

EDITORIAL

Helen Sutherland

There is one piece of exciting Warner news to report: the recent discovery of a cache of letters between Sylvia Townsend Warner and Rachel, the daughter of her cousin Cecily. It is a correspondence which began in 1950 and continued to the end of Warner's life, although it is not yet clear how many letters there are, as the process of sorting them out has only just begun. While not, perhaps, the best letters she ever wrote, this correspondence shows Warner adopting a more 'guardianly' role than we might expect, and emphasises her versatility as a letter-writer. Eventually, of course, the letters will be added to the archive in Dorchester County Museum, and I would hope to include a selection in future volumes of *The Journal*.

This year's *Journal*, however, features non-fictional writing of a different sort by Warner, in the shape of two short pieces from *The Countryman*, the first being her thoughts on the state of rural education in 1941, and the steps needed to improve it. It is a percipient piece, especially in its demand for the ongoing education of the teachers themselves, though what Warner would have made of the 'in-service' days which are such a feature of teachers' working lives nowadays is a different matter.

The second piece of the two *Countryman* contributions is a 'make do and mend' gem describing a cheap and reliable means of protecting raspberries against the onslaught of hungry birds, published – alas! – without the

sketch that Warner herself drew to accompany her writing. The final Warner piece included in *The Journal* is an untitled Christmas poem, also originally published in *The Countryman*.

Although in no sense a themed issue, *The Journal* offers two articles on Warner's late fantasy tales originally published in *New Yorker* but collected under the title *Kingdoms of Elfin* in 1977. The opener is 'The Unnaturalness of a Society: Class Division and Conflict in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Kingdoms of Elfin*' by Hannah Priest, who sees these tales as an 'ambivalent response to class distinction and conflict' but argues that they ultimately 'resist both utopian projection and nostalgic retrospection'. 'Encounters Between Elves and Humans in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Kingdoms of Elfin*' by Rebecca Hahn, however, focuses more on personal encounters between fairies and mortals, using 'Foxcastle' as an example of mortal (mis)application of human standards and means of understanding 'this' world to that other world, the realm of faerie.

With Barry Pike's article on 'Sylvia Townsend Warner's Excerpts from *The Portrait of a Tortoise*' we are brought down to earth with detailed descriptions not just of the tortoise's seasonal routine, but also of the world of nature more generally, while Peter Swaab's closely reasoned article on 'The Queerness of *Lolly Willowes*' examines Warner's first novel as a 'story about sexuality and sexual identity'. As ever, I would like to thank all the contributors for their input.

A final point: the absence of book reviews does not signal a change in editorial policy, but reflects a shortage of recent books dealing substantially with Warner and her writing. However, this will be rectified in the next issue of *The Journal*, as I already have one title lined up for review. Suggestions of other suitable titles would nevertheless be very welcome.