

Review: *What a Life! Selected Short Stories*

JB Priestley

Turnpike Books, 2014

*What a Life!* came as a treat to review, having just been reading early short stories by fellow Yorkshireman, Stan Barstow. His were from the 1950s and Priestley's the 1930s, and very much products of those days, reflecting their individual sensibilities and preoccupations at the time.

I was pleased to leave Barstow's world of dour and disappointed people, frustrated wives and weak-willed husbands and taken into a brighter and cheerier one presented by Priestley in these seven stories in this anthology. They lifted my spirits and made me laugh while showing the idiosyncrasies of human nature alongside social commentary. Perhaps because of the period in which they were written, there was a touch of Wodehouse about the plots and characters.

I loved Tom Hebblethwaite from Luddenstall Co-operative Society (you don't need a description to picture him, do you?) who features in three of the tales. My favourite was *Handel and the Racket*. What a great idea to have him stuck in a lift with the American manager of the United Tropical Fruit Company, arguing over the interpretation of a few whistled bars of *Judas Maccabeus* he overhears. After they go to check an original Handel score (of course!) which the American happens to have in his hotel room, they are interrupted by two hoodlums in fancy suits and shiny shoes 'like a pair of sinister peacocks'. It turns out OK in the end, as do the other stories. Not a spoiler, I hope, but an encouragement to enjoy over a cuppa and a slice of Yorkshire Parkin.

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