

## EDITORIAL

*Peter Tolhurst*

Part of Sylvia Townsend Warner's appeal is the impressive range of her work. Based initially on a series of highly original novels and short story collections, her reputation continued to grow with her biography *T H White* (1967) and the *Collected Poems* (1982). In a career spanning fifty years she found time for her diary, a prolific correspondence and a regular supply of articles and reviews to publications as diverse as *Good Housekeeping* and *Left Review*. The six pieces included in this edition illustrate something of Warner's considerable achievement.

First up is *Feverell's Middlesex* (1948), one of several autobiographical essays for *The Countryman*. Here the pristine countryside of her childhood is evoked through a series of detailed observations - worn stiles, 'slime-green horse-ponds' - and occasional Betjemanesque asides - 'English architecture is at its best when housing the horse'. Warner was then working on her critically ignored *Somerset* guide, by far the best volume in that Vision of England series, where her idiosyncratic sense of place is again richly evident. The poem *Elegy* returns to the theme of rural despoilation that preoccupied so many writers of her generation.

*The Music at Long Verney* (2001) may prove to be the last collection of stories but individual gems still lurk between the covers of defunct periodicals. *Arcase, Il Faut Partir*, written for *English Story* (1945), is among her finest, a decidedly unwhimsical tale of occupation reproduced here alongside

*Love of France*, a short essay written the same year for the *New York Herald Tribune* which chimes too with *Feverell's Middlesex* in its celebration of local material culture.

Before a consideration of class struggle in *Summer Will Show* and *After the Death of Don Juan*, Gillian Beer's wide ranging and cogently argued critique of Warner's literary achievement, '*The Centrifugal Kick*', discusses the musicality of her writing. Beer suggests that her work on Tudor church music and the long affair with Percy Buck effected the 'tone' and 'temper' of her prose and helped shape her gifts as a storyteller.

Throughout her life Warner preferred the company of musicians and composers, maintaining a lengthy correspondence with the Finzis, Paul Nordoff and latterly Peter Pears. The selection of letters to Pears reproduced here demonstrates concern for her beloved Craskes, the importance of the Third Programme in her last solitary years and a formidable musical knowledge employed to good effect in book reviews ranging from the *Beethoven* piece included in this edition to *Folk Songs from America* and *Cecil Sharp* for the *New Statesman*.

Justin Cartwright's piece in the highly recommended new quarterly *Slightly Foxed* offers an intriguing glimpse into the world of William Maxwell and the literary output of a man who, for many years, was Warner's editor at the *New Yorker*. It also reveals that Cartwright, himself a distinguished novelist, only discovered Warner with the publication of *The Element of Lavishness* (2001).

Finally, reviews of two books, very different in both style and content that make a valuable contribution to our appreciation of Warner's life and work; Judith Stinton's *Chaldon Herring: Writers in a Dorset landscape* and Jane Garrity's *Step-Daughters of England: British Women Modernists and the National Imaginary*.

If anyone would either like to submit an article or review for next year's journal or draw one to my attention, then please contact me at the editorial address. Feedback in the form of letters is always welcome.