



The Persephone Biannually

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Alice in Wonderland 1879 oil on canvas by Leslie George Dunlop

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OUR BOOKS FOR AUTUMN/WINTER 2011–12

N*o Surrender*, Persephone Book No.94, is our first suffragette novel. Yet is it? On page 84 of Cicely Hamilton's autobiography she says that *William an Englishman* (1919), which became Persephone Book No.1 in 1999, 'was taken by its public and critics for a war novel, but as a matter of fact it was only accidentally that it dealt with the catastrophe of 1914. It was really a "suffrage" novel.' Having frequently wondered what would happen if her fellow suffragettes were confronted by 'something more dangerous to life and limb than rough-and-tumbles round the Houses of Parliament', she planned her book, but was then unable to write it until the last year of the war. By then its focus had shifted.

Constance Maud (1857–1929) knew Cicely Hamilton because both were members of the 400-strong Women Writers Suffrage League. She had published several children's books, as well as works of popular history, and lived in Chelsea with her sister; both of them were active suffragettes. *No Surrender* was published by Gerald Duckworth (he would publish his half-sister Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out* four

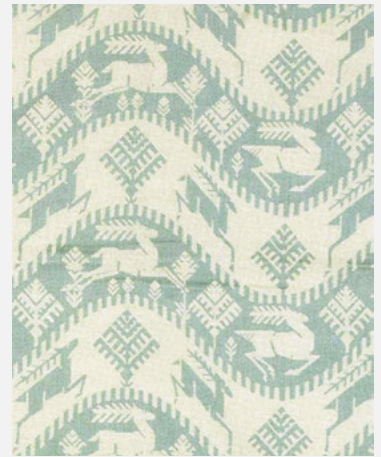
years later) in November 1911 when the struggle for the vote was at its height.

A suffragette novel *par excellence* – and it is a mystery why it has never been republished before – the narrative of *No Surrender* is faithful to real facts and incidents, with some of the main characters drawing on leading suffrage figures. One character is based on Lady Constance Lytton and another, the heroine Jenny Clegg, is a Lancashire mill girl (who speaks in authentic dialect) – thus putting paid to the myth that the suffrage movement was mainly middle-class. The main focus of the novel is on the strong support for women's suffrage by women workers in the textile mills (Jenny says, "we working women, you see – we need the vote for our homes, our children, our work – it is an economic question, this one of our votes") and on the prejudices against votes for women on the part of many of the men in the labour movement.

When Emily Wilding Davison, who was to die in 1913 under the King's horse at the Epsom Derby, reviewed *No Surrender*, she wrote: "There is



'Mechtilde', a linen in suffragette colours designed by the Omega Workshops in 1913, used for No Surrender (1911).



A worsted cotton damask designed by Alec Hunter for St Edmundsbury Weavers in 1930, used for Greenbanks (1932).



'Grapes' 1932, a linen designed by Duncan Grant for Allan Walton Textiles, used for Dinners for Beginners (1934).

scarcely a notable incident of the militant campaign which is left untouched. As we devour its pages, we once more review such unforgettable events as the Pantechnicon incident, the protest of the Grille, the Suffragette Fire-Engine, the sending of women by Express Post to the Prime Minister, and the final word-picture of [the procession of 1910]. But for vivid realism, the pictures of prison life, of the Hunger Strike and Forcible Feeding [cf. the 1912 poster reproduced on this page], are difficult to beat. It is a book which breathes the very spirit of our Women's Movement.'

Another key aspect of *No Surrender* is that the suffragettes were a sisterhood. The defining scene takes place in prison. 'In a small bare cell about eight feet by six, the furniture of which consisted of one wooden stool, five women were crowded together. Five women of widely different type, age, class and education, united by only bond, but that sufficiently strong to break down all the ordinary barriers created by such differences, and place them at once on the footing of comrades and sisters. It was such a bond as united the early Christians crowded together behind the bars of the Coliseum cells awaiting their turn to fight and to die for the faith that was in them.'

Nevertheless, the book is even-handed. As Lydia Fellgett (who is writing a PhD about Betty Miller at UEA and

works part-time at Persephone Books) writes in her Preface: 'A political novel cannot be successful without creating engaging characters: it is therefore also a love story between Jenny Clegg and the Independent Labour Party member Joe Hopton. And it is about powerful female friendship fostered through the common cause. But like most of the (surprisingly few) novels that emerged from the women's suffrage movement, *No Surrender's* importance comes from its documentation of social history; it is polemical but not without complexity; it accurately

portrays the arguments of the anti-Suffragists alongside those of the heroines; and it is a passionate account, full of enthralling detail and political fervour.'

Greenbanks, Persephone Book No. 95, was chosen as the 'Choice of the Book Society' in the summer of 1932. 'Not a Recommendation, which is all I would have hoped for if I had given it a thought, but the *Choice!* I can't believe it. I am stunned,' wrote Dorothy Whipple in her diary. It was the beginning of a long association of her work with the Book Society. And when thousands of people received



their *Book Society News* some weeks later, the novelist Hugh Walpole wrote about *Greenbanks* at length. It had been chosen, he said, because of its creation of character. 'To put it plainly, in Dorothy Whipple's picture of a quite ordinary family before and after the war there is some of the best creation of living men and women that we have had for a number of years in the English novel. She is a novelist of true importance'

He went on: 'I believe *Greenbanks* will be remembered for a long time to come because of the characters of two people in it, the grandmother Louisa and the granddaughter Rachel. In them Dorothy Whipple has performed splendidly the great job of the novelist, which is to increase for us infinitely the population of the living world. Every character in this quiet book is alive. Louisa is an old woman, rather muddle-headed, generous, sometimes irresponsible, always governed by the emotions of a loving, anxious heart, which is at the same time never sentimental, who has become as real to me as any of the ladies in *Cranford* [and indeed, at Persephone Books we often call Dorothy Whipple the twentieth century Mrs Gaskell]. Rachel is alive from the first instant. She, perhaps, is more of an achievement than Louisa, for kindly dear old women are frequently successful in novels, but a child who is real and charming and quite natural, moving through those difficult years from ten to eighteen,

cannot be easy to create. This is a quiet and a true book. It is also a beautiful book.'

Greenbanks was Dorothy Whipple's third novel – her first was *Young Anne* (1927) and her second *High Wages* (1930), Persephone Book No. 85. (We have also published *Someone at a Distance* Persephone Book No. 3, *They Knew Mr Knight* No. 19, *The Priory* No. 40, *They Were Sisters* No. 56 and *The Closed Door and Other Stories* No. 74.) It is the name of the solid old-fashioned house lived in by the Ashton family just before and after the First World War. The book chronicles the Ashtons' joys and sorrows: marital infidelity, illegitimate babies, divorce,

autocratic parents, rebellious offspring, unhappy wives.

The *Spectator* reviewed *Greenbanks* at the end of September 1932, after *Cold Comfort Farm* (of which they liked the first half better than the second) and said: '*Greenbanks* is a pleasant, quiet, delightful domestic book, lifted head and shoulders above the ranks of pleasant, quiet, delightful domestic books by the uncanny accuracy of the portraiture and the lightness and delicacy of its touch. Louisa lives at the house, with her brood gathered more or less around her. Jim and Ambrose, her virtuous and self-satisfied son and son-in-law, make league against Charles, her rolling-stone son, whom she



Louis Gimmet 'The Coat of Many Colours' ©Royal Pavilion Museums, Brighton and Hove

adores. Laura, her daughter, marries the wrong man out of pique. It is all perfectly ordinary and far from undistinguished. The portraits of Laura, Rachel and Ambrose (in particular) are as good as they can be.'

And Charles Lock, Professor of English Literature at the University of Copenhagen, who has written the *Persephone* Afterword, points out: 'By 1932 there were many novels protesting about the obstacles faced by young women. There are still not many novels that can so stealthily take down male pretensions and presumptions.' It is Ambrose who is pilloried, his wife Letty who is a tragic figure, poor Letty who 'had

missed the great love she had dreamed of as a girl, but she thought about it no more. Her wishes had changed as she grew older; she now only wanted to get away by herself, to enjoy life in her own way. "It's as though I have grit in my wheels," she said to herself. Ambrose was the grit.'

Although the first mention of her book in her diary was despairing ('I cannot get on with *Greenbanks*. Shall I ever have done with it?'), when Dorothy Whipple handed it over to her agent and was 'so relieved to get rid of the book', in the end she was 'sorry to see Louisa, Rachel, Kate, Letty, Ambrose – all of them, troop silently away. They

have finished with me...' How right her American publisher was when he wrote, '*Greenbanks* is one of the loveliest books I have read in a long time.' But after she had received Hugh Walpole's *Book Society* piece, she had to copy down phrases 'so that I can turn to it when I feel, as I often do, that I can't write for toffee.' And, after it became a bestseller, she noted: 'I can hardly believe my book is turning out like this... I wonder what my self-deprecatory little grand-mother would have thought of herself in this book. She would have been amazed. I am sure she never dreamed that she was being anything, or doing anything that would remain in my mind all these years.'



Stanley Roy Badmin (1906–89) Towcester High Street 1940

Our third book for Autumn/Winter 2011–12 is Persephone Book No. 96 *Dinners for Beginners* by Rachel and Margaret Ryan (whom we believe to have been mother and daughter but since we have not found the copyright holder we are not sure; if their heirs read this, will the copyright holder please step forward so that we can send her – or him – a cheque?).

This is our eighth cookbook – as is evident from the new list of our books by genre at the back of the *Persephone Catalogue*. It came out in 1934, the same year as *The Country Housewife's Book* by Lucy H Yates. Both books were suggested to us by readers, one by the owner of a working farm in Kent (the country housewife) and one by a busy young teacher (dinners for beginners).

The premise of the book is that it is for 'people who know nothing about cooking. At the same time it is intended for all those – whether they can cook or not – who appreciate good food and like to entertain their friends, but cannot afford to spend more than a strictly limited amount of money on housekeeping. The authors have tried to write a cookery book that EXPLAINS EVERYTHING. No knowledge is taken for granted. The beginner is not expected to know by the light of nature how to make gravy, sauces or pastry; she is told when the lid of a saucepan or fireproof dish ought to be on and when it should be off.'

The book contains 109 recipes and 28 menus of dinners for four people, seven for each season of the year, at a total cost of 5/-. This is about £15 nowadays and indeed it would be possible (if one excluded wine, cheese and coffee as the Ryans have done) to feed four people on £15. Here are some of the menus for autumn: Squab Pie (made with stewing lamb and vegetables), corn on the cob and baked pears; chicken in white sauce, braised celery, cheese potatoes and lemon cream; rabbit, cauliflower, blackberry pudding and junket; jugged hare with vegetables and rice and pineapple cream; and whiting with spaghetti and chocolate pudding.

Dinners for Beginners was written at a time when the working girl, or the bachelor, or the new wife could no longer rely on having someone to do the

cooking for them (despite the book's original cover, which shows a kitchen maid hard at work in a basement kitchen). It would have been a perfect book for Felicity in *Greenery Street* (1925) or Catherine in *Hostages to Fortune* (1933) or Rose in *House-Bound* (1942); and will be ideal nowadays for anyone wanting to cook delicious meals using traditional English recipes.



‘SUSAN AND FATHER CHRISTMAS’ BY MOLLIE PANTER-DOWNES

Up to the time that Susan was five years old, the day nursery was pink and blue, the night nursery was blue and pink – a scheme in which a pair of Nannie’s large, sagging shoes were apt to sound a regrettably earthy note. It was impossible to keep all the furniture in a Lilliputian scale, but the Gargantuan outlines of Nannie’s bed had been softened with pixies. Climbing into it at night, she laid her spectacles and floating false teeth on a whimsical little table shaped like a toadstool. Pretty, Nanny considered it, and she mourned when Mrs Ramsay read in a book that a child should not be confused by untruthful fairytales and away went the untruthful pixies; the frieze of bogus rabbits gave way to a reproduction of van Gogh’s sunflowers.

‘I shall change the picture every month,’ said Mrs Ramsay brightly. ‘Susan is big enough to acquire an interest in Art.’

So van Gogh vanished in October and Susan scowled at a strawberry-pink Matisse. Raoul Dufy had a run in November, and on Christmas Eve Nannie climbed creakingly on a chair and stuck a sprig of holly and some tinsel behind a dizzy Dali, which looked much embarrassed.

‘Don’t you simply love it?’ Mrs Ramsay said, coming into the

nursery and surprising Susan glancing through an untruthful and confusing copy of Hans Andersen. Mrs Ramsay referred to the Dali, not to Nannie’s holly.

‘Not much,’ said Susan.

Mrs Ramsay sighed. Susan was not reacting properly to Art, or to the cork dado which was meant to be pinned over with bright pictures snipped by the child herself from magazines. At the moment it was adorned by a solitary clipping, a newspaper photograph of the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose arriving at Balmoral.

‘Don’t we look gay?’ said Nannie, referring to the holly. She hung a large silver cardboard bell from the electric light and observed ambiguously, ‘We’re getting ever so excited about our stocking. But I tell us that we’ll have to get to sleep quickly tonight or else Father Christmas will never be able to get down our chimney.’

‘It’s not really Father Christmas, you know, darling,’ said Mrs Ramsay to her daughter. ‘It’s *really* only Daddy and me.’

‘Is it?’ said Susan.

She and Nannie exchanged a smiling glance, immeasurably superior.

‘There’s no such person as Father Christmas, *really*,’ said Mrs Ramsay, but her voice sounded

thin and unconvincing. She was not surprised, as she left the nursery, to hear Susan say anxiously, ‘You don’t think he’ll get stuck, do you, Nannie?’, and she sighed again. Susan was difficult.

Feeling depressed, Mrs Ramsay went downstairs and carried the sherry decanter and glasses into the living room. For a while she sat there, despondent among the perky chintzes, brooding over parenthood. Something was wrong somewhere. She took the job seriously. She went to endless pains to bend the budding mind (oh, so gently!) up all the right pergolas, to prune away the rubbishy false values and hypocrisy that she remembered as the horrors of her own childhood; but the thing simply was not working out right. Was it Nannie’s fault? Had the moment come to start looking round for some stark young woman, nourished on Adlerian theories? Mrs Ramsay took a good swig of sherry and decided that the moment had probably come.

Nannie had admirable qualities, certainly, but Susan still believed a lot of whimsies about little pink babies floating down on little pink clouds to their little pink cribs, although Mrs Ramsay had taken the first opportunity to read her a jolly book called *Where Did I Come From?* There was the

question of religion, too. Mrs Ramsay had made it quite clear from the start that no form of belief was to be forced on Susan, but she had an idea that a good deal of bootleg praying went on quietly in the nursery. For the last few days the place had echoed with shrill noels and shepherds watching their flocks by night, and Nannie and Susan had come in rosy, clutching horrid little packages from Woolworth's that leaked silver dust and artificial holly berries over the rugs. Metaphorically speaking, the atmosphere of the house was thick with reindeers, Mrs Ramsay reflected fretfully.

Feeling better, she helped herself to another glass of sherry. Yes, Nannie would have to go. Already in Mrs Ramsay's thoughts the break had been made, and she saw the future as an uncluttered landscape, hygienically bright as an Alpine meadow, across which she and Susan ran hand in hand miraculously of an age, telling each other everything, having fun. She felt warm and brave and ready to go upstairs now and tackle Nannie; but on second thoughts it might be kinder to wait until the holidays were over. Let them enjoy Christmas – this last Christmas, Mrs Ramsay decided contentedly – in peace.

When she went up to say good night to Susan, the child was already lying in bed, talking quietly to the old blue bear that she cherished stubbornly in

preference to the amusing peasant dolls her father had brought her from Yugoslavia last summer. Nannie had switched off the light and gone into the day nursery. Mrs Ramsay knew that children are only adults in miniature and that their unsupervised conversation is often instructive, and therefore she paused at the door, listening. Susan was crooning in a smug voice, 'There's no such person as Father Christmas, *really*, darling – it's only me what fills your stocking, stoopid.' Then she spoke for the blue bear coldly, 'I'm surprised at an old woman like you, making up such ridic'ulous stories,' and the bed

jiggled, and the empty stocking tied to the rail capered up and down with Susan's laughter.

Mrs Ramsay suddenly felt uncertain. Things might not work out so beautifully after all, even without Nannie, who at that moment was comfortably rocking and listening to herald angels on the radio, unconscious that they packed a nasty punch in their tidings for her this season of peace and good will to all men.

This story first appeared in The New Yorker on December 24th 1938. It is reprinted by permission of the Estate of Mollie Panter-Downes.

MILDEST AUTUMN 2005

Hottest September Day | 2nd September 1906

(35.6°C recorded in Bawtry, South Yorkshire)

(also one of the 10 hottest days on record in UK)

HEAVIEST RECORDED HAILSTONE | SEPTEMBER 5TH 1958

(recorded in Horsham, Sussex weighing 185gms)

EARLIEST RECORDED WIDESPREAD SNOWFALL | SEPTEMBER 20TH 1919

WETTEST DAY OF THE YEAR ON AVERAGE | 20TH OCTOBER

AUTUMN

Highest 180 minute total rainfall | 7th October 1960

(178mm was recorded at Horncastle, Lincolnshire)

Warmest November Day | 5th November 1938

(21°C recorded in London, 22°C recorded in North Wales)

Most Prolonged Fog 19th November 1936

(recorded in both Manchester and Birmingham)

Wettest Day on record 21st November 2009

Longest Tornado Outbreak | 21st November 1981

(105 tornadoes were spawned in the space of 5¼ hours)

Linen tea towel by Karen Wilks available from the shop for £10.

OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

‘The stories in *Midsummer Night in the Workhouse* describe, in unsentimental though often touching prose, young women, sometimes married, sometimes not, anticipating, enjoying, or just missing out on brief sexual encounters with men, sometimes married, sometimes not. Diana Athill writes in the preface that seeing her stories republished reminds her of how it felt to discover she could write and how it changed her life profoundly. She hopes they will give pleasure. They do, both in their own right and as a coda to a remarkable woman’s life.’ Katie Law in the *Evening Standard*

‘This beautiful volume of Diana Athill’s stories will delight her existing fans and win her new ones. They reveal the same wry, mischievous and essentially humane sensibility that will be familiar to readers of her memoirs. They echo the struggle to achieve sexual confidence that she has described elsewhere. But their value goes far beyond their potential biographical contribution. In her capacity to calmly and cheerfully record deep sadness she ranks among the very best writers of late 20th-century English short stories.’ Ruth Scurr in *The Times*

‘In 1909 Maud Pember Reeves and her colleagues in the Fabian Women’s Group started something extraordinary... a sort

of Edwardian Sure Start. The breathtaking aspect of their work was not their intervention but the data they captured in the process. *Round about a Pound a Week* is a fascinating read full of heartbreaking detail. It was hugely influential to the pioneers of the welfare state.’ Dr Frances Wedgwood in the *British Medical Journal*

‘It may have been first published in 1973, but reading it again in this elegant re-print, Adam Fergusson’s *The Sack of Bath* remains a real shocker. The fury of his polemic against the powers in Bath that seemed hell-bent on destroying everything except a few grand Georgian set-pieces in that beautiful city still has a terrible relevance today. Looking at the photographs of acres of modest stone houses being reduced to rubble to be replaced by unbelievably low grade “comprehensive redevelopment” is utterly depressing. Even more lowering is Fergusson’s account of the elevated and titled collaborators who advised the city that to build the “new” and “iconic” was morally superior to repair and restoration. This slim volume exposed exactly how aesthetically uneducated planners and architects were some 40 years ago and they still are today.’ Colin Amery in the *Spectator*

‘Throughout the war Mollie Panter-Downes sent the

New Yorker semi-autobiographical stories collected as *Good Evening, Mrs Craven*, about evacuees, the Home Guard and Red Cross sewing evenings. Here they are splendidly read by Lucy Scott. This funny, intelligent, deceptively low-key *Persephone Audiobook* about the Home Counties under siege is long overdue. What Clovis is to Saki, Mrs Ramsay is to Mollie Panter-Downes. Behind her watchful eyes and bright hostess smile she suffers fools venomously.’ Sue Arnold in the *Guardian*

‘Diana Athill’s writing career began in the 1960s with feisty short stories. In this terrific collection each tale is permeated with the sense that all individuals are ultimately alone. The action – and it’s invariably erotic action – is usually seen from the woman’s viewpoint.’ Val Hennessy in the *Daily Mail*

‘Life, in Diana Athill’s short stories, just doesn’t follow the scripts her protagonists have written for it. Time and again her characters surprise themselves, only to be surprised, in their turn, by events. The results are sometimes painful, sometimes startling, and nearly always extremely funny. Throughout there’s a sense that the author is as intrigued as the rest of us to know how it’s all going to end.’ Stephanie Cross in *The Lady*

ADÈLE GERAS ON WHIPPLE

‘Dorothy Whipple was a popular novelist of the 1930s and 1940s whose prose and content absolutely defeated us.’ Thus Carmen Callil in an article in the *Guardian*. My immediate reaction to this was: ‘Have Carmen C and I been reading the same books?’ I couldn’t imagine why she had so taken against a writer whom I admired very much. Was she wrong or was I? In matters of literary taste, there’s no argument you can make to try and win someone over. We all have our blank spots. I, for example, am allergic to Tolkien. But Whipple? I could understand someone saying, ‘She’s not my kind of thing. I don’t like those sorts of books.’ But to be ‘absolutely defeated’ by these novels? And to draw the infamous ‘Whipple line’ below which Virago wouldn’t venture? I didn’t get it.

However, my aim here is to persuade others that Whipple is a writer more than worthy of their attention. I’d say she was astonishingly good and in surprising ways, too. Her novels are also enjoyable and readable. These are not qualities at which readers should scoff and, moreover, they are not to be taken for granted. There are highly esteemed books which are pretty well unreadable. It’s quite a relief to look at the first page of something and know immediately where you are and with

whom and when. There’s no scratching of the head and thinking: Who’s saying this? What’s going on? When will things become clear?

Dorothy Whipple is a middle-class writer, and her subject is middle-class families. Her stories concern mothers and children, sisters, husbands and wives, and she is very good at delineating other relationships: with in-laws, with servants (even not very rich people had live-in help in her day) and especially with those who intrude into a household in different ways and somehow wreck the careful balance that has been established there. She loves the daily detail of life: the food, the clothes, the running of a house, be it large or small. Each novel has a moral, though it’s never overtly stated. Whipple sometimes uses her own belief in a benevolent God to provide comfort for her characters and an ending that might be deemed less than happy is made to seem better because, we are told, God is taking care of matters. I don’t regard this as any kind of barrier to my enjoyment.

Never less than acute, Whipple is sometimes positively Austen-sharp in her perceptions. She sees right through pretensions and often has a great deal of fun (there’s much to laugh at in even the most serious of her novels) at the

expense especially of minor characters. Schoolteachers, neighbours, tradesmen, peripheral men and women on the fringes of the books are as real as the main protagonists, without toppling over into caricature.

I particularly enjoy writers who pay attention to things like dress, jewellery, food, houses and gardens, but do not be alarmed if you think you hate that stuff. Whipple doesn’t go in for long descriptions which tire you out before you’re at the end of a paragraph. Rather, she manages to convey precisely what everything looks like and feels like in the most economical and deft of strokes.

Finally (and this is the most important thing of all about any novelist’s work), she makes her main protagonists come to life on the page and engage our emotions. We care deeply what happens to them. Occasionally, when truly ghastly things are going on, it’s very hard to read the words in front of you without holding your breath until matters improve. And sometimes, for some people (these are not cosy books) things get much, much worse. It’s also worth saying that while love is a very important part of Whipple’s subject matter, she is never sentimental and her style, whatever she’s describing, is never overwrought. She’s the

least hysterical of writers, but that makes the emotional punch behind her words even stronger.

T*hey Knew Mr Knight* (1934) concerns Thomas and Celia Blake and their financial difficulties. It sounds as though it might be dull but that's far from the case. The eponymous Mr Knight is in fact the Devil, though the allegory is subtly handled and what happens to each character is both fascinating and constantly entertaining. The story is rich with event and incident, astute about the effects of poverty and wealth, interesting about what goes on between colleagues and neighbours and outstandingly sensitive in describing the nuances of family life: the problems which actually seem to grow out of the deep love you have for those closest to you.

T*he Priory* (1939) is in a genre I particularly like: the story of a house, Saunby Priory, and its inhabitants. The lives of the Marwood family, the way they're bound up with the place, the financial difficulties involved in the upkeep of such a property, the upstairs/downstairs aspects of the story, and what happens to the protagonists, make for the sort of novel where drama and conflict, just because they are set in a reassuring context, might seem less unbearable, and yet the emotional force of every relationship is well-described and dealt with fully. Also, when twins are born to one of the Marwood sisters, we encounter Nurse Pye,

a positively Dickensian creation who takes over the household in an almost sinister way. The novel is absorbing and wide-ranging, and particularly good about the problems of adjusting to being a mother for the first time.

Parts of *They Were Sisters* (1943) are so harrowing that I found it quite hard to read in places. The story is a simple one. There are three sisters. One (Vera) is unutterably vain and self-absorbed. Another (Lucy) is 'the good sister', anxious about the others and always striving to do her best for everyone. She is also happily married and with no children of her own. This makes her the ideal aunt and it's thanks to her that the young children in the book have any kind of life. The children of the third sister (Charlotte) in particular need shelter and protection because their father, Geoffrey, is one of the most odious, abusive and loathsome men ever to be found within the covers of a novel. There are moments of unspeakable bleakness in this book, but the main thing I will remember it for is Geoffrey, who is a monster in a completely different way from other abusive men you've met in fiction.

S*omeone at a Distance* (1953) is my favourite of Whipple's novels. It's about Avery and Ellen North and their children, Hugh and Anne. Avery's mother hires a French companion called Louise Lanier and she acts as a kind of serpent in this Garden of Eden. It's another book where

you want at various times to shout out to the characters: Oh, don't do that. Can't you see what the consequence of that will be? Why won't you listen to him? Why don't you say something, etc. And yet Whipple has such control over her story, over her characters, that you are drawn along, deeply involved with everyone, even the detestable Louise. She is a magnificent creation and in this book Whipple does a really good job of describing French life as well. Having the book set in two places gives it its title. 'Someone at a distance' refers to Paul, Louise's ex-boyfriend. He scorned her while she was still in France and everything that happens in the novel is as a result of her trying to punish him for his behaviour. The Norths are simply pawns in her extended and unpleasant game. It's a terrific book, full of anguish, passion, jealousy and remorse.

'Proper people in interesting situations' is one definition of a good novel. I think that Whipple's books are precisely that. If some people think that they are no more than women's magazine fiction writ large, I think they are mistaken. Do try these novels and see what you think. I'm willing to bet you'll agree with me.

This piece first appeared on Norman Geras's blog
<http://normblog.typepad.com>

THE PERSEPHONE 96

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 This funny, romantic first novel, which came out in 1940, 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 destruction of a formerly happy 1950s marriage. Preface: Nina Bawden, R4 'Book at Bedtime' 2008
4. **Fidelity** by Susan Glaspell 1915 novel by a Pulitzer-winning writer brilliantly 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 woman in Amsterdam, 'the Anne Frank for grown-ups', wrote diaries and letters: they 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 read on R4 twice, and on R7. Preface: Gregory LeStage Also available as a Persephone audiobook (unabridged) read by Lucy Scott
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 'One of the great English cookbooks, full of delightful, delicious recipes that actually work.' Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall
11. **Julian Grenfell** by Nicholas Mosley A biography of the First World War poet, and of his mother Ettie Desborough. Preface: the author
12. **It's Hard to be Hip over Thirty and Other Tragedies of Married Life** by Judith Viorst Funny, weary and wise 1960s poems about marriage, children and reality. Preface: the 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 Funny, observant and bleak 1947 short stories, twice in the *Evening Standard* bestseller list. Preface: AN Wilson
16. **Saplings** by Noel Streatfeild A 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; 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 women's lives from 1900–75, 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 nightclub 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 'Book at Bedtime' on R4 read by Jamie Glover. Afterword: Anne Sebba
- 29. The Making of a Marchioness by Frances Hodgson Burnett** A very entertaining 1901 novel about the ensuing melodrama after a governess marries a Marquis. A R4 Classic Serial in 2007. Preface: Isabel Raphael, Afterword: Gretchen Gerzina. Also available as a *Persephone audiobook* (unabridged) read by Lucy Scott
- 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. R4 '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. A novel in verse sounds unappealing – but we highly recommend this book.
- 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. Preface: Frances Partridge. Also available as an *unabridged Persephone audiobook* 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 (the author's daughter)
- 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 shielding her daughter from a blackmailer. Filmed as *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 1933 cookery book written for Aga owners which can 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 into 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 and his wife 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 cookbook about 'food for free', full of excellent (and now timely) 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*). A 'Book at Bedtime' on BBC R4. Preface: Sally Beaman

56. They Were Sisters by Dorothy Whipple A 1943 novel by this wonderful writer, contrasting three 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 anticipated.

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, 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* (fritillary), *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 of *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 about a young doctor in Arizona which encapsulates the social, racial and moral tensions of the time. By the author of *In a Lonely Place*. Afterword: Dominic Power

69. Journal of Katherine Mansfield The husband of the great short story writer (cf. *The Montana Stories*, Persephone Book 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 A 1957 cookery book which was a bestseller at the time and a pioneering work for British cooks. The line drawings and the

endpapers are by David Gentleman.

71. The Shuttle by Frances Hodgson Burnett A 1907 page-turner about Rosalie Vanderpoel, an American heiress who marries an English aristocrat, whose beautiful and enterprising sister Bettina sets out to rescue her. Preface: Anne Sebba

72. House-Bound by Winifred Peck This 1942 novel describes an Edinburgh woman deciding, radically, to run her house without help and do her own cooking; the war is in the background and foreground. Afterword: Penelope Fitzgerald

73. The Young Pretenders by Edith Henrietta Fowler An 1895 novel for adults and children 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

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-women's liberation era, bored and lonely in suburbia. Preface: Valerie Grove

78. A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914–39 by Nicola Beaman A mixture of literary criticism and historical evocation, first published in 1983, about the women writers of the inter-war period.

79. Round About a Pound a Week by Maud Pember Reeves A study of working-class life in Lambeth in the early years of the C20th that is witty, readable, poignant and fascinating – and relevant nowadays. 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, 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 1934 book by an author whose work sold in millions. Preface: Aline Templeton

82. Amours de Voyage by Arthur Hugh Clough A novel in verse, set in Rome in 1849, funny and beautiful and profound, and extraordinarily modern in tone. Preface: Julian Barnes

83. Making Conversation by Christine Longford. An amusing, unusual 1931 novel about a girl growing up which is in the vein of *Cold Comfort Farm* and *Persephone Book No. 38 Cheerful Weather for the Wedding*. Preface: Rachel Billington

84. A New System of Domestic Cookery by Mrs Rundell An 1806 cookbook – we have reprinted the 1816 edition in facsimile – which is long, detailed and fascinating. Preface: Janet Morgan

85. High Wages by Dorothy Whipple Another novel by Persephone's bestselling writer about a girl setting up a dress shop just before the First World War. Preface: Jane Brocket

86. To Bed with Grand Music by Marghanita Laski A couple are separated by the war. She is serially unfaithful, a quite new take on 'women in wartime'. Preface: Juliet Gardiner

87. Dimanche and Other Stories by Irène Némirovsky Ten short stories by the author of *Suite Française*, written between 1934 and 1941. 'Luminous, extraordinary, stunning' was the verdict of reviewers.

88. Still Missing by Beth Gutcheon A 1981 novel about a woman whose six year-old son sets off on his own for school and does not return. But his mother never gives up hope...

89. The Mystery of Mrs Blencarrow by Mrs Oliphant Two 1880s novellas about women shockingly, and secretly, abandoned by their husbands, that were favourites of Penelope Fitzgerald. Afterword: Merryyn Williams

90. The Winds of Heaven by Monica Dickens This 1955 novel by the author of *Mariana* is about a widow with three rather unsympathetic daughters who eventually finds happiness. Afterword: AS Byatt

91. Miss Buncle Married by DE Stevenson A hugely enjoyable sequel to *Miss Buncle's Book* (No. 81) about Barbara Buncle's marriage and her move to a new village. Afterword: Fiona Bevan

92. Midsummer Night in the Workhouse by Diana Athill Twelve short stories, mostly written in the late 1950s and never published in the

UK, by the celebrated editor and memoir writer. Preface: the author. **Six stories are available read by the author as a Persephone audiobook.**

93. The Sack of Bath Adam Fergusson A 1973 polemic, with numerous black and white photographs, raging at the destruction of much of Bath's C18th artisan terraced housing. Preface: the author

94. No Surrender by Constance Maud A 1913 novel centring on the struggle for the vote by a mill girl and the upper-class Mary O'Neill who becomes her friend. Preface: Lydia Felgett

95. Greenbanks by Dorothy Whipple An early novel by Persephone's most popular author about an early C20th family and, in particular, the relationship of the grandmother and granddaughter. Afterword: Charles Lock.

96. Dinners for Beginners by Rachel and Margaret Ryan A 1934 cookery book for the novice cook telling her everything in exacting and, by today's standards, slightly punishing detail: useful but also eye-opening.



Sweet Peas 1938: watercolour by Margaret Calkin James taken from At the Sign of the Rainbow: Margaret Calkin James 1895–1985 (Felix Scribo, 2006) p62.

'LAST LAUGH' BY DOROTHY WHIPPLE

It was astonishing to find anyone so obviously well-off as Mrs Wilmot at the Claremont, one of the modest private hotels in which London abounds. The residents were mostly retired Army officers and their wives, widows, elderly bachelors and spinsters with small incomes. It says a good deal for the Claremont that most of them had been there for years; but it was, all the same, not the sort of place you would live in if you could afford a better.

Though there might be no fog outside, there seemed to be a fog in the hotel. The mirrors were misty. The stair-case was so dark that the steps were tipped with white canvas, perpetually pipe-clayed. The lights were bad. The fires were lost in cavernous grates. There were plenty of arm-chairs and sofas, but they sagged, and so did the beds.

Yet Mrs Wilmot was there, her furs and diamonds startling among the shapeless daytime cardigans and evening velveteens of the other ladies.

In the dining-room her table, loaded with bottles of wine and expensive fruits, was as conspicuous among the other tables, bare of extras, as she was herself in the rather dim company at the Claremont.

Since she was so rich, I wondered why she stayed there. And she seemed to be enjoying

her money so much that I felt she couldn't have had it long.

'Has she just come into a fortune or something?' I asked Mrs Cathcart.

'Has she *not!*' said Mrs Cathcart darkly, and needed no encouragement to tell me about it.

'I am not a close friend of Mrs Wilmot's,' explained Mrs Cathcart rather frostily.

She didn't tell me, though someone else did, that the reason why she was not a close friend of Mrs Wilmot's was because at one time when the Wilmots came home from the East and settled at the Claremont, Mr Wilmot had had one of his affairs with Mrs Cathcart. In fact, all Mrs Wilmot and Mrs Cathcart had in common was Mr Wilmot's unfaithfulness to both of them. It did, however, constitute a certain bond.

Mrs Wilmot had evidently put up with a good deal in the way of infidelity on the part of her husband. She might not have minded so much if it had been less public. But his affairs took place under the very eyes of the occupants of the Claremont; they knew as much about them as Mrs Wilmot herself. It must have been humiliating. The only consolation was that he ran through them pretty quickly. Mrs Cathcart, for instance, hadn't lasted long. There used to be intervals of something like

domestic harmony between Mr and Mrs Wilmot, until, in the third year of their residence at the Claremont, a Miss Sonia Kenworthy arrived.

Mrs Wilmot was not surprised when Geoffrey deserted Mrs Cathcart and almost at once began to make a fool of himself, as his wife put it, about Miss Kenworthy. But she was surprised that this rich, good-looking and comparatively young woman should take Geoffrey so seriously. The residents of the Claremont watched with scandalised, but immense, interest the development of a major affair.

So major, in fact, that Miss Kenworthy felt it advisable to remove herself to a flat on the other side of London; or perhaps it was merely that she didn't find the Claremont sufficiently comfortable. At any rate, she went, and Mr Wilmot began to leave the hotel every morning at ten o'clock as regularly as if he were going to business. But Mrs Wilmot and everybody else knew it wasn't business. They knew he spent every day with Miss Kenworthy.

Mrs Wilmot consoled herself as best she could by the cultivation of pot plants, of which she had forty-seven miniature varieties on a wire stand in her room, and by going to the cinema as often as possible. In the cheaper seats, because she could not afford the

others. The Wilmots had no money to speak of. That was why she could not understand the Kenworthy affair. She knew Geoffrey had no money to spend on Miss Kenworthy. He couldn't be said to be 'keeping' her. In fact, Mrs Wilmot reflected with astonishment, she must be keeping him. Mrs Wilmot couldn't understand why anybody should want to keep Geoffrey.

She disliked Miss Kenworthy intensely, because she shamed her before the occupants of the Claremont hotel. She disliked Geoffrey too now, although she could not show it; she was middle-aged, she had no money, nowhere else to go, no one else to be with but her husband. She put up with him because she didn't see what else there was to be done.

It was now that Mrs Cathcart and Mrs Wilmot drew together; not much, but a little. In the mornings when Geoffrey had departed to Miss Kenworthy, Mrs Cathcart popped into the Wilmots' room to watch Mrs. Wilmot water the plants and glean as much information about the Kenworthy affair as she could.

Mrs Wilmot didn't say much; she didn't know much, so she couldn't. But there was a good deal of unexpressed bitterness shared by the ladies over the cacti, the miniature roses and ferns, and the bulbs when it was bulb time.

The Wilmots' room was crowded with relics of their life in the East. There were Buddhas on the mantelpiece, joss-sticks in a jar by the gas-fire, tarnished

embroideries over the backs of the chairs and something Mrs Cathcart took to be a large lump of glue until Mrs Wilmot said it was a model of a Tibetan monastery in jade. In the window was a mahogany desk which Mrs Cathcart at that time never saw unlocked. Mrs Wilmot never saw it unlocked either, unless Geoffrey was sitting at it. She saw him writing there, but she didn't know what it was he wrote. She saw him going through his papers, but she didn't know what they were. Geoffrey was very secretive; at least with his wife.

Perhaps people who are always having affairs of the heart are searching for the true and final love. Mr Wilmot may have been

like that. At any rate, the Kenworthy affair went on for several years. To Mrs Wilmot it became a dull trouble, chronic rather than acute; and Mrs. Cathcart was more comfortable when because of the length of the affair, she had to give up all hope of recovering Mr Wilmot for herself.

Then one morning at breakfast, with the Wilmots at their table on the other side of the dining-room, Mrs. Cathcart, looking as usual down the Deaths column of *The Times*, gasped.

'Kenworthy, Sonia, 44, at the Westminster Clinic, after an operation for appendicitis,' she read, and bending over the paper, she read it again. It was unmistakable. It was in black and



A Woman in her Kitchen in Stevenage New Town in the late 1950s photograph © Stevenage Museum. From Putting on the Style MacDonald and Porter 1990

white. Miss Kenworthy was undoubtedly dead.

She lifted her head and looked across at Geoffrey Wilmot. He was finishing his coffee. In a few moments he went out of the room as he always did at this time, and shortly afterwards, Mrs Cathcart, still staring incredulously, saw him pass the windows on his way to the usual bus.

She could keep the startling announcement to herself no longer. She took *The Times* across to Mrs Wilmot's table and sat down abruptly.

'Have you seen this?' she said, laying a magenta nail on 'Kenworthy'.

Mrs Wilmot's reception of the news was as amazed as Mrs. Cathcart could have wished. She

was dumb-founded. Over the butter and marmalade dishes and the toast crumbs, the two women stared at each other.

'Didn't he say anything?' asked Mrs Cathcart. Mrs Wilmot shook her head.

'Not a word.'

Lost in amazement at the lengths of secretiveness to which Geoffrey could go they left the table at last and shut themselves into Mrs Wilmot's room. The plants were neglected. They spent the morning in speculation. How would Geoffrey take it? Or rather how had he taken it? According to the paper, Miss Kenworthy had died some days ago and must be buried by this time. Yet Mr Wilmot had shown no emotion.

'It's almost frightening,' said Mrs Cathcart. But Mrs. Wilmot was not frightened. She was used to Geoffrey. She didn't know what he felt or if he felt anything.

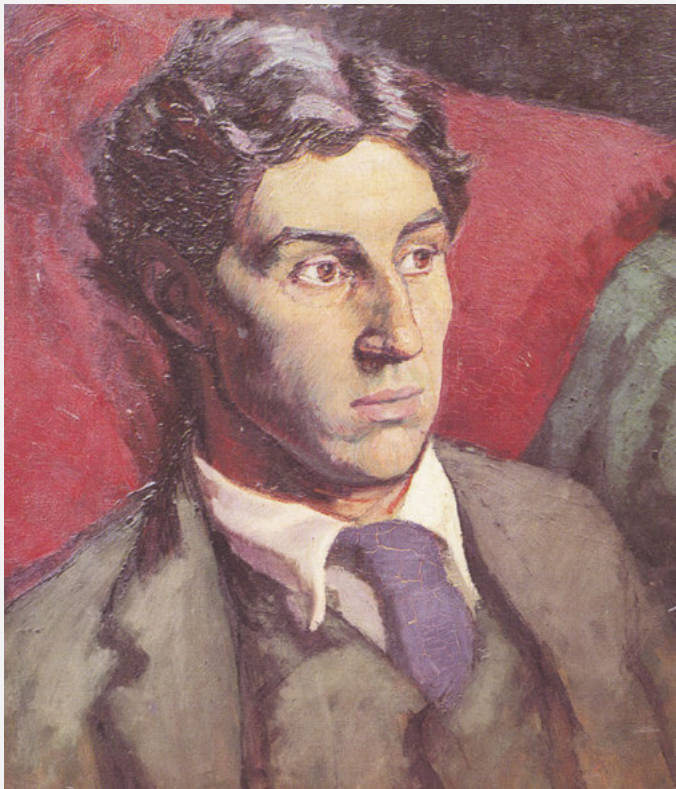
'What will he do now?' asked Mrs Cathcart.

Mrs Wilmot didn't know that either.

What Mr Wilmot did for some time was to leave the hotel in the morning and return in the evening as before. He was preoccupied but not melancholy. Then he began to spend more and more time at the mahogany desk and Mrs Wilmot was in the room less and less. She felt he didn't want her there. She almost wished he would have another affair so that she could spend her time with her plants as before. As it was she had to knit downstairs in Mrs Cathcart's company. Or go to the cinema; still in the cheap seats because though Geoffrey must be saving a good deal in bus fare by not going to see Miss Kenworthy, he didn't give her any more money.

Then suddenly, at the end of the following winter, after a few days' illness, Geoffrey in his turn died. Mrs Wilmot was astonished to find herself a widow. Everything had come to an end so quickly, the long series of affairs, culminating in Miss Kenworthy, Miss Kenworthy herself and now Geoffrey.

Mrs Wilmot could not pretend to mourn, but she was stunned by the swiftness of events. She felt blank and in need of support and after the funeral did not repel Mrs Cathcart's offer of help in going through Geoffrey's things.



Portrait of Jacques Raverat by Gwen Raverat © The late Sophie Gurney

Geoffrey had always been so careful that she should never go through his things, that Mrs Wilmot had an awful feeling he might turn up at any moment and find her at it. But Geoffrey had always been a fascinating enigma to Mrs Cathcart and she looked forward with avidity to getting to know something about him at last.

'Have you opened that desk yet?' she asked

'No,' said Mrs Wilmot nervously.

'You must open it at once,' said Mrs Cathcart. 'His will is probably in there.'

'He had nothing to leave,' said Mrs Wilmot. 'His pension died with him. I don't know what's going to happen to me now.'

Mrs Cathcart was far too interested in the desk to go into that.

'If you don't like to open it, give me the key and I will,' she said.

She unlocked the desk and at once discovered two long envelopes. She handed them to Mrs Wilmot, who interrupted her sorting of her husband's handkerchiefs to open the first.

'Yes, here's his Will. Very short,' she said. "'Everything to my beloved wife", so you can tell how long ago that was made. Thirty-two years ago.'

She laughed shortly. 'Everything. And beloved,' she said. 'Funny, isn't it?'

'What's in the other envelope?' prompted Mrs Cathcart, seeing Mrs Wilmot about to turn back to the handkerchiefs.

Mrs Wilmot picked it up and brought out the contents.

'Looks like another Will,' said Mrs Cathcart.

Mrs Wilmot unfolded the stiff vellum sheets. At the sight of the first words she stiffened. Her eyes flew wide.

'Sonia Kenworthy,' she cried. 'Oh heavens ...'

'What is it. What on earth is it...' Mrs Cathcart darted to read over Mrs Wilmot's shoulder.

'Sonia Kenworthy,' breathed Mrs Wilmot sitting down suddenly on a bedroom chair and crushing the vellum in both hands on her knees.

'Let me see. What is it? It's her Will, isn't it? Here let me read it if you can't.'

She took the sheets and ran her eyes rapidly over them.

'Oh, she left him – she left him fifty thousand pounds,' she cried her voice rising to a shriek at the sum. *'Fifty thousand pounds.'*

A slow flush dyed Mrs Wilmot's face as she stared at Mrs Cathcart. 'And he never said a word,' she breathed.

Mrs Cathcart still devoured the Will.

'Never a word to me,' breathed Mrs Wilmot. She thought of all her small economies, of the monotony of her life at the Claremont. A little extra money would have made such a difference. Yet Geoffrey had never told her that he had come into a fortune. She didn't think he had ever meant to tell her. What was he going to do with it? She didn't know.

'Do you realise,' said Mrs Cathcart, looking up from Miss Kenworthy's Will, 'that this money is yours?'

Mrs Wilmot lifted her eyes and stared uncomprehendingly at Mrs Cathcart.

'Mine?' she said.

'Yours. He left everything to you, didn't he? He's died first, hasn't he? So this money is yours.'

Mrs Wilmot gaped.

'Unless he made another Will,' said Mrs Cathcart, beginning to throw papers out of the desk in urgent search.

Mrs Wilmot sat with her hands to her lips, watching breathlessly.

'There's nothing here,' announced Mrs Cathcart, 'I don't suppose he ever made another Will. He wasn't the sort of man who expected to die, was he?'

'Fifty thousand pounds,' breathed Mrs Wilmot

'Fifty thousand pounds,' said Mrs Cathcart with deliberation.

She turned and faced Mrs Wilmot on the bedroom chair.

'But coming from such a source, how can you take it? You can't take your husband's mistress's money, can you?'

A sardonic smile spread slowly over Mrs Wilmot's face.

'You can't possibly take it,' said Mrs Cathcart harshly.

'Can't I?' said Mrs Wilmot with grim satisfaction. 'I'll show you whether I can take it or not.'

And she did.

© *The Estate of Dorothy Whipple. The typescript of this short story is among DW's unpublished papers. It is a curiosity because the novelist Elizabeth Taylor obviously drew on it for Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont (1971). But where did she read it? It is not clear if it was ever published.*

FAREWELL LEICESTER SQUARE

Persephone Book No. 14, the theme of which is a young man's escape from his restrictive Jewish roots to a life in films, came out in 1941. It was written six years before: Betty Miller, having written three previous novels for Victor Gollancz, was devastated when he rejected *Next Year in Jerusalem* (as her fourth book was then called). In these paragraphs from a much longer piece, the American academic Kristin Bluemel analyses some of the themes of the book.

The source of Alec's success as a film director is his obsession with English middle-class spaces. Both the fictional film *Farewell Leicester Square*, and the novel, are 'the sort of picture of middle-class London life that [he] could be trusted to do with his eyes shut. A trivial but well-constructed story, adapted from a recent lending-library success, redeemed, brought alive, by his loving insistence on detail, his genius for putting the common-place onto the screen and somehow illuminating it with his own passion of observation.' The passage echoes the judgments of what we imagine to be Alec's more discriminating critics, intellectuals who are more sympathetic to modernist art than Alec's 'trivial' tastes.

Betty Miller paints a portrait of her hero as a man of the masses by describing his days in the middle-class suburb of Lewisham, where Ladywell Films is located. His affection for the mass consumer culture that defines his

age demonstrates his belonging to the dominant culture of the suburban neighborhood that he associates with authentic Englishness.

The book's detail about houses and residential districts reveals its contribution to an almost obsessive interwar discourse created by intellectuals whose 'hostility to the suburbs as ecologically destructive quickly fused with contempt for those who lived in them' (John Carey in *The Intellectuals and the Masses*). Many of the disagreeable qualities that anti-Semitic English writers assigned to their fictional Jews are evident as well in their characterisations of suburban dwellers. Both Jews (of any class) and suburbanites (of any religious or ethnic identity) were stereotyped as vulgar, trivial, grasping, degenerate, artificial, and feminine.

The narrative encourages us to focus our criticism on its proper target, [Alec's wife] Catherine, while still showing the complex sources of England's 'spiritual concentration camp'. Alec imagines Catherine's defence: 'Of course, you're different. Or else: Some of my best friends are Jews...' With heartfelt bitterness, Betty Miller makes her readers experience the violence done to spirit and self by constant censoring of authentic reactions of anger toward gentile antisemitism, the transformation of shock into polite smiles and the gentleman's silence of acquiescence.

The climax of the novel occurs in Piccadilly Circus (close to Leicester Square), where Alec meets his friend Lew. They share a distinct kind of intimacy following Lew's soundless alerting of Alec to the English fascist on the corner who calls out, 'Buy the only newspaper not run by Jewish finance!... Clear out the Jews! England for the English!' It is the first encounter with extremist anti-Semitism for either man, but neither is shocked. 'It was as if, unconsciously, they had always expected this: been on the lookout for it, distrustful of the long truce.' Betty Miller here voices the unspeakable idea that haunted many English Jews and that they dared share only with each other: would the 'tolerant' English betray the liberal ideal and turn them over to the Nazis?

Farewell Leicester Square's contorted path toward publication shows that it was overwhelmed by the forces of history: on the one hand Gollancz's ambivalent attitudes toward Jewishness arising from his childhood and adolescent experiences and on the other the effects of English anti-Semitism that were only modestly disguised by affirmations of the ideals of liberal tolerance.

From 'The Urban Geography of English Antisemitism and Assimilation' in Antisemitism and Philosemitism in the C20th and C21st (2008) ed. Lassner and Trubowitz.

OUR BLOGGERS WRITE

‘The first sentence of *Still Missing* completely captured me: “You could hardly get to age thirty-four without learning something about loss.” How true. And that feeling of being gripped by loss – here of course the sudden disappearance of a child, which is something I can’t even begin to imagine – stayed with me throughout. There was something in the sheer luminosity of the prose that sucked me right into the scene and kept me there. Beth Gutcheon is a woman very much in charge of her material and intently focused on character. And just as I wondered how much longer the terrible but utterly non-sentimental emotions could be wrung out of the page as we all wait for news of Alex, the plot gathers essential pace and additional tension. The final pages are excellent and it ends at just the right point. Kudos to the author for not giving us an epilogue.’ *Vulpes Libris*

‘Although *The Fortnight in September* is not plot driven, the chronicle of the Stevens family’s two-week holiday is wonderfully wrought, with lots of humour and poignancy. Written in 1931, it is a bit of a snapshot social history of a suburban London family barely over the cusp of the middle class; it also has so many more layers to appreciate: brilliantly but quietly quirky and likeable characters, a fascinating

look into days long past, and a rather touching exploration of life’s priorities. Even among Persephone fans I think this one deserves more attention.’
Thomas at My Porch

‘Dorothy Whipple builds the picture of family comfort, loyalty and happiness in so stealthily that I was startled by her even-handedness. Her omniscient narrator in *Someone at a Distance* spends as much time in the consciousness of the French hussy Louise as she does in the baffled masculine inner world of Avery or the sweet cluelessness of Ellen. Result: I don’t know what I’m supposed to make of the story, and I keep turning it over in my head. Should Ellen have been more wary? Were the children spoiled? Can this marriage be saved? Why do we so enjoy reading about nasties like Louise and Mrs. North – to prove that we aren’t like them?’ Book Group of One

‘Florence White was part of a group of people who realised that searching out and recording English folk culture, whether music or storytelling or food, was not about a conservative desire to live in the past, but a way of saving this knowledge for the future and our next generations. *Good Things in England* became one of the best sources of English recipes, and an influence on many writers from Jane Grigson to Nigel

Slater. The recipes are largely culled from a call to BBC listeners, asking them for old family recipes. These are not the sort of recipes that previously featured in earlier recipe books, since most would not have been considered “grand” enough; the “museum pieces” of English cookery as White calls them. These are mostly hard-working recipes handed down the generations, many part of an oral tradition (and observation) and rarely published.’
Marmaduke Scarlet

‘*Miss Pettigrew* is a wonderful piece of escapism. The pace is swift and it races from one ridiculous situation to another. This charming, humorous and exuberant novel is a blend of adventure, romance and unadulterated joy. But although the book is lighthearted, it is not completely frivolous. It is wonderful to see Miss Pettigrew open up and grow in confidence, becoming bolder, funnier, and finally embracing the self she has kept hidden for so many years.’
Blogging for a Good Book

‘What is it about Dorothy Whipple’s books? What seems like a fairly ordinary story on the outside ends up being almost impossible to put down. I’ve read four of her books now and they have all been the same. It’s as if the minute the first page is turned I’m immersed in the

world of the characters – it’s perplexing yet wonderful. The heroine of *High Wages* is Jane, a delightful 19 year old with a buoyant and entrepreneurial spirit, committed to making something of her life despite the odds being against her. It is set in a fictional Northern town in England and highlights the massive gap in living conditions between women of different social classes at this time. The contrast between Jane and the women she waits on is marked. It is a reminder of the complete lack of choice and freedom that was available to unmarried women with no family support.’ A Book Sanctuary

‘After *Miss Pettigrew*, I expected Persephone books to be sweet, charming and domestic in focus with a lively wit and intelligence. However, *The Victorian Chaise-longue* may have the expected domestic setting and it’s definitely clever, but goodness me it’s dark! What I expected to be a cosy, pleasant read turned out to be a little slice of nightmare, but nevertheless a stunning book. Melanie (or Milly as she is in 1864) was a very interesting character: when the reader sees her in the 1950’s she seems docile and rather vacuous, the nightmare experience of finding herself in an alien time period is the catalyst which forces her to become independent and so in a peculiar way the reader watches her becoming free even as she is trapped.’ Old English Rose Reads

‘Ruth Holland falls in love with Stuart Williams, a very married Stuart Williams, who is not able to put his marriage back together after a previous dalliance. His wife will not forgive him: shut out from her, he is all the more susceptible to the charm of Ruth. Who likewise is drawn to him. *Fidelity* follows several stages through which Ruth progresses: a tumultuous passion which cannot be abated; a brief longing to return to her hometown which quickly dies when she feels the scorn of society; the desire to set herself, and her lover, free when she determines their relationship can grow no farther. And so *Fidelity* bears the question, “To whom are we faithful?” To our spouses? To the protocols of society? To our families? To the lover with whom we’ve aligned? Or, to our own selves.’ Dolce Bellezza

‘I often seem to use the word unputdownable when I review Persephone books. Usually it’s the Dorothy Whipples. I love her characters so much that I stay up late with my eyes propped open to find out what’s going to happen to them. *Still Missing* is the most involving book I’ve read for ages. I read 150pp in one sitting and barely drew breath. My stomach was clenched the whole time. If I hadn’t had to get up for work next morning, I think I’d have sat up half the night. I read the rest of the book the next night, nothing would have stopped me getting back to it. First published in 1981, the qualities that this book shares

with the more typical Persephone book written in the 1920–50s are the readability of the story and the emphasis on the importance of domesticity & the home. Susan’s house is at the centre of the book, it’s her refuge and her prison. It becomes a beacon, a point of familiarity to guide Alex home if he is still alive. It’s the repository of all her memories of Alex. It’s where the story begins and ends. *Still Missing* is not an easy read but it is a compulsive one. This is one of the most memorable books in the Persephone list.’ I Prefer Reading

‘*House-Bound* by Winifred Peck was not a Persephone I’d read much about prior to purchasing it. Happily, it proved to be a most delightful, thoughtful, and quietly amusing book. It begins simply with Rose, in need of a few maids and a cook, struck by the revolutionary idea of assuming their work herself in light of the wartime labour shortage. What ‘house-bound’ really comes to mean for her is the emotional rather than physical isolation of the self. The book focuses on the breaking down of those walls that allows Rose to see her family anew, of the revelations about the characters of those closest to her. There is a strong warning through the latter part of the novel that the old conventions, the codes of conduct which required stoicism and the bottling up of emotions, the full laying of the dinner table complete with flowers and useless accoutrements every

evening, have no place in the world being shaped by the ongoing war. In terms of writing and characterisation, this is a good novel but not a great one. Its greatest virtue must come from its willingness to confront what Peck certainly viewed as her society's damagingly antisocial conventions of human behaviour, the isolation of the self that leaves so many people to struggle alone just when they need the warmth of human understanding most.' *The Captive Reader*

‘*Alas, Poor Lady* tells the story of one London family from the Victorian era through to the 1930s. Captain and Mrs Scrimgeour have eight children

and we watch as they grow up and try to find their place in a society designed to cater only for men and, to a lesser extent, for married women. For a woman who stayed single (whether by choice or not) her options in life were very limited. I loved this book but I know it won't appeal to everyone. And yet without anything really 'happening' there's still so much going on that for anyone with an interest in feminism and the differing roles of men and women in society, I can't recommend *Alas, Poor Lady* highly enough. Although my favourite Persephone so far is still *Little Boy Lost* this one is now a close second.' *She Reads Novels*

‘*Miss Ranskill Comes Home* is heartwrenching, humorous, and inspiring all at once. The relationships Miss Ranskill forms with people in the book are written quite beautifully and you can appreciate why she becomes attached to them, without Barbara Euphan Todd spelling it out. As a modern reader, you cannot help but sympathise with the emotions that Miss Ranskill is going through. If you were dropped back in time during WWII in England, how would you manage coping with rations, coupons, and blackout? The narrative is great to read, has great pace, and elements I've never seen in a war-time story. It was definitely hard to put down this book and I



'Girls Learning to Stook and Men Stooking' 1940, one of the Women's Land Army subjects painted by Evelyn Dunbar (1906–60) on view at Sim Fine Art's Wartime Art Exhibition 54 Shepherd Market London W1 from October 24–29.

was so sad when I came to the last page. But, the book ended amazingly well and has bumped its way up to my favorite Persephone book. I must say, I never thought that *Miss Bunclie's Book* would be knocked from that position!' Behind the Curtain

‘**L**ittle Boy Lost was a wonderful book. It started out slowly but before I knew it, I couldn't put the book down. One of the reasons that I wasn't sure I would like it was because Hilary was such a flawed character. The purpose of his journey was originally to find his son, but also became one in which he had to come to grips with the new, post-war France, at once familiar and completely different from the one he had loved prior to the war. Little Jean, on the other hand, I fell for immediately. Sometimes you come across a character with the saddest, most sincere lines that just grab hold of your heartstrings and won't let go. It's not that they want anyone to feel sorry for them, they're just honestly sharing aspects of their life. Jean was such a character.' Alita Reads

‘**R**euben Sachs, the story of an extended Anglo-Jewish family in London, focuses on the relationship between two cousins, Reuben Sachs and Judith Quixano, and the tensions between their Jewish identities and English society. This is a beautifully crafted little novel. The language is faultless, pared down to only what is necessary, yet at the same time painting an

unforgettable picture of Anglo-Jewish life at the end of the 19th century. A world is created in such a way that the people who live in it step right off the page. Reuben Sachs was written (some say) in answer to the highly romanticised portrait of Jewish life created by George Eliot in *Daniel Deronda*, and therefore caused some criticism at the time.' Heaven-Ali's Book Journal

‘**F**ew Eggs and No Oranges is the longest of the Persephone books, being the wartime diaries of a woman working for a charity in London. It is a faithful, honest and detailed record of what it was really like, and unlike many books of wartime diaries, some of which I have mentioned here, the length and depth really demonstrate the character of the writer as well as just the events. The diary is so realistic, describing things like the mind-numbing exhaustion of dozens of nights when sleep was disturbed. If you are a fan of wartime diaries, or Persephone books, or just an accurate record of an exciting period of history, it represents a very worthwhile investment' Joulesbarham's Blog

‘I thought *Good Evening, Mrs. Craven* was one of the most wonderful books I have read in a while. Mollie Panter-Downes's stories are not 'pretty'. In fact, I'd say they're quite the opposite: they focus on the 'ugly' side of the home front, the inner turmoil beneath the calm. Since the book is arranged chronol-

ogically, we can see shifts in the dominant emotions expressed as the war goes on, from enthusiasm and earnestness in the earliest stories to hopelessness and fear in the middle, to resolve and exhaustion near the end. The stories hang together because the author chose to focus on small, intimate moments of (mostly) women's lives, at a time when everything they knew – social roles, class, family – were changing. I don't read a lot of short stories, and reading *Good Evening, Mrs. Craven* has reminded me what a mistake that is.' Col Reads

‘**T**ime travel. Fear. Confusion. Could I be describing the premise of a contemporary novel flying off bookshelves faster than Amazon sales rankings can keep up with? Perhaps. Or, these could be a few words to describe *The Victorian Chaise-longue*: first published in 1953 and only 99 pages, this tiny book is creepier and more uncomfortable than many Gothic books published today. I sat transfixed in the short time it took to read it. Eerie. Creepy, uncomfortable, descriptive and engaging, Marghanita Laski's story is one that showcases this author as a brilliant strategist, one who crafts a powerful punch with each unsettling moment, and in the shortest amount of time. Without question, this is a classic of monumental significance.' Coffee and a Book Chick

ADAM FERGUSON ON BATH

*In May, Adam Ferguson spoke at a Lunch about his book *The Sack of Bath* (1973), *Persephone Book No. 93*. He talked about why Bath still matters so much and how he came to write the book.*

Unlike any other major city of historic importance Bath was built virtually in a single century. Uniquely, all Georgian Bath grew old together, as a unity. It never spawned a 'West End'. Consequently, the little artisan houses and streets and lanes were as essential to the urban scene as the big set-pieces like Royal Crescent and the Circus. The lesser dwellings are what Shelley might have called 'unpremeditated art' – with their sudden corners, tiny arches, wrought ironwork; the idiosyncrasies of raised pavements, tumbling steps, cobble-stones, narrow doorways, and twisting alleys. To destroy these informal streets, as Bath Corporation with its lust for comprehensive development was bent on doing in the early '70s, was – these similes are not new – like denuding a forest of its wild undergrowth, robbing old masters of their frames.

Bath was built, as has often been said, by a handful of architectural geniuses at the height of a great classical revival; and built of a honey-coloured local material, oolite, otherwise known as Bath stone,

singularly suited to that style. The necessity to provide huge numbers of terraced houses, many apartmentalised, resulted not just in the novelty of those crescents (the most admired curling out into the country), but in the introduction of the palatial terrace – a row of houses, the middle ones pedimented, to create at a distance the illusion of a palace.

And who lived in the artisan houses and little inns and mews and these diminutive streets which the Corporation's Planning Department was sweeping away? Well, they were precisely the people who made it

possible to run the Assembly Rooms and the Pump Rooms, who serviced the city known to Jane Austen; the city visited by Johnson and Boswell and Nelson, and Sheridan and Sydney Smith and Dickens. And, unlike the constant stream of well-to-do visitors from all over Britain, down an ever more crowded Bath Road, these people dwelt in Bath all year long. In many ways they were the real Georgian Bathonians: the Sedan-chair carriers, the launderers, the ostlers, the postmen, the grooms, the footmen, the buhl-cutters, the croupiers, the shopkeepers; the paviors, the chimney-sweeps and



stonemasons; the families – of the landladies, and of the man-and maid-servants, and of the porters and the watchmen. Of course, if it is practicable (and it largely was and is), we must conserve this Bath as well.

That, roughly, was my perception of the Georgian city when, in February 1972 as a feature writer on *The Times*, I was sent down with Tony Snowdon as a photographer to discover what was going on and why. The Bath Preservation Trust under Sir Christopher Chancellor was near to panic. The listing system whereby the country's important architecture had been graded one, two and three had manifestly failed to preserve anything but the best. Grade III offered no statutory protection to houses of undoubted but only minor merit. And that had been an invitation to developers and councils to pull them down before any upgrading process could be completed.

As for Bath's Grade III buildings – hundreds of them had already been lost by 1972, in addition to the 2000 Georgian houses which, mainly because they were so profuse, had never made the original list at all. Acres and acres of eighteenth century streets had only recently been flattened to create those 'comprehensive development areas' with which the planning department had persuaded the city fathers that they must tackle the future.

New buildings erected in Bath, in the meantime, were of the brutalistic persuasion of the 1950s and 60s, as antagonistic to the classical style they rose beside, and insulting, as anything one can think of. A myriad more were in the pipeline. Already, two decades of tastelessness ranging from the uninspired to the grotesque starkly punctuated Britain's most remarkable townscape. The then biggest names in architecture were involved: Sir Frederick Gibberd had designed the unspeakable Technical College. Owen Luder was behind the Southgate shopping centre, now mercifully replaced. Sir Hugh Casson, another luminary of the Royal Fine Art Commission, was retained by Bath corporation to guide its taste.

I went to Bath then as a journalist. I returned as a crusader, horrified by what had already happened, by the planning blight that had caused neglect in so much that was saveable, by the demolition still proposed – and by the outrageously unsympathetic attitude of the City Architect who had recently written an article on 'the dangers of conservation'.

I have just turned up among my papers what I wrote for a broadcast the following spring: 'There are a few treasures left in another clearance area, which one must hurry to see while they remain. I mean Walcot Street. Here below the beautiful old corn market, which itself lies in

the path of the proposed loop road, is a stretch of mediaeval riverside vaults. Here in Walcot Street is Ladymead House, built in 1806, according to a Victorian guidebook "for the voluntary retirement of that unhappy class of females who have forfeited the respect of one sex without securing that of the other". This is to go, under present development plans – just as the original Bath Oliver factory went to make room for a new police station; just as the Bath chair factory beside Pulteney Bridge went to make way for the new Law Courts. Just as hundreds upon hundreds of Bath's lesser buildings have gone, and are going, every year'.

The Times proved to be the right medium to bring the threat to Bath to the nation's attention. As I have written in the Preface to the Persephone edition of *The Sack of Bath*, there were then speeches, articles, broadcasts and interminable newspaper correspondence. The press and the media were uniformly outraged and in favour of government intervention. Conservation groups around the country took up the cry. The consequence of all the fuss we made was the extension by the Department of the Environment of the Conservation Area legislation to cover an entire town or city: and thus the wholesale destruction of Bath could be stopped dead. And it was.

AND BY THE WAY

Some of you already know that the price of our books is going up – from £10 to £12 or three for £30. A grey *Persephone* book has been £10 or three for £27 since March 1999 when we launched. In those twelve years printing and paper costs have increased and books have gradually risen in price; the National Theatre Traveler tickets have recently gone up from £10 to £12; and the London Congestion Charge is now also £12. Reluctantly we have decided to follow suit.

However, our books are still good value compared with many ‘quality’ paperbacks; and two-thirds of our customers do buy three books at a time, so for

them the rise is only £1 per book. And we still supply a matching bookmark with each book, a free *Biannually* and *Catalogue* and, for those on our email list, there is the occasional special offer (most recently, if you bought three books in the first fortnight of September you received a free copy of – *The Fortnight in September*).

Don’t forget that visitors to our shop can buy a range of items other than books: the mugs Annabel Munn makes especially for us; cushions and lampshades in the ‘Black Goose’/*Farewell Leicester Square* fabric; the ‘seasons’ tea towel (cf. p 8); and the *Persephone* bracelet for £10.

And we have five *Persephone audiobooks* and will soon have twelve *e-books*. But our core business is still mail order – the belief that busy people want to come home and find on their doormat a book, sent by us, they can rely on to be interesting, well-written and thought-provoking.

And here is another plea for some of you to make comments on the *Persephone Forum*. Quite a lot of people look at it (we can tell from the ‘stats’) but very few write about the book. We wish you would! But we are pleased by the response to our *Facebook page*; and delighted that every weekday 500 people look at the *Persephone Post*.



Queensland Avenue in Merton: Laggard Leaves 1925 by Harry Bush 1883–1957, © Museum of London

EVENTS

The first event this autumn is in a new format: *Tapas (and wine)* from 6–8. This should be adequate for those not having dinner, but an *hors d'oeuvres* for anyone eating later. The first such occasion is on **Tuesday November 8th** when Gill Clarke will talk about the painter *Evelyn Dunbar*, whose biography she wrote in 2006; this celebrates the exhibition at Sim Fine Art of some newly discovered work by Dunbar (who featured on the *Post* in April).

On **Wednesday November 23rd**, at *Tapas* from 6–8, Anthony Quinn, the *Independent's* film critic, will be in conversation about Constance Maud's *No Surrender*, Persephone Book No. 94, and his own novel about the suffragettes, *Half of the Human Race* (which we sell in the shop).

On **Tuesday December 6th** *Sarah Dunant*, broadcaster and bestselling author of *The Birth of Venus* (1490s Florence), *In the Company of the Courtesan* (1530s Venice) and *Sacred Hearts* (1570s Ferrara) will give the *Seventh Persephone Lecture* at the Art Workers Guild. Doors open at 6 o'clock for a glass of wine and a cheese straw, the lecture is at 6.30 and there is a second glass of wine afterwards. Sarah Dunant is a spectacularly good speaker. Her illustrated talk will be called *Putting the Her into History: The Truth about Renaissance Women*.

On **Tuesday December 13th** Charles Lock, Professor of English Literature at the University of Copenhagen, who has written the *Greenbanks* Afterword, will give a talk at a *Lunch* from 12.30–2.30 called '*Dorothy Whipple: Why are her novels so unputdownable?*'



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There will be an *Open Day* in the shop on **Thursday December 15th** when all our books will be available gift-wrapped free of charge and free mulled wine and Konditor and Cook mince pies will be served all day until 8pm.

There are no Persephone events in January as some of us will be in Paris for the month! If you live there and would like to get together for a book group, please telephone or email.

Diana Athill will again talk about *Midsummer Night in the Workhouse*, Persephone book No.92, at a *Persephone Tea* on **Thursday February 9th** from 3:30 to 5:30.

There will be another showing of the unexpectedly good film of *Little Boy Lost* (1953) on **Thursday February 23rd** at 2 o'clock at the British Film Institute 21 Stephen Street W1. Lunch will be served at 1.

On **Thursday March 8th** at *Tapas* from 6–8, *Anne Harvey* and *Simon Brett* will give a performance of *Harry and Virginia* about *Virginia Graham* (who wrote *Consider the Years*) and her father Harry Graham.

On **Wednesday March 21st** at *Tapas* from 6–8, *Ann Thwaite* and *Gretchen Gerzina*, both authors of biographies of *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, will talk about the different biographical methods they used to explore her life and work.

All Persephone events now cost £20. Please ring the office in order to book a place.

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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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