

WITH THE HUNTED. SELECTED  
WRITINGS OF SYLVIA TOWNSEND  
WARNER

Ed. *Peter Tolhurst*

Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2012. 418pp. £16.99.

Critical attention has in the past been directed towards Sylvia Townsend Warner's fiction and poetry, but this has changed with the publication of *With the Hunted* which draws together a range of her non-fiction from the early 'Night Shift', an extract from "'Behind the Firing Line" By A Lady Worker' (*Blackwood's Magazine*, February 1916) to her Prologue to T.H. White's *Book of Merlyn* published in 1977, just the year before her death.

The collection is arranged thematically, rather than chronologically, under headings such as 'Starting Out', 'Life Lines' and 'Literary Concerns' which are self-explanatory to the more intriguing 'Are Parents Really Necessary?'. Many other headings could have been chosen but this particular arrangement works well, bringing together thematically linked pieces while still allowing for surprising and, in some cases, enlightening

juxtapositions. In 'Friends and Familiars', for example, 'T.F. Powys and Chaldon Herring' is followed by Warner's Introduction to *The Portrait of a Tortoise* by Gilbert White, for all the world as though White and his tortoise Timothy were as close friends as were the Powys brothers.

The material has been well chosen to display Warner's skills as a writer in different types of articles destined for a range of publications. 'Escape from the Suet Crust – *The Tale of Beatrix Potter*', a review of a book by Margaret Lane, for example, is written with style and grace and showcases Warner's considerable skill and sensitivity as a literary critic. 'Recommendations to Starvation', on the other hand, is a savage critique of government advice on diet for those living on the dole in 1933 which was originally published in *The Countryman*, while in 'Not To Be Done in May' Warner works a more light-hearted vein but still finds gold.

A number of the pieces included here have already been reprinted either in the *Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, or in the Society's Newsletter. At first glance this seems an unnecessary duplication of material at the expense of previously unpublished work, but on balance their inclusion in the anthology is to be welcomed as giving them a longer print life and a wider readership than they would otherwise enjoy.

Peter Tolhurst gives a valuable introduction to *With the Hunted* which is part biographical and part critical but this would have been improved by fully referencing quotations, be they from Warner's own writings or from secondary critical material. I appreciate that a stream of endnotes is unhelpful, but sources and page numbers could have been given in textual parentheses without disruption and would have saved readers a great deal of time. Likewise, a 'works cited' list appended to the Introduction would have been a valuable addition.

Notes to Warner's articles have been provided where necessary but have been wisely kept to a minimum. They are not altogether easy to find, however, for rather than being located close to the article to which they refer, the

consecutively numbered notes have been printed at the end of the themed sections. While this is a minor matter, the end result is a little clumsy and this is perhaps one instance where footnotes would have been preferable to endnotes, particularly as there are so few of them anyway.

To stress these points is to be unreasonably captious, for when all is said and done *With the Hunted* is an excellent showcase of Warner's non-fiction which will not only make a major contribution to the re-assessment of her as an important twentieth-century writer but also place her in a wider context by enabling readers to see her as an inheritor of the journalism tradition of Samuel Johnson. No less importantly, it will give much pleasure to Warner readers, and therefore demands a place on their bookshelves, even if it is more likely to be found – open – on a bedside cabinet or coffee table.

*Helen Sutherland*