



# The Persephone Biannually

**N°4 Autumn & Winter 2008/9**

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*Early 1900s kitchen © The Bourneville Trust  
from Nails, Noggins and Newels: an alternative history  
of every house (2006) Bill Laws p171*



# OUR AUTUMN & WINTER 2008 BOOKS

Some Persephone books are essentially frivolous but interspersed with seriousness; others are essentially serious but are interspersed with frivolity. *Round about a Pound a Week* is in the latter category: it is a deeply serious study of working-class life in Lambeth in the early years of the twentieth century, and even has tables of figures (weekly expenditure etc). But it is poignant, fascinating and extremely readable – and relevant to today’s Britain.

In 1909 a group of women, all of them members of the feminist, left-wing Fabian Women’s Group, would regularly leave their comfortable homes in Kensington and Hampstead and call on forty-two families in Lambeth in order to interview them about their everyday life. They wrote down their findings in tiny lined notebooks which are still preserved in the London School of Economics library and in 1912 these were initially written up as a twenty-page Fabian Tract, the cover of which is reproduced on the opposite page (and in this new Persephone edition of the book). In itself the cover is interesting: why is the woman in diaphanous, almost goddess-like, clothes, why is she

holding a branch from an apple tree in one hand, and why is she knocking at an oak Arts and Crafts door? Is this perhaps ironic, or self-mocking indeed, about do-gooders in their tweeds and silks taking apple blossom to the slums; or is it merely a nice drawing of a woman not so different from the Greek woman in the Persephone logo and no irony is intended?

Once the tract had appeared Maud Pember Reeves (1865-1953) and her co-author Charlotte Wilson decided to turn it into the more snappily titled *Round about a Pound a Week* with sixteen chapters covering such topics as Housing, Thrift, Food and Mothers’ Days. From the jottings in the notebooks, and from the twenty page pamphlet, the two authors produced a book of stunning interest and originality which has never really been rivalled in the nearly a hundred years since first publication in 1913. The reason the book remains unique is its mixture of factual rigorousness, wit and polemic. As Polly Toynbee points out in her new Persephone Preface, one of the most shocking facts to emerge from the book is that ‘the Fabian women deliberately avoided the



*Alphabet’ sampler by ‘DAR’, Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester*



*‘Spring’ 1933, CPA Design, Calico Printers for Warner & Sons, Braintree*

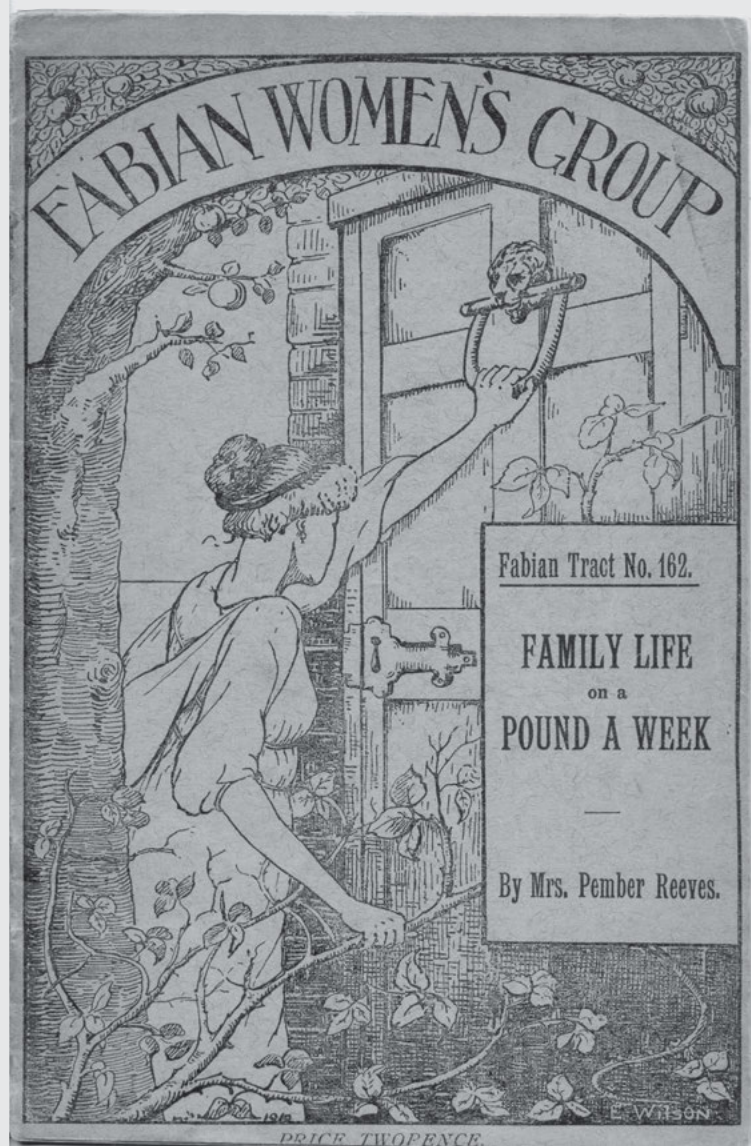


*‘Flower vase lit by rays from a table lamp’, Vanessa Bell 1934, Allan Walton, V & A*



poorest families... because they wanted to show how the general standard of living among ordinary manual workers was below a level which could support good health or nutrition.' Later she says: 'Perhaps the single starkest fact is that none of these children ever tasted milk again once they stopped breast-feeding. The absence of milk throws into perspective the irrelevance of much of the supercilious health and nutrition advice routinely handed down to the poor by their betters. What was the point of lecturing mothers on the value of milk when it was wildly beyond their means?'

For one of the most remarkable aspects of this book is that it is consistently on the side of the mothers. Without being in any sense do-gooding it explains 'to a middle-class world of power and condescension' (in Polly Toynbee's words) that the forty-two decent, hard-working women could not do better than they were doing on the tiny house-keeping allowance that their husbands were able to give them. Yet the book is about far more than how the women of Lambeth 'managed'. It is full of the kind of human detail that is usually only found in a novel. When Maud Pember Reeves declares that 'the mother who is not disturbed by a little mud on the floor has vitality left to deal with more important matters' she is anticipating one of the themes of Dorothy Canfield Fisher's *The Home-Maker* (1924), Persephone



*The cover of the 1912 Fabian Tract No.162*

Book No. 7. When she declares that 'to manage a husband and six children in three rooms on round about £1 a week needs, first and foremost, wisdom and loving-kindness, and after that as much cleanliness and order as can be squeezed in' she reveals that she is Dorothy Canfield Fisher's equal in terms of empathy and compassion. And

when she says that 'it must be remembered by those who are convinced that the working man can live well and easily on 3d a day because middle-class people have tried the experiment and found it possible' but then points out that the well-to-do have quiet, airy rooms, a bathroom, light and hygienic clothing – then she makes the affluent who dare to

criticise her Lambeth families bitterly ashamed of themselves. After all, the Kensington householder 'can always stop living on 3d a day if it does not suit him, or if his family gets anxious. When his daughter needs a pair of 6s 6d boots he does not have to arrange an overdraft with his banker in order to meet the crisis, as the poor man does with his pawnbroker.'

In the main, the objective of Maud Pember Reeves and her collaborators was to convince people that it was impossible to live on a pound a week; and they wanted as well to be able to assist women towards economic independence through the equal participation of women in paid work. But the Fabian women also took active steps in the form of financial donations, every one of which was recorded in the little



*Maud Pember Reeves, taken from Maud and Amber: A New Zealand Mother and Daughter and the Women's Cause 1861-1981 (1992) by Ruth Fry*

notebooks. The giving to the poor was not in itself radical; what was radical was writing a polemical book, backed up by research, that, it was hoped, would change things for the poor for ever. Polly Toynbee ends her preface by asking what Maud Pember Reeves would think nowadays. She concludes that she would be proud of the NHS and the welfare state but that she would be perplexed that the inequalities between rich and poor are still so enormous.

**R**ound about a Pound a Week was first reprinted by Virago in 1979. 'A remarkable book,' wrote Natasha Walter in *The Independent*, adding that 'the immensely accessible tone and the impassioned thrust of the book [gives it] heartfelt authority.' *The Daily Telegraph* called it 'fascinating, touching and occasionally even funny.' *The Sunday Express* said: 'Horri-fying, chastening and finally humbling.' And the *Times Educational Supplement* commented: 'With its dry sense of humour and common sense it retains much of its original impact.'

**T**he *Country Housewife's Book* by Lucy H Yates was recommended to us by the owner of a working farm in Kent who said that she uses it all the time even though it was first published seventy-five years ago. And yet, like *Good Food on the Aga*, Persephone Book No.45,

which is a useful and inspiring cookbook even for those who do not have an Aga, this is an engaging and important book even for the town-dweller. The introductory note suggests that the book would be useful for 'the busy woman who must often look after the growing as well as the gathering of the crops, and who sometimes wants help in finding out what should be done with them at the right time. It has been designed to aid people who are dependent upon their own resourcefulness and initiative, for in the country there is great need of these qualities.'

**T**he book, the sub-title of which is 'How to Make the Most of Country Produce and Country Fare', is beautifully illustrated with line drawings by Mary Gardiner (cf. p11). It has eight chapters and there are separate sections within each one. The first is 'a general survey of storeroom and larder', which is not so much a list of essential ingredients as hints on how to use 'pickings' and gluts to create a storeroom. Very quickly the hay-box makes its appearance, which will please Persephone readers who have dubbed it the star of *The Children who Lived in a Barn* (Persephone Book No.27). 'The hay-box is a development of the idea of the Thermos Flask in that where air cannot enter and where there is no contact with the atmosphere heat once gained is retained for a very long time.' There follow the instructions for

making one. 'The lid is clamped down and the box left to its own devices. Porridge placed in overnight is hot and fully-cooked in the morning; stew put there in the morning is hot and not overcooked by evening.'

The second, much longer, chapter is about 'Garden and Orchard Fruits': this tells you the best time to pick fruit, what size it should be and how to bottle it, and how to preserve fruit as jam and jelly. The recipes are wonderfully simple: I like the idea of boiling 3lbs of cut-up rhubarb with the juice of two lemons and some crushed stem ginger, when soft adding two and a half pounds of sugar, boiling for quarter of an hour and the result being – rhubarb jam. Later in the same chapter, brandied fruits for

desserts is rather Lady Jekyll-ish, and I'll be sure to serve 'Strawberry Sherbet' as 'a refreshing drink for Tennis Parties'. Finally there are sections on storing fruit and vegetables and drying them (and I have to admit I have never tried drying carrots and doubt if I ever will).

The next chapter is about using garden produce and is full of useful suggestions that marrows should be planted to ramble over an arch and how to grow sorrel and salsify. There is a section about bottling vegetables, although few of us will actually do this nowadays, and recipes for chutneys and ketchups – we have put the tomato one on the bookmark. After that there are recipes using vegetables (cheese cauliflower, stuffed peppers,

potato toast, rice fritters).

Chapter IV is about milk and eggs (cream and butter-making, lemon curd, egg nogg for colds) and Chapter V is called 'The Sportsman's Bag' and has tips and recipes for pigeon pie and game soup and salmon trout. Then comes a chapter on herbs – drying them, using them for medicinal purposes. This part is in some ways the most inspirational and will make any reader who does not already have a herb-bed or box want to plant one straightaway with sage, thyme, basil, fennel, borage, chives, mint, lemon balm, marjoram and rosemary – and to use them every day.

The penultimate chapter on 'hobbies of the country

housewife' may be less useful to those of us who do not want to skin rabbits or use fowl feathers. But there are some good tips on how to deal both with unwanted insects and 'the mischievous mouse' and the 'unpaid helpers of the country housewife' such as ladybirds. To end with there is a chapter on special country-house recipes such as 'household bread' and crème brûlée. *The Country Housewife's Book* would be enjoyed by anyone interested in



'Haytime in the Cotswolds' James Bateman 1893-1959 © Southampton City Art Gallery/Bridgeman



cooking, in the countryside, in old-fashioned methods of food production or simply in housewifery. To conclude: we are delighted to point out that *The Country Housewife's Book* has been Dispersion Bound, an excellent thing for a cookery book since it lies flat when propped up.

**M**iss *Buncle's Book*, our third book for Autumn/ Winter 2008-9, is in the first category of Persephone book mentioned above – it is essentially light-hearted social comedy although interspersed occasionally with seriousness. The storyline is a simple one: Barbara Buncle, who is unmarried and perhaps in her late thirties, lives in a small village and writes a novel about the village in order to try and supplement her meagre income. The first chapter describes 'Silverstream' coming to life and, over breakfast, Barbara Buncle receiving a letter from a publisher which says that he likes her book. As in *Angel* by Elizabeth Taylor (the film of which is now on general release) he, in this case Mr Abbott of Abbott & Spicer, cannot decide if the book is written by a genius or an imbecile. 'The manuscript had gone home with him and he was still reading it at 2 a.m. Still reading it, and still in doubt. It was not written by a genius, of course, neither was it the babblings of an imbecile; but the author of it was either a very clever man writing with his tongue in his cheek, or else a very simple person writing in all good

faith. Whichever he was, Mr Abbott was in no two opinions about publishing him. The Autumn list was almost complete, but room should be made for *Chronicles of an English Village* [the original title].'

**T**he serious point is that Miss Buncle writes a book in order to try and earn some money and thereby succeeds in taking charge of her own life. In this respect she is at one with Miss Pettigrew and Miss Ranskill, two other unmarried women who, not having subsumed their existence into that of a man, have to find a way of looking after themselves. There are some other serious moments, for example when the doctor's children are, very briefly, kidnapped (as a way of trying to force their mother to admit that she wrote the book; which she did not). But the seriousness of *Miss Buncle's Book* is minimal; mostly it is an entirely light-hearted, easy read, one of those books like *Mariana*, *Miss Pettigrew*, *The Making of a Marchioness* and *Greenery Street* which can be recommended unreservedly to someone looking for something undemanding, fun and absorbing that is also well-written and intelligent and with an entirely original plot.

**D**E Stevenson (1892-1973) was in one sense similar to the women writers who were her contemporaries, but there was a difference: she sold in enormous quantities. During her writing career, which lasted from 1923 to

1970, four million copies of her books were sold in Britain and three million in the States (*Miss Buncle* was the fourth of her forty-five books). Writers such as EF Benson, Ann Bridge, O Douglas, Kathleen Norris, Dorothy L Sayers, Margery Sharp, Dodie Smith or Angela Thirkell (to name just a few examples out of hundreds of possibilities) could well be compared with 'DES'; but authors like these sold books in thousands rather than millions. So what did DES (as she is called by her devoted, mostly American fans, who have created two websites in her honour) have that these other writers did not have? They too, after all, are funny, intensely readable, engaging, dependable, as indeed are hundreds of other English women novelists to whom we turn for pleasure and a reliably good read.

**F**irstly, *Miss Buncle's Book*, which was the most popular of DE Stevenson's novels, has a completely original plot and a charming and delightful central character. 'Barbara Buncle, plain, unfashionable, patronised and ignored, is an unlikely heroine,' writes Aline Templeton, who recommended the book to us and has written the Preface. 'The only daughter of respectable middle-class parents, she has had a sheltered village life even after their death, living off the dividends which so reliably came through the letter-box at appropriate times and cared for by Dorcas, the maid who had been her own nurse when Miss

Buncle was “a small fat child in a basketwork pram”. It is the 1930s, though the chill winds of depression are blowing and the dividends dwindle and dwindle. The possibility of doing without domestic help occurs to neither mistress nor maid, Dorcas being as much family as any blood relation could be. Nor, it seems, does the idea of Miss Buncle finding a job, since this would be so unsuitable as not even to be discussed. Since Dorcas didn’t fancy hens or paying guests, she suggests a book. And Miss Buncle, despite her claim, “I have no imagination at all”, writes it with results she could never have foreseen.’

Silverstream, the village where Miss Buncle lives, is so carefully described, in every detail, that the reader could easily draw a map showing the relation of one house to another. But it is Silverstream’s disguise as Copperfield that is at the core of the book. “Do you mean that we are all described in that book?” demanded Miss King in her deep quiet voice, and she pointed to the somewhat battered copy of *Disturber of the Peace* which lay dejectedly upon the buns. “I’ve told you so, haven’t I?” shrieked Mrs Featherstone-Hogg. “Are you all deaf or imbecile that you can’t understand plain English?”

Barbara Buncle never knew how she got away from that dreadful tea-party.’ (When she did she rang Mr Abbott. “But they know,” she squealed. “They know it’s them – they are going to start libel actions –” “They won’t do anything of the sort,” he assured her in his comforting deep voice.’)

A line Templeton offers some other suggestions for DE Stevenson’s appeal. First of all, ‘she created attractive people. She loved her characters and her readers loved them too...“I write,” she said simply, “about people everyone would like to meet.” Secondly, ‘she was a proud Scot, and lived there all her life, even dedicating her first book “to all who love Scotland, her tears and smiles, her dark woods and sunlit moors, and the plain and homely folk in the lonely villages of the north,” but her stories set in tranquil English villages also have a magic of place.’

There is a final reason for DES’s appeal. ‘Oscar Wilde’s Miss Prism, asked about her lost three-volume novel, explained, “The good ended happily and the bad unhappily. That is what fiction means.” Perhaps part of the attraction is that in DE Stevenson’s novels these rules comfortingly still apply.’ Or, as her granddaughter Wendy, who still lives in DES’s home town of Moffat, puts it: the novels are ‘a soothing balm’ at times of stress and exhaustion.



*'Tea Time' c.1930 by FW Elwell © Bridgeman Art Library/Mallett Gallery*

# OUR READERS WRITE

‘What a remarkable book *The Young Pretenders* is. Apparently a modest nursery tale about the endearing, imaginative Babs (with much of Maggie Tulliver about her) whose direct questions and eagerness for enlightenment are met with such punitive censure from her vain, childish aunt; but I found it profound in its understanding of the gulf between a child’s intuitive perceptions and the dangers of mindless convention, as relevant to the 21st century as it was to the 19th.’ SR, Cambridge

‘How I loved *Daddy’s Gone A-Hunting*. It was surely Penelope Mortimer’s best, better I think than *The Pumpkin Eater*. Keep wondering where I was in 1958 that I don’t remember any impact of this brill novel. If I read it then I’m sure I wouldn’t have forgotten it, so conclude I can’t have. Anyway, I was gripped by it – terrific dialogue (why didn’t SHE write plays?) & then those one-page descriptions of a place – like Saturday morning in Ramsbridge – & the humour, so sarcastic & biting, & above all the panic seeping through all the time so that you’re suffering with Ruth.’ Margaret Forster, Cumbria

‘Sometimes one reads a book at just the right time in life and I did that with *Alas, Poor Lady* – I had been feeling a bit ground down by life and was very busy – childcare, housework, the

garden AND a university job and Chair of Governors at school. Reading *Alas, Poor Lady* made me remember that I am blessed indeed to be so busy. Those poor women and their wasted lives. One wonders what the Mary and Grace Scrimgeours would make of women today doing the work of the nanny, the cook, the housemaid, the mother and the (work) of a man.’ ER, Lewes

‘I wanted to tell you that I finished *Daddy’s Gone A-Hunting* this weekend on the train back from visiting friends in Brighton, and was reduced to such a sobbing mess that I had to wipe my nose on my scarf and all the people in the carriage were regarding me with deep concern. It is so beautifully written, alive and heartbreakingly sad.’ Amy Rosenthal, London NW3

‘Now I know I’m coming rather late to this particular party, but I’ve just finished *The Priory* and am flat on my back with admiration. What a story! And the imagery – the doll’s house furniture chesnuts, the stagnant pond pierglass – not to mention the merciless dissection of character. No one escapes it. I was reading standing up in the kitchen last night, supposed to be making the dinner, when Bessy went to the lake and so the potatoes boiled dry and ruined the pan, which is more Barbara Pym than Dorothy

Whipple but still a testament. Then I stayed awake until 3 a.m. to finish it. Today is a bit of a blur as a result, but *The Priory* was worth it.’ CM, Castle Douglas

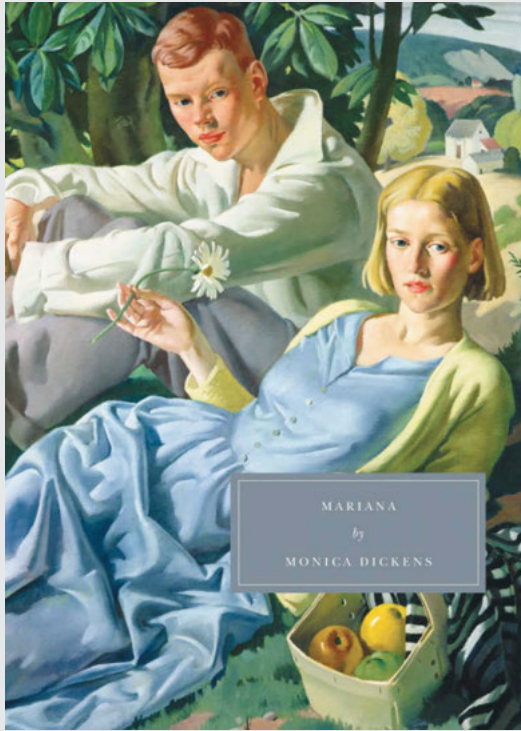
‘I spent the whole of Sunday collapsed in a park with *Daddy’s Gone A-Hunting*. What a book. I’ve never come across Penelope Mortimer before and can’t wait to get my teeth into some more. The Johnsons? That horrible coffee they have with Tony in the dingy café? It really is extraordinary stuff.’ DE, London

‘I have just finished *The Shuttle* and want to go right back to the beginning and read it all over again. The last 100 pages were so exciting that I could not put the book down. I had to keep reminding myself to breathe. I didn’t think Frances Hodgson Burnett could have written anything better than *The Making of a Marchioness* (which gave me that sense of heart-stopping excitement that I had not experienced since *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *The Woman in White*). But I was wrong!’ CH, London N1

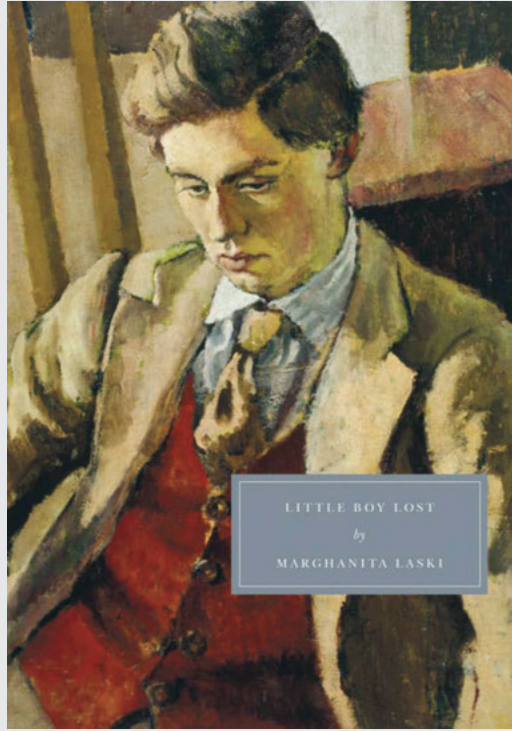
‘*Someone at a Distance* is a great treat. I actually abandoned work, the garden, phone calls etc. this morning because I couldn’t wait until tonight to finish the book. Thank you very much for the introduction. Dorothy Whipple is a joy to read.’ LS, Ludlow



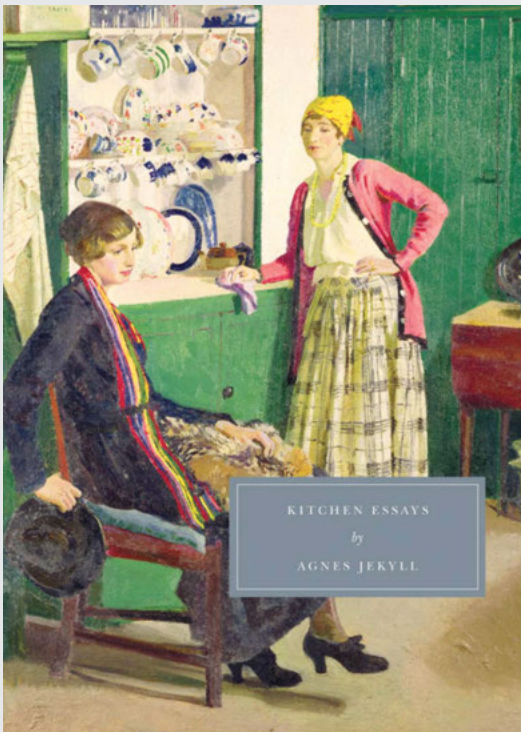
# THE PERSEPHONE CLASSICS



MARIANA  
by  
MONICA DICKENS



LITTLE BOY LOST  
by  
MARGHANTA LASKI



KITCHEN ESSAYS  
by  
AGNES JEKYL

*The artwork on the front of Mariana is 'Amity' 1933 by Bernard Fleetwood-Walker, on Little Boy Lost 'Youth Wearing a Brown Waistcoat' 1938 by Rhoda Glass and on Kitchen Essays 'In the Kitchen' 1918 by Harold Harveyon.*

The *Persephone Classics* are some of our bestselling titles in a more bookshop-friendly format (but also available from us by mail order). They cost £9 each (plus £2 p & p), the typeface and paper are the same, the covers have flaps, and the original endpaper is printed in grey on the back of the Classic cover. The books are bound so that they lie flat, a technique called Dispersion Binding developed by GGP in Germany. The covers of the October 2008 Classics are reproduced here; the next three Classics, to be published in April 2009, will be *Saplings* by Noel Streatfeild, *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* by Julia Strachey and *The World that was Ours* by Hilda Bernstein.

# FROM THE BLOGS

‘I was inspired to read *Miss Pettigrew* by seeing the delightful movie with Frances McDormand and Amy Adams, and I'm happy to say this is even more delightful... a book that is a lot of fun that actually has some interesting things to say about class and superficiality.’  
Josephinn.livejournal.com

‘In *They Were Sisters* one sister loves too much, and is broken. One never loves enough, and is broken in her fashion. And one has a peculiar marriage (and a hilarious maid) but tries to pull the broken strings of the family together. All the characters, major and minor, are well-drawn and the story draws one in and means the book is hard to put down.’ lyzzybee.livejournal.com

‘Isobel English's style in *Every Eye* is not an easy read for moderns and is, probably, a matter of taste. She is intellectually challenging with heavy emphasis on the psychological. The author's own Catholic preoccupations come through. I highly recommend the book.’  
beccaandbella.typepad.com

‘*A Very Great Profession* is my kind of thing, a chatty, informative social history of women's literature. Pointedly yet gently, learnedly yet subtly, it explains exactly why middle-class women loved these inter-war women's novels. This is a book I'll

treasure; its appreciation of women's novels is like learning history effortlessly at the same time as getting recommendations from a literary friend. *Alas Poor Lady* may seem more conventional than *The Brontës Went to Woolworth's*, but I'm convinced there's more to it. It is beautifully written, with compassion and great cynicism, and more blatantly feminist and more sophisticated than the earlier novel. The witty, staccato style is addictive, a bit Virginia Woolfish, a bit Dorothy Whipple-ish.’ frisbeewind.blogspot.com

‘Persephone Books have done it again! Another republished masterpiece, this time by the wonderful Winifred Holtby: *The Crowded Street* is a study in social expectations and the subsequent limitations experienced by women during the Golden Age of the Edwardians and through to WWI and beyond. and is a fascinating and compelling insight into the lives of several women. Winifred Holtby brings a tear to the eye and a sense of deep frustration to the C21st female reader.’  
juliapainter.com

‘I didn't merely read *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*, I devoured it. I started reading and got lost. I blinked and suddenly it was a few hours later and I had enjoyed Miss Pettigrew's day almost as much as she had. Yes,

there are racist comments. And yes, there's a certain amount of sexism. Unfortunately, we can't go back to the last centuries and change people's opinions and views on women, race and culture. Nor can we censor them (despite many a school board's attempts to). But when read within their historical context, with an understanding of the time in which the work was written and why such ideas are no longer appropriate, novels like *Miss Pettigrew* can be enjoyable.’  
sassymonkey on blogger.com

‘Its serious but delicate study of the possible contents of [the heroine of *Brief Encounter's*] shopping basket makes *A Very Great Profession* both unusual and delightful. The working title for the book was ‘Silly Lady Novelists’ but far from treating them as silly, its tender touch sees what is good in these works both as literature and as entertainment; it can see both where popular novelists fail to become great and where great novelists fail to be entertaining.’  
juxtabook.typepad.com

‘I love picking up a book when I have few expectations and discovering a true gem of a story. That happened when I read *Family Roundabout*, a book I absolutely adored. Crompton has a wonderful ability to portray characters of great depth and breadth.’ danitorres.typepad.com

# £1 A WEEK AND MISS BUNCLE

‘But the personality of the parents is, of course, the chief cause of order or disorder. A man who loves order has a great influence for order, and a man who likes to go to bed in his boots and spit on the floor has an almost overwhelming influence in the other direction. He may be an equally good fellow in all other respects, but his wife, if she has a tidy nature, may quarrel bitterly with him; whereas if she is more easy-going she may remain his good friend, through not feeling constant irritation and insult because of his ways. It is a fact that a woman the law of whose being is cleanliness and order at all costs may, to a slovenly man, make a most tiresome wife. Her little home may be shining and spotless – as far as anything can be shining and spotless in Lambeth – at the cost of all her vitality and all her temper. She herself may, as a result of her desperate battle with dirt and discouragement, be a scold and an unreasonable being. She cannot be got away from in two rooms where a light and fire can only be afforded in one, and she may be the greatest trial in an always difficult life. In such homes as £1 a week can buy in London, the women who do not insist upon doing the impossible, and fretting themselves and everybody else because it is impossible, often arrive at better results – with regards at least to the human beings about them –

than the women who put furniture first and the peace of the family second. And this even if the rooms in their charge do look as though their dark places would not bear inspection. The mother who is not disturbed by a little mud on the floor has vitality left to deal with more important matters.’

‘The parcel of books from the library was on the table. Sarah undid the string and turned them over with her long thin fingers. What had they sent this time? She rejected a fat biography, and dipped into a historical rechauffé – too dull,

She was not in the mood for improving literature tonight, something light and amusing would pass the time better. What about this one – *Disturber of the Peace* by John Smith? She took it up and sank into the doctor's chair. She laughed softly, and Nell stirred in her sleep and raised her beautiful head. ‘You know, Nell, you miss a lot by not being able to read,’ Sarah told her. ‘These people are real live people – they are quite delicious.’ She read on. You couldn't help reading on. It might be Silverstream, she thought..

‘I suppose I should never have written it,’ continued Miss Buncle sadly. ‘But you see I had to do something – I told you about the dividends, didn't I? – and the only thing I could do was to write a book, and the only kind of book I could write was about people I knew. And then another thing was that I never really thought or believed *in my bones* that the book would be published. I just finished it and sent it up –’ ‘And why to *me*?’ enquired Mr Abbott with much interest. ‘I mean why did you send the book to *me*? Perhaps you had heard from somebody that our firm –’ ‘Oh, no,’ she exclaimed. ‘I knew nothing at all about publishers. You were the first on the list – alphabetically – that was all.’ Mr Abbott was somewhat taken aback – on such trifles hang the fates of bestsellers!’



*Drawing by Mary Gardiner at the head of the chapter about herbs in The Country Housewife's Book p155*





*'The Red Armchair' by Vanessa Bell was painted in 1934, the year of publication both of *The Country Housewife's Book* and *Miss Buncl's Book*. That year someone could have sat in this room, which is almost certainly in Gordon Square, Bloomsbury, in this comfortable-looking chair; and read both books.*

*In the same year that she painted this picture, Vanessa Bell designed the fabric used for *Miss Buncl's Book*, 'Flower vase lit by rays from a table lamp.'*

*The whereabouts of 'The Red Armchair' is unknown; it was reproduced in the catalogue for Part Three of the 'Home and Garden' exhibition at the Geffrye Museum in 2007.*

# THE PERSEPHONE 81

1. **William - an Englishman** by Cicely Hamilton Prize-winning 1919 novel about the effect of WW1 on a socialist clerk and a suffragette. Preface: Nicola Beauman
2. **Mariana** by Monica Dickens First published in 1940, this funny, romantic first novel describes a young girl's life in the 1930s. Preface: Harriet Lane
3. **Someone at a Distance** by Dorothy Whipple 'A very good novel indeed' (*Spectator*) about the tragic destruction of a formerly happy marriage (pub. 1953). A R4 Book at Bedtime in September 2008. Preface: Nina Bowden
4. **Fidelity** by Susan Glaspell 1915 novel by a Pulitzer Prize winner describing the long-term consequences of a girl in Iowa running off with a married man. Preface: Laura Godwin
5. **An Interrupted Life** by Etty Hillesum From 1941-3 a young woman in Amsterdam, 'the Anne Frank for grown-ups', wrote diaries and letters which are among the great documents of our time. Preface: Eva Hoffman
6. **The Victorian Chaise-longue** by Marghanita Laski A 'little jewel of horror': 'Melly' lies on a chaise-longue in the 1950s and wakes as 'Milly' eighty years before. Preface: PD James
7. **The Home-Maker** by Dorothy Canfield Fisher Ahead of its time 'remarkable and brave 1924 novel about being a house-husband' (Carol Shields). Preface: Karen Knox
8. **Good Evening, Mrs Craven: the Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes** Superbly written short stories, first published in *The New Yorker* from 1938-44. Five of them were twice read on R4. Preface: Gregory LeStage
9. **Few Eggs and No Oranges** by Vere Hodgson A 600-page diary, written from 1940-45 in Notting Hill Gate, full of acute observation, wit and humanity. Preface: Jenny Hartley
10. **Good Things in England** by Florence White This comprehensive 1932 collection of recipes inspired many, including Elizabeth David.
11. **Julian Grenfell** by Nicholas Mosley A biography of the First World War poet, and of his mother Ettie Desborough. Preface: author
12. **It's Hard to be Hip over Thirty and Other Tragedies of Married Life** by Judith Viorst Funny, wise and weary 1960s poems about marriage, children and reality. Preface: author
13. **Consequences** by EM Delafield By the author of *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*, this 1919 novel is about a girl entering a convent after she fails to marry. Preface: Nicola Beauman
14. **Farewell Leicester Square** by Betty Miller Novel (by Jonathan Miller's mother) about a Jewish film-director and 'the discreet discrimination of the bourgeoisie' (*Guardian*). Preface: Jane Miller
15. **Tell It to a Stranger** by Elizabeth Berridge 1947 short stories which were twice in the *Evening Standard* bestseller list; they are funny, observant and bleak. Preface: AN Wilson
16. **Saplings** by Noel Streatfeild An adult novel by the well-known author of *Ballet Shoes*, about the destruction of a family during WW2; a R4 ten-part serial. Afterword: Jeremy Holmes
17. **Marjory Fleming** by Oriol Malet A deeply empathetic novel about the real life of the Scottish child prodigy who lived from 1803-11; now published in France; was a play on Radio Scotland.
18. **Every Eye** by Isobel English An unusual 1956 novel about a girl travelling to Spain, highly praised by Muriel Spark: a R4 'Afternoon Play' in 2004. Preface: Neville Braybrooke
19. **They Knew Mr Knight** by Dorothy Whipple An absorbing 1934 novel about a man driven to committing fraud and what happens to him and his family; a 1943 film. Afterwords: Terence Handley MacMath and Christopher Beauman
20. **A Woman's Place** by Ruth Adam A survey of C20th women's lives, very readably written by a novelist-historian: an overview full of insights. Preface: Yvonne Roberts
21. **Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day** by Winifred Watson A delightful 1938 novel about a governess and a night-club singer. Read on R4 by Maureen Lipman; now a film with Frances McDormand and Amy Adams. Preface: Henrietta Twycross-Martin Also available as an unabridged Persephone audiobook read by Frances McDormand
22. **Consider the Years** by Virginia Graham Sharp, funny, evocative WW2 poems by Joyce Grenfell's closest friend and collaborator. Preface: Anne Harvey
23. **Reuben Sachs** by Amy Levy A fierce 1880s satire on the London Jewish community by 'the Jewish Jane Austen' who was a friend of Oscar Wilde. Preface: Julia Neuberger
24. **Family Roundabout** by Richmal Crompton By the *William* books author, 1948 family saga contrasting two matriarchs and their very different children. Preface: Juliet Aykroyd
25. **The Montana Stories** by Katherine Mansfield Collects together the short stories written during the author's last year; with a detailed publisher's note and the contemporary illustrations. Five were read on R4 in 2002.
26. **Brook Evans** by Susan Glaspell A very unusual novel, written in the same year as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, about the enduring effect of a love affair on three generations of a family.
27. **The Children who Lived in a Barn** by Eleanor Graham A 1938 classic about five children fending for themselves; starring the unforgettable hay-box. Preface: Jacqueline Wilson
28. **Little Boy Lost** by Marghanita Laski Novel about a father's search for his son in France in late 1945, chosen by the *Guardian's* Nicholas Lezard as his 2001

Paperback Choice. A R4 'Book at Bedtime' read by Jamie Glover. Afterword: Anne Sebba

**29. The Making of a Marchioness by Frances Hodgson Burnett** A wonderfully entertaining 1901 novel about the melodrama after the penniless Emily Fox-Seton marries a Marquis. A R4 Classic Serial in 2007. Preface: Isabel Raphael, Afterword: Gretchen Gerzina

**30. Kitchen Essays by Agnes Jekyll** Witty and useful essays about cooking, with recipes, published in *The Times* and reprinted as a book in 1922. 'One of the best reads outside Elizabeth David' wrote gastropoda.com

**31. A House in the Country by Jocelyn Playfair** An unusual and very interesting 1944 novel about a group of people living in the country during WW2. Preface: Ruth Gorb

**32. The Carlyles at Home by Thea Holme** A 1965 mixture of biography and social history which very entertainingly describes Thomas and Jane Carlyle's life in Chelsea.

**33. The Far Cry by Emma Smith** A beautifully written 1949 novel about a young girl's passage to India: a great Persephone favourite. 'Book at Bedtime' in 2004. Preface: author

**34. Minnie's Room** The Peacetime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes 1947–1965: Second volume of short stories first published in *The New Yorker*, previously unknown in the UK.

**35. Greenery Street by Denis Mackail** A delightful, very funny 1925 novel about a young couple's first year of married life in a (real) street in Chelsea. Preface: Rebecca Cohen

**36. Lettice Delmer by Susan Miles** A unique 1920s novel in verse describing a girl's stormy adolescence and path to redemption; much admired by TS Eliot.

**37. The Runaway by Elizabeth Anna Hart** A Victorian novel for children and grown-ups, illustrated by Gwen Raverat. 'There never was a happier book' (*Country Life*, 1936). Afterwords: Anne Harvey, Frances Spalding.

**38. Cheerful Weather for the Wedding by Julia Strachey** A funny and quirky 1932 novella by a niece of Lytton Strachey, praised by Virginia Woolf. Soon to be a film with Emily Blunt and David Tennant. Preface: Frances Partridge. Also available on two cassettes, read by Miriam Margolyes.

**39. Manja by Anna Gmeyner** A 1938 German novel, newly translated, about five children conceived on the same night in 1920, and their lives until the Nazi takeover. Preface: Eva Ibbotson (daughter of the author)

**40. The Priory by Dorothy Whipple** A much-loved 1939 novel about a family, upstairs and downstairs, living in a large country house. 'Warm, witty and realistic' (Hatchards). Preface: David Conville

**41. Hostages to Fortune by Elizabeth Cambridge** 'Deals with domesticity without being in the least bit cosy' (Harriet Lane, *Observer*), a remarkable fictional portrait of a doctor's family in rural Oxfordshire in the 1920s.

**42. The Blank Wall by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding** 'The top suspense writer of them all' (Chandler). A 1947 thriller about a mother who shields her daughter from a blackmailer. Filmed as both *The Reckless Moment* (1949) and *The Deep End* (2001); a R4 serial in 2006.

**43. The Wise Virgins by Leonard Woolf** This wise and witty 1914 novel contrasts the bohemian Virginia and Vanessa with Gwen, the girl next door in 'Richstead' (Putney). Preface: Lyndall Gordon

**44. Tea with Mr Rochester by Frances Towers** Magical, unsettling 1949 stories, a surprise favourite, that are unusually beautifully written; read on R4 in 2003 and 2006. Preface: Frances Thomas

**45. Good Food on the Aga by Ambrose Heath** A 1932 cookery book for Aga users which can nevertheless be used by anyone; with numerous illustrations by Edward Bawden.

**46. Miss Ranskill Comes Home by Barbara Euphan Todd** An unsparing, wry 1946 novel: Miss Ranskill is shipwrecked and returns to a completely changed wartime England. Preface: Wendy Pollard

**47. The New House by Lettice Cooper** 1936 portrayal of the day a family moves to a new house, and the resulting adjustments and tensions. Preface: Jilly Cooper.

**48. The Casino by Margaret Bonham** Short stories by a 1940s writer with a unique voice and dark sense of humour; they were read on BBC Radio 4 in 2004 and 2005. Preface: Cary Bazalgette.

**49. Bricks and Mortar by Helen Ashton** An excellent 1932 novel by a very popular pre- and post-war writer, chronicling the life of a hard-working, kindly London architect over thirty-five years.

**50. The World that was Ours by Hilda Bernstein** An extraordinary memoir that reads like a novel of the events before and after the 1964 Rivonia Trial. Mandela was given a life sentence but the Bernsteins escaped to England. Preface and Afterword: the author

**51. Operation Heartbreak by Duff Cooper** A soldier misses going to war – until the end of his life. 'The novel I enjoyed more than any other in the immediate post-war years' (Nina Bawden). Afterword: Max Arthur

**52. The Village by Marghanita Laski** This 1952 comedy of manners describes post-war readjustments in village life when love ignores the class barrier. Afterword: Juliet Gardiner

**53. Lady Rose and Mrs Memmary by Ruby Ferguson** A 1937 novel about Lady Rose, who inherits a great house, marries well – and then meets the love of her life on a park bench. A great favourite of the Queen Mother. Preface: Candia McWilliam

**54. They Can't Ration These by Vicomte de Mauduit** A 1940 cookery book about 'food for free', full of excellent (and now fashionable) recipes.

**55. Flush by Virginia Woolf** A light-hearted but surprisingly feminist 1933 'life' of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel, 'a little masterpiece of comedy' (*TLS*). Preface: Sally Beauman

**56. They Were Sisters by Dorothy Whipple** The fourth Persephone book by this wonderful writer, a 1943 novel that contrasts three very different marriages. Preface: Celia Brayfield



- 57. The Hopkins Manuscript by RC Sherriff** What might happen if the moon crashed into the earth in 1946: a 1939 novel 'written' by a delightful anti-hero, 'Mr Hopkins'. Preface: Michael Moorcock, Afterword: George Gamow
- 58. Hetty Dorval by Ethel Wilson** First novel (1947) set in the beautiful landscape of British Columbia; a young girl is befriended by a beautiful and selfish 'Menace' – but is she? Afterword: Northrop Frye
- 59. There Were No Windows by Norah Hoult** A touching and funny novel, written in 1944, about an elderly woman with memory loss living in Kensington during the blitz. Afterword: Julia Briggs
- 60. Doreen by Barbara Noble** A 1946 novel about a child who is evacuated to the country during the war. Her mother regrets it; the family that takes her in wants to keep her. Preface: Jessica Mann
- 61. A London Child of the 1870s by Molly Hughes** A classic memoir, written in 1934, about an 'ordinary, suburban Victorian family' in Islington, a great favourite with all ages. Preface: Adam Gopnik
- 62. How to Run Your Home Without Help by Kay Smallshaw** A 1949 manual for the newly servantless housewife full of advice that is historically interesting, useful nowadays and, as well, unintentionally funny. Preface: Christina Hardyment
- 63. Princes in the Land by Joanna Cannan** A novel published in 1938 about a daughter of the aristocracy who marries an Oxford don; her three children fail to turn out as she had hoped.
- 64. The Woman Novelist and Other Stories by Diana Gardner** Short stories written in the late 1930s and early 1940s that are witty, sharp and with an unusual undertone. Preface: Claire Gardner
- 65. Alas, Poor Lady by Rachel Ferguson** A 1937 novel, which is polemical but intensely readable about the unthinking cruelty with which Victorian parents gave birth to daughters without anticipating any future for them apart from marriage.
- 66. Gardener's Nightcap by Muriel Stuart** A 1938 pot pourri: a huge variety of miniature essays on gardening – such as Dark Ladies (frittallary), Better Gooseberries, Phlox Failure – which will be enjoyed by all gardeners, keen or lukewarm.
- 67. The Fortnight in September by RC Sherriff** Another novel by the author of *Journey's End*, and *The Hopkins Manuscript*, Persephone Book No. 57, about a family on holiday in Bognor in 1931; a quiet masterpiece.
- 68. The Expendable Man by Dorothy B Hughes** A 1963 thriller set in Arizona by the well-known American crime writer; it was chosen by the critic HRF Keating as one of his hundred best crime novels. Afterword: Dominic Power
- 69. Journal of Katherine Mansfield** The husband of the great short story writer (cf. *The Montana Stories*, Persephone Books No. 25) assembled this journal from unposted letters, scraps of writing etc, to give a unique portrait of a woman writer.
- 70. Plats du Jour by Patience Gray and Primrose Boyd** is a 1957 cookery book which was a bestseller at the time and a pioneering work for British cooks. The black and white illustrations and the coloured endpapers are by David Gentleman.
- 71. The Shuttle by Frances Hodgson Burnett** A 1907 page-turner by the author of *The Making of a Marchioness* (Persephone Book No. 29) about Rosalie Vanderpoel, an American heiress who marries an English aristocrat and whose beautiful and enterprising sister Bettina sets out to rescue her. Preface: Anne Sebba
- 72. House-Bound by Winifred Peck** This 1942 novel describes a middle-class Edinburgh woman who decides, radically, that she must run her house without help and do her own cooking; the war is in the background and foreground. Afterword: the late Penelope Fitzgerald
- 73. The Young Pretenders by Edith Henrietta Fowler** An 1895 novel for both children and grown-ups about Babs, who lives with her uncle and aunt and has not yet learnt to dissemble. Preface: Charlotte Mitchell
- 74. The Closed Door and Other Stories by Dorothy Whipple** Ten short stories drawn from the three collections (now extremely hard to find) that Dorothy Whipple published during her lifetime. Read on BBC R4 in 2007.
- 75. On the Other Side by Mathilde Wolff-Mönckeberg: Letters to my Children from Germany 1940-46.** Written in Hamburg but never sent, these letters provide a crucial counterpoint to *Few Eggs and No Oranges*. Preface: Ruth Evans, Afterword: Christopher Beaman
- 76. The Crowded Street by Winifred Holtby** A 1924 novel about Muriel's attempts to escape from small-town Yorkshire, and her rescue by Delia, alias Vera Brittain. Preface: Marion Shaw
- 77. Daddy's Gone A-Hunting by Penelope Mortimer** This 1958 novel is about the 'captive wives' of the pre-war women's liberation era, bored and lonely in the commuter-belt. Preface: Valerie Grove
- 78. A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-39 by Nicola Beauman** A mixture of literary criticism and historical evocation, first published 25 years ago, about the women writers of the inter-war period.
- 79. Round about a Pound a Week by Maud Pember Reeves** A 1913 dissection of the causes of poverty in Lambeth, full of human details and empathy usually only found in a novel: unexpectedly readable, fascinating and poignant. Preface: Polly Toynbee
- 80. The Country Housewife's Book by Lucy H Yates** A useful 1934 book, suggested to us by the owner of a working farm, on topics such as the storeroom and larder, using garden produce, herbs and game.
- 81. Miss Buncle's Book by DE Stevenson** A middle-aged woman writes a novel, as 'John Smith', about the village she lives in. A delightful and funny book (pub. 1934) by an author whose work sold in millions. Preface: Aline Templeton

# A FEW PROBLEMS IN THE DAY CASE UNIT BY GEORGINA HAMMICK

My name is Lettice Pomfrey and I am thirty-four years old. I am sitting in the gynaecologist's waiting room waiting to see the gynaecologist. I tell you this now, at the beginning, in case gynaecology is not the subject for you; in case you find some aspects of it distasteful; in case you would rather be somewhere else than in this waiting room on a hot and sunny July afternoon.

I don't want to be here; I've a high failure rate in gynaecologists. The first one I saw was a misogynist and an extortionist, the second a lecher. The third one might have been all right, I can't positively say he wasn't, but we moved house before I had a chance to find out. The fourth one, Mr Gamble, I haven't yet met. He's been recommended by my doctor and by several people I know who variously say he's sympathetic, attractive, dishy. A surgeon's wife I share the school run with told me Mr G. is the envy of his colleagues, who've had to watch him sweep the gynaecological board, not just of the county's childbearers, but of the menopausal. They seek him out, according to her, for hysterectomies, for removal of ovarian cysts and ovaries, and

for Hormone Replacement Therapy. This is enough to put me off him, but I'm telling myself to keep an open mind.

The waiting room is in the consulting rooms an ENT man, a paediatrician and Mr Gamble share. They see their private patients here, and their NHS patients at the Infirmary. I'd have been quite happy, not being on BUPA, to see Mr G. at the NHS clinic he holds on Tuesdays, but my doctor explained that because of the consultants' dispute, and as I can't be called an urgent case, it'd mean tagging on to the end of a long waiting list. Impossible to say when I'd get an appointment. It could be years, not months. Centuries even, my doctor said, with one of his occasional flashes of humour. Milleniums.

The waiting room is very smart. Its colour scheme is white and fawn and chocolate brown. The ceiling is white, the walls fawn, the carpet fawn with a chocolate Greek key pattern round the edge. The chairs are white tubular with chocolate wool seats. There are two rubber plants, one either side of the fireplace, standing in white, square jardinières. In front of the plate-glass window is a large table with a glass top, and on this are

magazines. They've been arranged like a game of giant clock patience, but in the centre, where the king of hearts or spades should be, is an enormous ashtray, square and glass to match the table. I would like a cigarette at this moment, but don't want to be caught smoking. Also it seems common courtesy to keep my breath sweet for Mr Gamble, even if my mouth is not the part of me he'll be seeing most of.

Mrs Pomfrey, ready for you now.

The nurse who's come for me is a dark girl, and pretty except for some serious and disconcerting spots (no matter how often you come across them, spotty nurses, like dentists with bad breath and hairdressers with hacked hair, are always somehow shocking). I follow her to a little room where I am weighed, and where my blood pressure is taken. As she pumps me up I squinny to see the reading, but she's too quick for me. That's fine, she says grimly, unwinding the black mackintosh from my arm.

Mrs Pomfrey for you, Mr Gamble, she says, opening a connecting door. Mr Gamble gets up from behind his desk and comes forward and shakes my hand. Then he squeezes my

shoulder, a gentle pressure that encourages me to sit down on the chair my side of the desk and facing his chair. When he has returned to his place he leans towards me on his elbows.

Well, Mrs Pomfrey, he says, well now.

Mr Gamble is a good-looking man; he may even be attractive. Somebody told me he's a bit like James Stewart, and he is, about the mouth and chin. His eyes aren't blue though, they're brown. They're kind eyes, and the expression in them of sympathy and concern is intensified by the furrows in his brow. They cannot be a misogynist's eyes. I'm sure. And there's no hint of lechery in them.

Mr G. begins to ask me questions – my date of birth; my husband's date of birth; the dates of birth and sexes of our four children, etc. – the answers to which he jots down with a fountain pen on a sheet of unlined A4. I wonder why he bothers with this: most of the information must be in the letter from my doctor I can see on his desk, or in the file containing my medical notes, ditto. Perhaps he hasn't read the letter or had time to glance through the notes; or perhaps he prefers to do his own spadework in what for him is new ground, in what for me is old ground, dug over many times before.

How old was I, Mr G. wants to know, when I

had my first period? Can I give him a brief account of the births of my children? Am I a smoker? Do I have any problems at all with bowels or waterworks?

Mr G. lays his pen on the paper. Would I like to tell him, and I can take my time, about the various methods of birth control I and my husband have tried during the course of our marriage? We started off with my using a cap, I tell him, and Mr G. picks up his pen and writes Diaphragm on the sheet of paper. Then we started a baby – on purpose, I explain, and then after the baby was born I went on the pill. Oral C, Mr G. writes down. And how did that suit? he asks, leaning forward again.

The truth is it made me sick and fat and gave me headaches, and I tell him this. So, he says, looking down at his hands, So what's the score at the moment? What method are you using now?

I must think about this. I can't say French letter to *him*. But the official words, the words I know

I ought to use, stick in the throat. My husband is taking precautions, I say. Mr Gamble writes down Sheath, and asks if it's satisfactory for us, me and my husband.

Pictures float into my head; my husband groping in his bedside drawer, having knocked the lamp over; me lying in the dark with nothing to do and going off the boil, if I was ever on it; our children wandering round our bedroom before breakfast while I'm getting dressed or putting my face on, touching things, picking up things, opening drawers. What are these, Mum? What are they *for*? Not just pictures. Some man once told me that doing it in a French letter is like sucking a sweet with the wrapper on.

It's not ideal, I say to Mr G.

No, it's not, Mr G. says. It's not much fun for your husband, I can promise you that. Even more important, perhaps, it's not really *safe*. The accident rate is high. Have the two of you ever







*'Eleanor of Toledo and her son' Agnolo Bronzino 1503-72 © The Art Store*

considered – he pauses, he presses the tips of his fingers together, and then pushes them apart – sterilization?

A vasectomy? I tell him we have, but one of us might, you never know, die of a heart attack or get run over by a bus, and the other might then remarry someone who hadn't had children and who wanted some.

Mr G. glances at his watch. Let's re-cap, he says. Which method you've tried was, d'you think, if not entirely satisfactory, then on balance the best for you, the best for both of you? Remembering, of course, that no method – apart from sterilization, and we've ruled that out – is a hundred per cent?

The Coil, I say. Because it has to be the Coil. At least with the Coil you know it's there, and

you don't have to remember to swallow anything; or coat something with sperm-killing cream and stick it up yourself. And remember to take it out afterwards (but not too soon, not before the sperm-killers have had a chance to be effective), and wash it and dry it and dust it with talcum powder; and not leave it on the basin when the telephone rings.

Mr Gamble, looking at me, opens a drawer in his desk and places what he finds there on the surface between us. He pushes at it with his forefinger. This is the Copper Coil, he says, triumphantly, like a conjuror at the end of a difficult trick, and I think we should give it a try.

The Copper Coil is very small. It is not shaped like a coil; it is a piece of bent fusewire; half a

hairpin; a shorthand character; a rest in music. How could it possibly prevent a baby?

We're not exactly sure, Mr G admits, still pushing the wire around with his finger, but we know it does. Of course there's bound to be some failure rate, but it's a low one as these things go. Right then – Mr G. leans back in his chair and pushes at the desk as though he's trying to get rid of it – I think we'd better have a little peep at you. If you'd like to pop up on the day bed over there. Just remove your tights and pants and bra, but keep your slip on if you're wearing one.

You may feel this a little, Mr G. says. No, don't tense, let yourself go. La la la la, porn, porn, porn, porn, let yourself go, I sing to myself, as the plunger, or whatever it is, twists in deeper and deeper, to my very core, centre, kernel, essence, nucleus, thesaurus. *Thesaurus?* Or *thesaurus?* Which should it be? If in danger, cross your legs; if you can't be good be careful; if sex is inevitable, relax and enjoy it; if –

All done, all finished, Mr G. says, you can get dressed again now.

I suppose I'll bleed a bit, I say to Mr G. when I am dressed again and back in my chair. (I'm an old hand at this; I seem to remember a bloody aftermath to Coil insertions.)

I see no reason for that, Mr G. says. He looks puzzled. Oh I see – I should have made myself clearer. What you've had was merely a routine smear test, long

overdue. If all's in order in that department, you'll get an appointment card from the Infirmary. Until very recently, he confides, I did Coil insertions here, in the Consulting Rooms, but it's safer and more hygienic in Theatre, where everything's to hand. It's better for the patient. More comfortable.

I've never had it done in a hospital before, I say. (I'm not at all sure.) I'm not sure –

There's absolutely nothing to worry about, believe me – Mr G. stretches a pinstriped arm across the desk and pats my hand – Feeling all right now, dear?

We get up. Mr G. walks with me to the door, one arm lightly around my shoulder. There's nothing sinister about this, I'm certain. I'm quite sure this is the way he dismisses all his patients.

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And now it is evening, our children tucked in their beds, what's left of the fish pie back in the larder. My husband is sitting in an armchair, reading a book. I am sitting in an identical chair, cobbling a seam in a pair of my son's jeans. There was no blue cotton in the sewing box, so I am making do with green.

I went to see the gynae today, I say to my husband.

My husband turns two pages at once of his book, Alan Moorehead's *Gallipoli*. He has read it before, a long time ago, but is looking something up.

What? Oh yes. How did it go? Is he a good egg, d'you think, your Mr Whatsisname?

I don't know. I think he may be. He took a lot of trouble (for

it's true; he did take a lot of trouble). His name is Gamble.

Ho ho, my husband says, going back to the index. You'd think he'd change it. He runs his finger down the page. Can't seem to find it, damn, he says.

He's giving me another Coil, I say. I've got to have it done in the Infirmary.

Why's that? What for? my husband asks, his eye still on the index. What does that mean exactly? *In nuce*, mind you, not *verbatim*, says my husband who is a Latin tag man, a man for whom all invoices are, *per se* and *ipso facto*, (if *a priori*) *pro forma*, all payments *ex gratia*, all evidence *prima facie*, all quids *pro quo*.

It's safer and more hygienic in hospital, in Theatre, Mr Gamble says.

That makes sense, my husband murmurs to the index, that makes sense.

I'm not too keen on the idea of Theatre, I say. I'd rather have it done in the Consulting Rooms, or the Clinic, like last time.

Don't then, my husband says. He takes off his spectacles and puts them back on again. You're the customer, I'm paying for this, remember. Do what you want to do. Have it done where you want.

But Mr Gamble doesn't do it in the Consulting Rooms any more. He said –

You told me what he said, and it makes sense to me, my husband says. He clearly has a *causa movens*. Stop worrying, he says, *nil desperandum*.

There is silence for a while. My husband leaves the room and returns with the whisky

bottle, which is nearly empty. We must have clobbered it before supper, he says.

I had to have an internal examination today, I tell him.

I'm sure you did, my husband says. He sips his whisky. Poor you, he says, how horrid for you, poor you.

When we were newly married my husband came with me on my first visit to a gynaecologist. I wasn't sure I wanted him as a matter of fact, but he insisted. He was very distressed. I cannot bear the idea of another man touching you, even looking at you, he said as we drew up outside the surgery. I cannot bear it, you are mine – and he thumped the steering wheel in despair. When I came out an hour later I found him hunched in the driving seat, and when I got in beside him he clung to me. My baby, he said, his eyes full of tears, my precious, precious baby. I imagine that my husband, who is a positive, forward-looking man and, Latin tags and military campaigns apart, never one to dwell on the past, has long since forgotten this incident.

I bite off the end of my cotton and take another item from the mending pile at my feet. Emerald green will not do for the rip in Angelica's scarlet party dress, but there's a reel of crimson Sylko in my lap which will have to.

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The queue in Reception is very long, and I join the end of it. I'm annoyed by this queue because it wasn't easy getting here on time. I had to organise,

which means beg, someone else to do the school run; we had to have breakfast before seven; I had to drive my husband to the station, get back, make sandwiches for two school lunch boxes, put the dustbins out, and then walk the dogs - because who knows how long they're going to be shut up for. All this so I could leave the house by ten to eight, so I could be here by half past.

There's a telephone on the Reception desk. It rings and rings. It rings all the time I'm waiting, all the time I'm inching up the queue. No less than three people to deal with appointments and enquiries, and yet none of them can answer this telephone. None of them so much as looks at it, and it's odd. I know I couldn't work at a desk where a telephone was ringing without doing something about it, without at least taking it off the hook, or shouting at it.

Follow the sign to B2, the Receptionist says when I hand her my card, and she jerks her head to her right. Your telephone is ringing, by the way, I tell her. Card please, she says to the person next in line.

I follow the signs to B2. Left from the desk through swing doors, right at the end of the corridor, up two levels in the lift, more swing doors, B2. A nurse is heading towards me. She's going fast, and when I accost her she has to brake, so that her black shoes squeak on the lino. I tell her my name and what I'm here for, and she turns back the way she's come and points to a door

on the right. Go in there, she says, take off your clothes and put on a theatre gown and a dressing-gown, and I'll be back in a jiff.

In the room there's a cupboard, partitioned down the middle: theatre gowns on the left, dressing-gowns on the right. I take off my clothes and put on a theatre gown. It is like a high-necked apron with sleeves, and it fastens at the back with tapes, one of which is missing. I bend my head into the cupboard and sniff the dressing-gowns to see if they've been worn, but they smell of nothing. I put one on. It is voluminous. Its sleeves come down over my hands, its skirts trail over the floor. I hitch it at the waist, and blouse and bag it over the tie-belt. I don't like these clothes, and the nothing smell of them.

I get off the bed and shuffle to the window. Far below two tiny figures in navy capes are being blown along a concrete walkway. They weave in and out of the buildings, disappear, reappear beside a grove of sapling poplars, vanish into Pathology, a shack like all the other shacks.

Angelica's classroom is a shack. She will be in it now - arithmetic, first period after prayers. She didn't want to go to school today. She didn't feel well, she said. She had a headache and a tummy ache, she felt *sick*. She says this, or something *sick* like it, every morning. Every morning I want to keep her at home and let her mess up the kitchen table with paintwater and scissors and gummed squares; every morning

I send her to school.

I go out into the corridor. There's a cleaner with a hovercraft outside my door. She shows me where the lavatory is, just in time.

I am back on the bed, curled up, reading the mail that came as I was leaving the house. My mail is one postcard, from a friend who's on holiday in Kenya (was on holiday, I should say. I saw her in Tesco yesterday, at the cheese counter. She was busy, I was busy, we pretended not to see each other). The card is addressed to Memsahib Pomfrey. It says Jambo! Habari? We are having a *fantastic* time. See you soonest, Love V & C. I turn it over. The picture side has a hippo with its mouth open, half submerged in a pool, surrounded by smaller hippos.

A man's head appears round the door of my room. I've come to take you to Theatre, he says. Leave your handbag and your clothes in the locker - and your watch if you're wearing one.

Are you a nurse? I ask the man when we are in the lift together, descending to G level. The man has his arms folded across his chest and is staring at the ceiling the way people tend to in lifts. I know I do, because it's the only way to avoid eyeball to eyeball confrontation with strangers. He uncrosses his arms and points to a badge on his overall which says Porter, green letters on white.

At G Level we follow signs to X-Ray and Haematology, but at the last moment bypass these and make now for Pharmacy, Outpatients Surgical, Gynaecology



and Shop. We walk out through plastic swing doors, Emergency Exit 2, and I lift my skirts, costume drama style, onto covered concrete, uncovered concrete, covered concrete, through swing doors, into lino corridor, where we stop. Put on a pair of overshoes, the porter says, and take a seat here.

Against the wall are two chairs and a row of see-through galoshes, all the same size; it doesn't matter which pair I choose. I take a seat in the corridor.

The doors of Theatre 2 open, a stretcher trolley shoots out, swings round, one person behind it pushing, another in front steering, holding the drip steady. I keep my head down as they trundle past at a trot, but I see because I want to see, because I have to, because I must: a white face, a dead face, surely, chin

tipped up, mouth hugely open, a tube in the nose - or was it the mouth? Gone.

How long have I been here? Ten minutes? Twenty? I keep checking, but on my left wrist, printed across unbleached hairs and a mole, is only the ghost of my watch. Where is Mr G.? Why doesn't Mr G. come?

Ready for you in theatre now, dear.

It isn't Mr G., it's a nurse, in green, masked and gowned, who leads me, clapping in my overshoes, out of the darkness of the corridor into the light of Theatre 1.

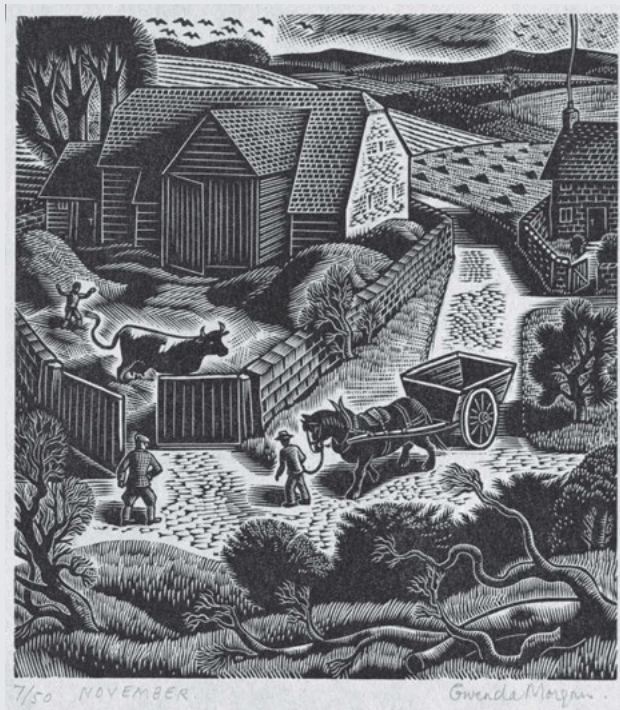
It is very bright in Theatre. Interval time. The house lights are up and there's a party going on. It's a tea party, I can tell, because the six or seven people wandering about chatting have cups and saucers in their hands. It's surprising really,

all this activity and chat and tea drinking, because you tend to think of hospital theatres as sterile, hygienic places, as Mr G. said, places (or areas, or *zones*) you can only enter if you're wearing overshoes.

Someone comes forward and helps me out of my dressing-gown. Someone asks me to take off my overshoes and my shoes. This same person gives me a hand onto the stage. (No, not a stage, a table. An operating table, for operations.) I lie down on my back, feet together, arms by my sides. Lift your *tail*, please. And at once, when I comply, the theatre gown is rolled back, up over my knees and thighs, and then folded above my waist. My legs are separated into a V. My right leg is carried up and away and placed in a sling and strapped; my left leg is carried up and away and placed in a sling and strapped. I raise my head. The slings are attached to a contraption suspended from the ceiling. It's like a Big Top up there: lights, wires, machinery, all the gear for tightropes and trapeze.

My bottom, my *tail*, is no longer on the table. Somebody slips a pillow underneath me, wedges it into the small of my back.

And that's all. Nothing else happens. I am on my back, with no knickers on, my legs wide apart and in the air - and nothing happens. The tea party is still going on, to be sure, all round me I can hear chatter and laughter and cups being returned to saucers - but I'm not part of



Gwenda Morgan 'November 1946' © Bolton Museum and Art Gallery/Bridgeman

it somehow, no one offers me a cup, no one chats to me.

This is not the first time I've been in this position; our second daughter, in no hurry to be born, had to be induced. But that time there were only two people in the Treatment Room - me, and the hospital doctor (Brown? Yes, Brown) who explained nothing, who said nothing, as he strapped up my legs. I remember the pain when he *ruptured the membranes*; I remember thinking it must be blood that gushed out and ran back underneath me and soaked the hospital gown and the sheets; I remember the ward sister in the corridor who, as I staggered out into it, took one look and snapped her fingers: Nurse! That girl needs some pethadine! I can think of all this, and concentrate on the detail and the pain because nothing that happens today, nothing that Mr G. has got up his sleeve, can be as bad as that.

Or can it? At least last time there was an end-product, a baby, Michael, to be born, at least there was someone to look forward to. What Mr G. is going to do (why doesn't he do it?) is prevent a baby being born; and at the same time rob me (when I am tired or cross, or simply not in the mood for love) of the best, the most convincing, the least hurtful, of my nocturnal excuses: D'you think we should, darling, when we know it isn't *safe*?

There's a game I used to play with my brothers, that I daresay everyone plays with their brothers - or sisters - if they have

them: the Would You Rather Game. Would you rather be (here describe the worst horror you are capable of inventing) or go to bed with (here name the most repellent specimen, of either sex, known to you all). Would you rather be on your back under a search light with your legs apart and no knickers on in the middle of a tea party, or...

All right, Mrs Pomfrey, dear? I'm afraid you will feel this, it will be a bit painful. But if you can relax and just allow yourself to go floppy, it will make it easier for you. It's Mr G.'s voice. It's Mr G.'s face, bending over mine, I recognise his eyes. He has pulled his mask down, below his chin, so that he can speak to me. I can see the bristles on his top lip and the hairs, wonderfully luxuriant hairs, in his nose. Has he been here all the time?

There is less chatter now, no chinking of cups. But no one has left the Theatre; I'm certain of this because if I roll my head to the right I can see the doors, and even if I couldn't see, even if I were blind, I'd feel the draught. Mr G. prepares to insert the Coil. While he does so, he gives a commentary, an *ex tempore* lecture, my husband would say, to the throng at the end of the table because, yes, that is where the tea party is now assembled. They are students, of course they are! And I am the demonstration model. Watch closely, Mr G. says, I'm just going to lubricate the vagina prior to insertion. Can you tell us about the relative safety and efficiency of this Coil? a male

voice, eager beaver, enquires. How does this Coil, the copper Coil, compare with other Interuterine devices currently available?

All over, Mr G. says at last, all done. Good girl.

My legs are unstrapped, removed from their slings and returned to me. I am helped down from the table. An S2, please, Mr G. says, and someone springs forward with a cellophane packet which, snipped open, contains two sanitary towels, individually and hygienically wrapped. You will have a period now, Mr G. promises, placing one of the sanitary towels between my thighs, but if the loss is unduly heavy don't hesitate to give us a ring. Take two aspirin four-hourly if there's any discomfort.

Dressing-gown on, shoes on, overshoes on. Out of theatre. A six-yard stumble on cardboard legs. Overshoes off. And here is the porter, come to take me back to my clothes.

There are some questions I forgot to ask Mr G. and the tea party in Theatre 1. How do you hold a sanitary towel in place when you haven't been given a belt or a pair of pants? How do you keep up with a porter in a hurry when your legs refuse to function properly, and when you're trying to glue your thighs together so that your ST won't leak or land on the floor? When your dressing-gown was designed for a giant and is intent on tripping you up? When your insides are falling out, when your

eyes are blurred and you can't see where you're going, when the pain is so bad you will surely faint, if not actually die?

In the lift, ascending to B2, a trickle – hot, sticky, but which cannot be amniotic fluid, not today – descends the inside of my right thigh, circumnavigates the knee muscle, finds a route down the calf, steers between the ankle and heel, arrives in my shoe, collects there.

Outside my door the porter and I part company. Here we are then, he says, the first words he's spoken since we left the theatre, and he goes. I reach out for the door handle of sanctuary, and then I notice it, a red-black splash on the beige lino at my feet, the size of a coin, a little ragged around the edge. I turn, and look, there are more of them, all down the corridor back the way we've come, dark two-penny pieces, regularly spaced, as far as the eye can see. I've left a trail, like Hansel and Gretel did in the forest! Supposing, just supposing, I wanted to go back to Theatre now, I wouldn't need a porter to show me the way.

\*

#### *Afterword 1: The Letters*

Unposted letter to Mr Gamble.

Dear Mr Gamble,

A week after my experience in the Infirmary I wrote you a letter.

I decided to write to you for two reasons: a) because I felt you should know what it was like to be on the receiving end of your lack of attention, and b) because

I thought it incumbent on me, being articulate, to suggest ways of improving your set-up.

I took trouble over my letter. The first two drafts were too emotional (you mustn't be allowed to excuse yourself on the grounds that you were dealing with an hysteric); the third too rude. In the end my letter was polite, neither sarcastic nor acrimonious. I gave you a matter-of-fact account of what happened to me. I said I thought you'd want to know about it, so that the experience couldn't be repeated for anyone else. I suggested a few things (a female nurse to take the patient to and from Theatre; fewer people, if possible, present in Theatre; the provision of a sanitary belt or pants afterwards) to make it less of an ordeal for other women in future. Yours sincerely, etc., etc.

Nineteen days later I got your reply: seven typewritten lines, sincerely regretting 'the problems you encountered in the Day Case Unit', hoping the Coil was 'proving satisfactory' – signed in your absence by your secretary, and enclosing your bill.

Could you please tell me, because it wasn't quite clear, which part of the Infirmary was the Day Case Unit?

#### *Afterword 2: The Titles*

I had difficulty deciding on a title for this story. I hope I chose the right one (the right one, that is, for the story, and also for you). It cannot be said to mislead, although it may be on the dull

side. If you did find it dull, you might be interested to see, in case there's one here you prefer, the other titles I rejected in favour of it. Before I list them, I'd like to tell you my reason for discarding them. It's that, when I typed them out, I saw they could all be construed as containing bitter little ironies; they all seemed to smack of, if not quite feminist, womens' or alternative writing.

I was worried they might, if you're a man, put you off.

Here they are, then, in order of invention, not merit:

- 1) The Would You Rather Game
- 2) That's Enough Gynaecology - Ed.
- 3) *Volenti Non Fit Injuria* \*
- 4) How to Make Your Man Happy in Bed.

\*Which is what Lettice's husband said, not unsympathetically and among other things, when she told him what happened in Theatre. It seemed quite neat for a while, perhaps the best of the bunch, I nearly settled for it; but not everyone appreciates Latin tags, some people consider them a joke or pretentious, not everyone understands them.

© Georgina Hammick, first published in the *Critical Quarterly* in autumn 1986, reprinted in *People for Lunch and Other Stories* in 1987 and 1996.



# OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

‘Miss Pettigrew follows Miss LaFosse from boudoir to nightclub in a daze of happiness. Drink, dance, drugs, sex; Miss Pettigrew demurs with a spinsterish blush... then in she dives. She know her day must end and her dreary life begin again, but when the magical 24 hours have passed Miss Pettigrew is a changed woman. *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day* is perhaps the happiest, most ebullient piece of fiction ever written for adults. It takes, sadly, far less than a day to read, but the sparkle doesn't fade for weeks.’ *Newsday*

‘I love the elegant dove-grey jackets, but mainly I love the writing this shop champions: neglected early twentieth century “women’s writing” that has a strong focus on domesticity and psychological interiority; the sort of thing male critics of the time dismissed as mundane and middlebrow.’ John O’Connell, Books Editor *Time Out*

‘*Miss Pettigrew* may not be a literary classic, but only the harshest of readers could fail to be charmed by the delightful heroine... Chronicled to the minute over a 24-hour time span, it is impossible to switch off – I had painted an entire bedroom by the end. It is intelligently read by Frances McDormand, who also stars in the film. Rumour has it she loved the book so much she insisted on recording it. [This is

true.] Exquisitely packaged, as ever, by tiny London publisher Persephone, *Miss Pettigrew* is a treasure.’ *Time Out*

‘*Daddy’s Gone A-Hunting* is so sharply written, so observant. It’s beautifully pared down: I think Penelope Mortimer was a brilliant novelist and it’s time she was revived. The emotions are timeless and she deals with them in a way that’s applicable to women anywhere; the mother-daughter relationship is beautifully done, mainly because she feels that her daughter does not understand her.’ Valerie Grove on A Good Read BBC R4

‘*The Crowded Street* is a family saga, comedy of manners and *roman à clef*. It tells the story of Muriel Hammond, from schoolgirl to maturity. The Hammonds inhabit the genteel Yorkshire village of Marshington, its confines narrow, its mindset small. Muriel leaves school to embark on Marshington armed only with a determination ‘so much to be good’ and a naive certainty that excitement beckons. Her disillusionment is slow but inexorable. Marshington values a single quality in women: marriageability. It is a quality Muriel lacks. *The Crowded Street* contains moments of terrific comedy and is punctuated by a quietly mordant wit that ruthlessly exposes the pretensions of Marshington’s intensely snobbish

provincial society. The novel is well-crafted, elegant, intelligent and persuasive.’ Matthew Dennison the *Spectator*

‘With repartee worthy of Noel Coward, the audiobook version of *Miss Pettigrew* will keep you chuckling but also touch your heart. Congratulations, too, on the prettiest and most practical CD casing I’ve come across.’ Christina Hardymont *The Times*

‘*Little Boy Lost* by Marghanita Laski – a poignant story, describing the post-war search in France for a lost child. The narrative develops into an emotional and moving conclusion.’ (Readers’ recommendation from the Swannington Women’s Institute Book Club, which read four other books – *Human Traces* by Sebastian Faulks, *The Little Friend* by Donna Tartt, *Oscar and Lucinda* by Peter Carey and *Landscape of Love* by Sally Beauman and chose *Little Boy Lost* as its favourite.) *WI Life*

‘In her brilliantly written, painfully honest novels, Penelope Mortimer turned her unflinching gaze on women’s lot in a pre-feminist age. *Daddy’s Gone A-Hunting*, the chilling but compulsively readable story of a middle-class housewife trapped in a loveless marriage, is a fantastic book – unsettling, at times, blackly comic.’ Anna Carey *The Gloss*

# WW1 ENDED 90 YEARS AGO

We publish the picture below because of this anniversary (and have put our WW1 nurses uniform on display in Lamb's Conduit Street). The immediate and long-term effects of the war is a running theme throughout many of our books, for example it is why women like Miss Pettigrew, Miss Ranskill and now Miss Buncler did not marry; it

is the subject of our first book, *William – an Englishman*; it is in the background of Winifred Holtby's *The Crowded Street*; its influence is felt in the very first chapter of *Manja*; and so on. We reproduce this picture because it is unusual and interesting. As the authors of the book from which it is taken comment: 'The nurses shown here are clearly, from their

relaxed posture, socially at ease with the Prince... Class differences exacerbated the problem many VADs encountered with the professional nurses under whom they worked, who disliked training the inexperienced and also resented the manifestation of different class attitudes and means. Yet the VADs worked amazingly hard in inadequate conditions.'



*The Prince of Wales at the Duchess of Sutherland's Hospital at Calais during a visit by the King and Queen, 14 June 1917. From Working for Victory? Images of Women in the First World War (1987) by Diana Condell and Jean Liddiard. p29*

# MISS PETTIGREW: THE FILM

As Miss Pettigrew Frances McDormand is a study in slowly revealed courage, providing a still, sure centre around which whirls Amy Adams' delightfully flighty Delysia. It's a magical 24 hours for her, and, if you're a big romantic at heart and crave a happy ending, let some of that magic rub off on you. *Country Life*

Without Ms. Adams' presence, who knows what *Miss Pettigrew* might have been. As it stands, it is an example of how a little nothing of a story can be inflated into a little something

of a movie with perfect casting, dexterous tonal manipulation and an astute eye and ear for detail. How light is this movie? So buoyant that even an air raid warning, signaling that this whole world is about to crumble, can't dampen its giddy spirits. *New York Times*

The frothiness of the showbiz intrigues is counterpointed by the implicit sadness of Miss Pettigrew's existence. Beneath the surface glitter lies the realisation of a life not fully lived, and the chasm of menacing poverty. The creaks in *Miss Pettigrew's* staging

can be forgiven so long as you concentrate on the fabulous production design, the costumes and the exuberantly brassy score. *The Independent*

The heroine is a wistful spectator on Delysia's youth, beauty and romantic intrigues, a part that would no doubt be written with a creepy sub-text today. It is briefly touching to see a film that dares to celebrate romance among the middle-aged. Despite its limitations, I found it impossible to dislike this frail little tale. *The Sunday Telegraph*





# THIS AND THAT

**T**he *Persephone Bookshop* at 109 Kensington Church Street London W8 is already building up a loyal clientèle. All the Original Persephone books are on sale here and the new Classics; and we try to stock a wrapped copy of every Persephone book (£2 extra). We also have a good selection of other new books, arranged by category (children's books, for which there is an entire small room), biography, cookery, history etc. and publisher (Eland, Pushkin, New York Review Books etc.). We offer a free courier service to local account customers. The opening hours are 10-6 every day (not Sunday). But the mail-order is still done from 59 Lamb's Conduit Street WC1N 3NB, which also sells the full range of Persephone books and is open on weekdays 10-6, Saturdays 12-5.

**T**he Persephone *Book Group* continues on the first Wednesday of every month from 6.30-8.00pm at the Lamb's Conduit Street shop: about a dozen of us discuss that month's book, drink madeira and eat bread and cheese. Please ring 0207 242 9292 if you would like to come (occasionally or every month). We have also started a *Book Group* at the Notting Hill shop; this is led by Claudia Fitzherbert and is on the third Monday of the month, also from 6.30-8.00. It is going backwards through the 81 books (whereas at

LCS we started with No. 1 and have now reached No.29). Please telephone the Notting Hill Gate shop on 0207 221 2201 if you wish to join this group.

**T**he star of the film of *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*, Frances McDormand, suggested that she read the unabridged audiobook for us and this she has done – it is available on five CD's in a nicely designed little box. The retail price is £20 in the UK but Persephone readers may buy it for £18 from us (plus £2 p & p).

**N**ext Spring and Summer's books are *Amours de Voyage* by Arthur Hugh Clough, a long narrative poem set in Italy in the 1850s which we publish with a new Preface by Julian Barnes and *Making Conversation* by Christine Longford, a very funny 1931 novel in the *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* mode which has a new Preface by Rachel Billington. And in addition we publish the first in a new series of Persephone Lives, *The Other Elizabeth Taylor* by Nicola Beauman, a life of the mid-twentieth century novelist.

**T**he Persephone *Fortnightly Letter* appears on the website on the 15th and 30th of every month. Apart from writing about anything that seems to be Persephone-related, and linking to relevant articles or comments, any extra Persephone events or updates would of course be

mentioned there. We also try occasionally to email the (now) eight thousand readers whose email addresses we have (half of our total mailing list).

**P**ersephone will be at the *House and Garden* 'Spirit of Christmas' Fair at Olympia from 5-9 November (10-6 every day, 10-5 on Sunday). Most of our books will be available and we will send any we do not have free postage the next day. *Nicola Beauman* will be talking at a teatime event at the Bridport Literary Festival on Saturday 15 November; at Chawton House Library in Hampshire on Thursday 15 January; at the Lewes Literary Club on Monday 30 March; and at the Suffolk Book League on Wednesday 8 April.

**T**he *Fourth Persephone Lecture*, for which there are now just a few tickets left, will be on Tuesday November 18th, again at the Art Workers Guild in Queen Square at 6.30: Professor *Elaine Showalter* will talk about 'The Home-Maker and the Home-Wrecker: Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Susan Glaspell, and 20th Century American Women Writers'.

**T**o book for any of the events listed overleaf please ring *Persephone Books* on 0207 242 9292. The *Teas* cost £10, the *Lecture* £20, the *Lunches* and the *Films* £30 (except for the *Lunch* in aid of *CRUSE* which is £35).

# EVENTS

The first Persephone event this autumn will be a **Lunch** on **Wednesday 12 November** in the Lamb's Conduit Street shop: **Polly Toyntee** of the *Guardian* will talk about **Round about a Pound a Week** by Maud Pember Reeves, for which she has written the Preface.

On **Tuesday 25 November** there will be another showing at the **BFI** 21 Stephen Street W1 of the 1924 film of **The Home-Maker** (this time Kevin Brownlow is kindly lending us his better-quality copy).

On **Tuesday 2 December** **Tim Dowling**, also of the *Guardian*, will talk at a **Lunch** about 'The Provincial Lady to Notting Hill Man: The Columnist's Life.' Tim is married to Sophie de Brant, who runs the new **Persephone Bookshop** (at 109 Kensington Church Street); she will also be at the lunch.

On **Thursday 4 December** from 3.30-5.30 there will be a **Tea** (cucumber sandwiches, cake and meringues) at Annabel's, 27 Sciennes Road, Edinburgh 9. The last (hugely successful) tea we held there was to celebrate **House-Bound**, this one will of course celebrate **Miss Bunckle's Book**, whose author, DE Stevenson, lived not far away at Moffat. The crime writer **Aline Templeton**, who suggested that we reprint the book and wrote the Preface, will give a short talk; it is

hoped that DE Stevenson's daughter and granddaughter will be there.

On **Thursday 11 December** both shops will be open from 10-8 instead of 10-6; mulled wine will be served (throughout the day!) and all books will be gift-wrapped for no extra charge.



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On **Wednesday 21 January** there will be a repeat showing at the BFI of **The Pumpkin Eater** with a script by

Harold Pinter, based on the novel by Penelope Mortimer. And on **Wednesday 11 February** there will be a showing at the BFI of **Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day** in aid of **CRUSE**. For each of the three films the format is the same: lunch is served from 1 o'clock onwards (salads or sandwiches with a glass of wine and fruit), the film is briefly introduced and then shown at 2 o'clock and afterwards there is tea (chocolate brownies).

On **Thursday 19 February** there will be a **Lunch** to celebrate **Miss Bunckle's Book** at which scenes from a play based on the book will be read by, among others, Anne Harvey and, it is hoped, DE Stevenson's son, daughter and granddaughter.

On **Thursday 12 March** **John O'Connell**, the Books Editor of *Time Out*, will be in discussion with Nicola Beauman at a **Lunch** on 'Women's Fiction: Interior or Inferior?' (The subject was prompted by his comment about our books in *Time Out*, quoted on p24, when interior became inferior because of a typo. And yet at first we were not quite sure it was a typo...)

All the lunches, which are at the Lamb's Conduit Street shop, begin at 12.30 with a glass of wine, lunch itself is just after 1 o'clock, then the speaker resumes and we end at about 2.30.

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If we have failed to acknowledge something that appears in the *Persephone* Biannually, please let us know.

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