-writing to be a consuming and exhausting activity; she felt herself inspired, exhausted and possessed by the process, whereas short stories came much more easily. Nonetheless, the short stories of these years are major achievements and to my mind the most underrated area of Warner's oeuvre, in particular the collections of the 1950s and 1960s, *Winter in the Air* (1955) and *A Stranger With a Bag* (1966). Literary critical attention to her stories has so far focussed disproportionately on the 1970s fairy stories collected as *Kingdoms of Elfin* (1977), a remarkable collection but also a special case in terms of genre and setting. The many postwar stories of contemporary life have been very little attended to, including the two on which I will finish, 'To Come So Far' (1947) and 'Oxenhope' (1971).

'To Come So Far' comprises only 12 short pages in the collection *The Museum of Cheats*,<sup>40</sup> and it has not as far as I have found been discussed beyond possible mentions when the collection was reviewed. It is set in April 1946 and begins with the arrival at a seaside resort of a married couple, Cecily and Arnold.

'If only we hadn't come so far,' she said. He turned off the engine and looked at the sea. It was calm and heavily white, and resembled a bad oil-painting. Part of the beach had been cleared, elsewhere the pale sand was cross-hatched with iron posts and barbed wire where the mines were still lying. Farther along the esplanade two men were planting delphinium seedlings in a flower-bed newly dug from the neglected grass which had once been a lawn.

'Bleak, isn't it?' she said.<sup>41</sup>

The description is framed between the two observers, starting and ending with Cecily's speech and registering in-between Arnold's looking at the sea. It is distinctly a postwar register, very different from *Opus 7*, less pressing about the rendering of landscape into significance. What do we make of

this view? The idea that reality resembles a *bad* oil-painting is an intriguing paradox; is this verdict confirmed or changed by the combination of visual delicacy and wartime scarring in ‘the pale sand ... cross-hatched with iron posts and barbed wire’ in the following sentence? This is a landscape in which wartime damage persists, but the planting of delphinium seedlings describes plans for new life. In that context the neglect does not seem such a bad thing, but rather a precondition for something new to arrive. The scene is at once ordinary and suggestive, quietly descriptive, not directing us by syntax or register. Poised between her spoken views and his unspoken one, such a style respects the reality of both.

As the story goes on, it becomes clear that Arnold doesn’t find the resort, Bosebridge, bleak – or rather that the bleakness suits him in profound ways. He is depressive, in the grip of the Black Dog, and Cecily tries to cheer him up; the start of the story takes us feelingly within her painful efforts on his behalf. ‘But he continued to look at the sea. Her expression changed, it became private and unobserved, and at once she seemed several years older.’<sup>42</sup> It turns out that he finds Bosebridge ‘charming’. To be somewhere bleak offers him relief from having to find things cheerful. Bosebridge is characterised by a flat, dowdy greyness, by the way the muddied estuarine water is seldom sea-blue, and by its still being inhabited by the occupants of ‘a government sub-department’ that moved there in 1941 (a nice touch that it should be a sub-department, not even a department). Although the story is maritally small-scale, it suggests larger situations. It analyses and belongs with the unusually gloomy mood of the literature of the later 1940s. Arnold’s depression is linked to the end of war; the shared danger of civilian wartime life had sustained the marital feeling between Cecily and himself, ‘perfectly comfortable with each other’. It is peace that has brought his depression, which Cecily wishes to change or deny.

The third person in this story is Mr Bellows, the proprietor of Coburg House, where they stay. He has old-fashioned ways, as the name of the house may suggest (the royal house of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha ended in 1917). He also has an original and cosmopolitan cast of mind. He has for instance learned to cook in Asia as well as Europe, which prompts this exchange with Cecily.

‘And do they really sit by the fire and fan it?’

‘Oh yes, madam. A very good method, I assure you. The fan acts like a conductor’s baton, it brings out the sensibility of the fire.’

‘Yes, I suppose it would.’<sup>43</sup>

Her sagging courtesy measures the distance between the two. Bellowes acknowledges how quiet the resort is.

But there is another thing, madam, which is much against us. We were never bombed. Holiday-makers prefer a little destruction, it gives them something to look at, something congenial.<sup>44</sup>

With his obliging ways, savoir-faire and courtesy, Mr Bellowes might remind us of the enabling figure of Satan as the gamekeeper in *Lolly Willowes*, also of Mr Edom who owns an antiques shop in a series of Warner's stories, and also perhaps of P.G. Wodehouse's Jeeves, or an ambiguous figure from M.R. James. Arnold does not at first take to Mr Bellowes, but after a while finds him fascinating. There is a certain sense of seduction; the stimulus of conversation with Bellowes wakes Arnold from his torpor and gloom, and prompts his marital sex life to resume.<sup>45</sup> The hinted seductive triangulation may be thought creepy or magnanimous, depending on the reader's preference. Its gender complication aligns with an unexpected suggestion that Arnold would have preferred to stay at home as a house-husband instead of doing his important war work in radio communications.

You know yourself that I am domesticated, though you have never known how frantically I have envied you when I went off every day to that blasted concern, leaving you with beds to make and floors to polish and meals to cook and flowers to arrange. If I'd told you, you would have murdered me – but it's true.<sup>46</sup>

The story ends with his decision to stay in Bosebridge where he and Mr Bellowes will set up a household and business together, first at the lodging house, then as a restaurant. The outcome of the story carries an intimation of violence averted,<sup>47</sup> as if its termination of an unhappy marriage were the lesser of possible evils.

The *New Yorker* rejected the story because, as Warner's editor Gus Lobrano wrote to her, '[we] missed the essential motivation or implication; we just don't understand why Arnold found refuge with Mr. Bellowes'.<sup>48</sup> It is indeed a strange ending. Arnold, like the young sailor, takes his chance to walk out – but it is a different situation when you're walking out *on* someone. The considerations and costs around his self-determination are more interpersonal. But even if the motivations and implications are elusive, as Lobrano thought, they are not opaque

(and sometimes the *New Yorker* disguised its squeamishness about matters of sex as aesthetic considerations about narrative). Arnold's decision seems neither a poetry of departures nor even a prospect of happiness, but an elected fidelity to his own temperament. The ending is observed dispassionately and compassionately both by the narrator and Mr Bellows. Cecily 'found that she could not look at Mr. Bellows's face. It was at once too compassionate and too impartial.'<sup>49</sup> Warner's method in such stories as this could well be described as 'compassionate' and 'impartial'. The phrase could be linked with two other almost-paradoxical phrases in the collection *The Museum of Cheats*, namely 'compassion and horror' and 'a fury of compassion'.<sup>50</sup> Warner's developing sense of the inconveniences of compassion looks ahead to the dispassionate style of her final phase as a fiction writer, the brilliantly cold fairy stories of *Kingdoms of Elfin* (1977) in which, as she said, she freed herself as a writer from troubling herself with the human heart.<sup>51</sup>

I will finish with another story concerned with the possibility of relocation. This is 'Oxenhope', published in the *New Yorker* on 9 July 1966 and collected in *The Innocent and the Guilty* (1971).<sup>52</sup> It is one of her finest stories, a marvel of economy and rich suggestion, involving large vistas of time and deep evocations of place and relationship. An opening paragraph establishes that the protagonist, William, is returning as a 64-year-old widower to Oxenhope, a place he first went to when he was 17. Each visit follows a 'brain-mauling'. For the older man, this is the aftermath of a bout of typhoid, while for the younger its source was more elusive: 'On the heels of winning a university scholarship, he discovered that all the facts he had grouped so tidily had dissolved into a broth stirred by an idiot.' It was a kind of internal rebellion, then, against all that's involved in fact grouping. He takes a train from the Midlands to Hawick, and sets off:

presently he was walking up a long steep hill, where there was meadowsweet growing in the ditches beside the road. As he had never known its name, he looked at it with pleasure.

Warner's style often takes us into a world of such quick deep implications. The idea here, that knowing the name of something can spoil it for you, gives us a clue about William's first brain-mauling. It was a rebellion by pleasure against the predominance of the brain.

Some time after this an evening sky became a night sky. Unable to remember the name of a single constellation, he lay down among

some heather and fell asleep. The next day he still walked, and a sensation like pleasure hovered somewhere behind his appalling consciousness of guilt, like the sun behind a fog.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps he is escaping not only the overload of intellect but also the burden of his parents' pride in him, hence 'his appalling consciousness of guilt'. His insouciant finding of an alfresco sleeping spot takes us back to Laura's penchant for a nice dry ditch in *Lolly Willowes*, as well as the departure from a safely established life in the story 'But at the Stroke of Midnight', also collected in *The Innocent and the Guilty*. Like Lucy Ridpath in that story he has thrown himself out of society, warmth and shelter into an experience that is at once freedom and breakdown. One way of being carefree is not to take care of yourself.

The young William is rescued, taken in out of a storm, by a farmer's wife, who takes charge and take care. This woman with her 'calm, large-boned face' has a rapid unspoken understanding of what's suited to his unusual state. She brings him gradually back from his straying, and 'he stayed for a month, bathing in the infinity of time and space'. Warner seems here to have drawn on the personal poignancy of her memories of two trips she made to the Essex marshes in 1922.<sup>54</sup> She recounts these as stories of getting found through getting lost. On the first trip she remembers taking refuge from a storm in a shed together with some farm-workers: 'I sheltered with them, we watched the lightning stabbing at the marsh.'<sup>55</sup> 'Oxenhope' echoes this moment when the lightning arrives soon after William's arrival at the farmhouse: 'Like old friends they stood in the doorway watching the storm drive down the valley.'<sup>56</sup> In the second of Warner's Essex trips she was offered lodgings overnight by a Mrs May, and such was the sympathy of her host and the place that she ended up staying a month. 'I was resolved not to go back,' she writes, as if the Essex visit meant for her the crossing of a significant threshold; it is the creative crossing for the young Warner that enabled her 'discovery that it was possible to write poetry'.<sup>57</sup>

The month William stays at Oxenhope is charged similarly as a passage of rescue and change. The story evokes the elderly man's memories of his first youthful stay and these are touched by natural magic. After he swims in a hillside pool, 'threshing about like a kelpie',<sup>58</sup> an 'adder elongated itself from the heather roots ... and basked on the rock beside him'. On another day he cycles off with toothbrush and knife to clean the farming family's gravestones, 'listening to the curlews and the minister's conversational hens' – the kirk setting lends a peaceful richness to

the scene even if you feel the hens may be more agreeable to listen to than the minister. And he goes boating on an unexpected hilltop loch, in which an oar stirs up some marsh gas and he begins 'touching off their tiny incandescence with a lighted match'.<sup>59</sup>

For all its brevity the story is one of Warner's profoundest engagements with Proust. She had spent several years in the 1950s deeply engaged with his works, first as the translator of *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and then as the publisher's choice to revise Scott Moncrieff's translation of *A la recherche* before the project fell through owing to objections from his executors. The title of Proust's final volume, *Le temps retrouvé*, suggests the territory of this story. 'As unfailingly as one knows that the sensation of Venice is called Venice, of Avila, Avila, William knew that the sensation of Oxenhope was called Oxenhope.' This first sentence weaves the place into impalpable powerful memories of the past, linked here to Venice and Avila, sites of romance and conversion. During the scenes of William's return he retraces some of his steps, and 'the past was in the present'. But this lasts only for a while, before the reality of the change and of his age brings home to him that 'he would never possess the sensation of Oxenhope again. He had grasped at the substance, and the lovely shadow was lost'<sup>60</sup> – a Wordsworthian turn of thought in this story with its border setting of farm, sheep and lake. Time isn't to be rediscovered, nor need it be.

So William decides not to spend the years of his retirement near Oxenhope. That decision might seem contrary to the changing of place in most of the other stories I have discussed, but it resembles them in being grounded on a difficult self-recognition. Nor does it make for a sombre conclusion. 'Oxenhope' might reasonably have ended on William's decision to leave, but it continues instead with a new encounter. William registers he is being watched, and spots signs of a young boy tracking him by cover of the hillside: 'If I had been that boy, thought William, I would have wished the unsuspecting stranger to go away and leave me to trail him. And after a decency-pause he did his part in the transaction.' He is rewarded when the boy catches him up and tells some stories of the locality, including Cat Loch: 'there was a man once, set fire to it. He was in a boat, and he set fire to the water.' Such simple words return us to the roots of storytelling as well as to William's youth. They decide him briskly to leave the place behind, 'an exile's farewell', but with a profoundly consolatory last word: 'He had his tenancy in legend. He was secure.'<sup>61</sup> But although the ending is consolatory it is not quite transparent and leaves a sense of mystery. Tenancy, after all, usually

offers not security but something temporary, while 'tenancy in legend' imagines security in some other dimension than an individual's life. Still, it leaves him free to go.

It is refreshing to read a story about the ambiguous freedom of later life. Having lost his wife to illness, and with his daughter living in Canada, William is free of family ties. It is refreshing, too, that the resolution involves no resumption of such ties. It has other kinds of freedom in mind. It ends on the complex sense that a life is not defined by its main events but by its possibilities of connectedness and its relation to the memorable. The emotionally sturdy conclusion does not turn on what we might have anticipated from the beginning – neither William's loneliness as a widower whose daughter has gone to live abroad, nor the need to recover a heterosexual romance, nor in the end the need for a Wordsworthian or Proustian succour from the past. 'Oxenhope', moreover, does not find its truth to self to be radically anti-social in the manner of *Lolly Willowes*, or dourly unexpectant as in 'To Come So Far'. William's little game with the boy is shrewd, worldly, interested in psychology; it promises well for the liveliness of his later years and suggests he was a good diplomat and might have been a good novelist.<sup>62</sup>

In some of her stories Warner's assertions of freedom are pitched against tyranny, whether domestic (as in *Lolly Willowes*), political (as in *After the Death of Don Juan*) or both (as in *Summer Will Show*). In much of her other writing the claims of freedom are balanced instead by constraints of irony. Figures such as Laura, Rebecca and Arnold are depicted ironically as well as sympathetically; they are odd and not entirely admirable, and the stories release them from the need to be morally exemplary. William is a character closer to the author than these protagonists, and in 'Oxenhope' the constraint comes from ironies of circumstance belonging with the passage of time. It is hard to imagine Warner's writing without her habit of irony. It works as a check on her utopianism, and a recognition of limitations born of time, circumstance and the persistence within individuals of stubborn internalised constraints. To that extent it is far from optimistic. But Warner's irony also expresses her own freedom of mind, her commitment to independent judgment and her powerful critique of proud authority. In artistic terms it contributes to her sceptical consciousness of the limited capacity of fictions to change the world, and her growing scepticism about literature as propaganda. Warner does not stand radically apart from other writers of the mid-twentieth century in being creatively focussed on the possibilities and limits of freedom, but I hope I have shown ways that her

address of the great theme is distinctive and personal, and that it spans the six decades of her writing. To see her career in this context places her as in no way a quiet removed stylist but a figure of vigorous cultural engagements, an intellectual contemporary of writings such as Bertrand Russell's *Proposed Roads to Freedom* (1918), Sartre's *Les chemins de la liberté* (1945–9) and Hannah Arendt's essay 'What is Freedom?' (1961). It suggests the large dimensions of her books, what matters centrally in them, and for us in reading them.

## Note on contributor

**Peter Swaab** has been the editor of the *Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* since 2015. He teaches English at UCL.

## Declaration and conflict of interests

The author is also Editor of *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*.

## Notes

1. 'Sylvia Townsend Warner', in *Oxford Handbooks Online* (2016). Accessed 28 August 2019. <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935338.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935338-e-31>.
2. Carmen Callil and Colm Tóibín, *The 200 Best Novels in English since 1950* (London: Picador Books, 1999), p. 68; David Carroll, 'History Unforeseen: On Sylvia Townsend Warner', *The Nation*, 25 January 2010.
3. Eleanor Perényi, 'The Good Witch of the West', *New York Review of Books*, 18 July 1985.
4. 'The Structure of Complex Words', *The Sewanee Review* 56 (1948), pp. 230–50 (p. 239); Empson also writes of 'the typical specimen of the whole confused field' (p. 238).
5. Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Letters*, ed. William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), p. 51, n. 1; to Nancy Cunard, 28 August 1945.
6. *The Corner That Held Them* (London: Virago Press, 1988), p. 63.
7. 'Pianos and Pianolas', *Sylvia Townsend Warner Journal* 2019:1–2, p. 108 (ellipsis added). My thanks to Dr Lynn Mutti for first drawing my attention to this essay.
8. 'The Young Sailor' in *Scenes of Childhood and Other Stories* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1981), pp. 90–5.
9. The quoted phrases in this paragraph come from *Scenes of Childhood*, pp. 90, 92, 91 and 93.
10. The quoted phrases and sentences in this paragraph come from *Scenes of Childhood*, pp. 94, 91, 94 and 94–5 (ellipsis added).



11. See also comments on this story in Chris Hopkins, “‘My Mother Won the War’: Patriotism and the First World War in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s Scenes of Childhood (1981)”, *Literature Compass* 11 (2014), pp. 754–66.
12. ‘The Victorian Psyche’, review in *Britain Today* of Marian Evans and George Eliot by L. and E. Hanson; reprinted in Sylvia Townsend Warner, *With the Hunted: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter Tolhurst (Black Dog Books, 2012), pp. 211–12.
13. The following two pages develop arguments from the present author’s ‘The Queerness of *Lolly Willowses*’, *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* 2010, pp. 29–52 (drawing on pp. 40–3).
14. *Lolly Willowses* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926), p. 4.
15. Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1903), pp. vii–viii.
16. *Lolly Willowses*, p. 26, pp. 17–18.
17. *Lolly Willowses*, p. 150. The narrative also includes two mentions of ‘the slave’ and being ‘slavish’ (pp. 163, 149).
18. *Lolly Willowses*, p. 240.
19. *Lolly Willowses*, pp. 238, 150.
20. It is reprinted in Sylvia Townsend Warner, *New Collected Poems*, ed. Claire Harman (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2008), pp. 159–91.
21. Empson and Warner were friends and correspondents in the first half of the 1930s. The Warner-Ackland archive includes a presentation copy of Empson’s poem *Letter IV* (Cambridge: Heffer & Sons, 1929). See also *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), ed. Claire Harman, p. 57; entry for 11 April 1930.
22. Donald Davie, *Under Briggflatts: A History of Poetry in Great Britain 1960–1988* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1989), pp. 58–61 and 229–34; John Lucas, ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner as Poet’, *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* 2000, pp. 1–16; Jan Montefiore, *Arguments of Heart and Mind* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 207–19, and ‘Enter If You Will: Echoes from a Haunted House’, *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* 2002, pp. 11–18.
23. ‘The Way By Which I Have Come’ (*The Countryman*, July 1939), reprinted in *With the Hunted*, pp. 13–20 (p. 17).
24. *New Collected Poems*, pp. 161–2.
25. *New Collected Poems*, pp. 160–1.
26. *New Collected Poems*, pp. 162, 163, 162.
27. *New Collected Poems*, p. 164.
28. Justin McCarthy and Justin H. McCarthy, *A History of the Four Georges and of William IV*, 4 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1884–1901), iv.106. Warner’s own historical acumen and detail owes much to her home education by her distinguished father, the teacher and historian George Townsend Warner. See Rosemary Sykes, “‘This was a Lesson in History’: Sylvia Townsend Warner, George Townsend Warner and the Matter of History”, in *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist, 1893–1978*, eds. Gill Davies, David Malcolm and John Simons (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), pp. 103–15. For Warner on Cobbett see *With the Hunted*, p. 16.
29. *New Collected Poems*, pp. 164–5.
30. *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford, 1986), p. 131; ‘Spring’, line 9. Warner often echoes Hopkins in her poetry of the 1920s and early 1930s; she remarks in her 1931 interview with Louise Morgan that ‘Of nineteenth-century writers to me the most thrilling is G.M. Hopkins’ (Louise Morgan, *Writers at Work* [London: Chatto & Windus, 1931], p. 32).
31. *New Collected Poems*, p. 165.

32. For an almost exactly contemporary collection celebrating a queer creative potential in gardening see *From a Garden in the Antipodes* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1929) by the New Zealand poet Ursula Bethell.
33. *New Collected Poems*, pp. 174–5.
34. *Letters*, p. 150 (ellipsis added); to Dorothy Hodgkin, 30 July 1954.
35. *New Collected Poems*, pp. 178, 189.
36. *New Collected Poems*, p. 191.
37. *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford, 1984), p. 297; ‘Ode’ (‘There was a time’), line 9.
38. See Wendy Mulford, *This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner & Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters & Politics, 1930–1951* (London: Pandora Press, 1988), pp. 70–104.
39. ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner’s Spanish Civil War Love Poems, with an Introduction by Mercedes Aguirre’, *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society Journal 2019:1–2*, pp. 62–7.
40. *The Museum of Cheats* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1947), pp. 72–83.
41. *Museum of Cheats*, p. 72.
42. *Museum of Cheats*, p. 73.
43. *Museum of Cheats*, p. 74.
44. *Museum of Cheats*, p. 75.
45. ‘that night they lay together in love’; *Museum of Cheats*, p. 78.
46. *Museum of Cheats*, p. 80.
47. See its phrases ‘about a homicidal maniac’ (p. 75), ‘accounts of murdered wives’ (p. 77), and ‘How Not to be Murdered’ (p. 78).
48. Gus Lobrano to Warner, 13 June 1946; from ‘The *New Yorker* Records’, Box 441, New York Public Library.
49. *Museum of Cheats*, p. 82.
50. *Museum of Cheats*, pp. 145 and 90, from the stories ‘Boors Carousing’ and ‘Waiting for Harvest’.
51. Michael Schmidt and Val Warner, ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner in Conversation’, *PN Review* 23 (1981), p. 36, reprinted in *With the Hunted*, pp. 402–3.
52. *The Innocent and the Guilty* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), pp. 183–96.
53. Quotations in this paragraph come from *The Innocent and the Guilty*, pp. 183–4.
54. See the essays ‘The Way By Which I Have Come’ and ‘Essex Marshes’ in *With the Hunted*, pp. 13–20 and 29–32.
55. *With the Hunted*, p. 30.
56. *The Innocent and the Guilty*, p. 184.
57. *With the Hunted*, pp. 31, 16.
58. ‘Kelpie’: ‘Lowland Scottish name for a fabled water-spirit or demon assuming various shapes ... reputed to haunt lakes and rivers’ (*OED*).
59. *The Innocent and the Guilty*, pp. 190, 186, 195.
60. *The Innocent and the Guilty*, pp. 183, 189, 192 (ellipsis added).
61. *The Innocent and the Guilty*, pp. 193, 195, 195.
62. Is the name William a graceful tribute to Warner’s friend and editor William Maxwell?

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