

The Persephone Biannually

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detail from 'View across Sandown Bay, Isle of Wight' 1850s

Richard Burchett (1815-75) oil on canvas ©V & A



OUR BOOKS FOR SPRING/SUMMER 2013

The new Persephone books, *Heat Lightning* and *The Exiles Return*, are linked by two words: home and exile. Both are meditations on family life, belonging, leaving and coming back; both explore questions of identity and individuality within a domestic context. The two novels, and a few of the other pieces in this *Biannually*, explore the theme of home and background as the crucial influence on a person's life; both books, one written in the 1930s and one in the 1950s, are oddly relevant nowadays and raise several questions in the reader's mind. What does it mean to say 'home is where the heart is'? Even though a third of us now live on our own, why is 'family life' still the ideal? Is an intense loyalty to home and country becoming an old-fashioned concept? And can one, should one, venture back to one's former home?

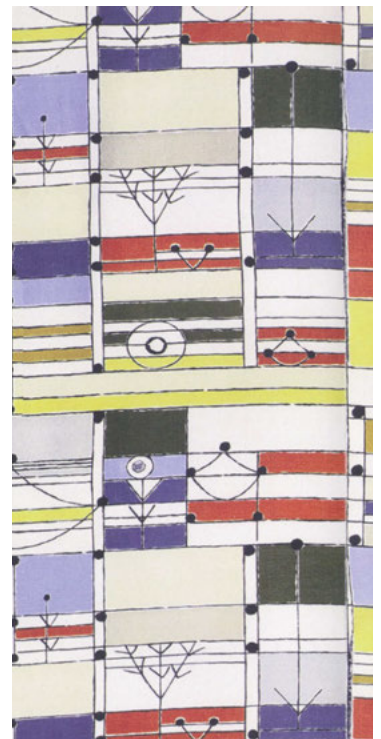
Helen Hull (1888–1971) was once a well-known American novelist (*Heat Lightning* was a Book-of-the-Month Club Selection for April 1932, cf. the article on p 23 of this *Biannually*). Her first novel appeared in 1922 and her seventeenth and last in 1963; she was unusual in being Professor of Creative Writing at

Columbia University and in living with another woman writer, Mabel Louise Robinson, for forty years (yet without there being any scurrilous gossip about this). We found Persephone Book No. 101, *Heat Lightning*, because a copy was given to us by an expert in modern manuscripts who had read it in the first English edition – which is now unobtainable, we have used the American edition instead. He had never forgotten reading it, and remembered that it had 'film script' written all over it, which indeed it does; but in any case we are sure Persephone readers will never forget it either.

The plot is simple: Amy Norton comes home for a week's visit to her hometown in Michigan (the town is unnamed but must owe a lot to Albion, where Helen Hull grew up): 'Now that she was back in the town of her childhood, standing on a corner across from the village triangle of green, a small pyramid of luggage at her feet, Amy's one clear thought, over the fluttering of unimportant recognitions, was "Why on earth have I come?"' Her husband has gone on holiday without her, her two children are at summer camp, and she is hoping to work out why she is unhappy; how



The endpaper for Heat Lightning is 'Memories of the Alamo' 1929 by HR Mallinson & Co © RISD



The endpaper for The Exiles Return is a 1953 textile by Jacqueline Groag for David Whitehead, in a private collection

other couples manage their relationship; and how women find a moral compass for their lives. 'Was there [really] a new code?' she asks herself. 'What, at the very bottom of her heart, did she believe? Did it differ, fundamentally, from her grandmother's set of values?'

She looks with detached eyes at every member of the Westover family, all of whom live within striking distance of their old home (as per the charmingly-drawn map used on the 1932 cover, reproduced over the page); and, having been away for so long, Amy is able to observe her female relations with fresh eyes and to see that 'each of them lived true to her own code, without conflict or rebellion. And I – Amy moved restlessly – I don't know what my code is.'

Yet, over the course of the sultry summer week, with flashes of lightning never far away, she starts to understand herself better and to have a new insight into the lives of her relations: the matriarchal 'Madam Westover' her grandmother; her parents Alfred and Catherine; her brother and sister Ted and Mary, who has just given birth to another child; and her aunt and her two unmarried children. It is the summer after the Great Crash of 1929 and, as in so many *Persephone* books, everything happens and nothing happens; however, a book which is simply about family life turns out to be unputdownable. Many people have said the same thing about the Helen Hull story that

we put in *The Persephone Book of Short Stories*: an elderly woman goes to stay with her exhausting, demanding daughter, and becomes involved with her exhausting, demanding grandchildren. That's about the sum of it. Yet an entire world is there, an entire life, and one is immersed in that world from the first sentence of the story.

Rachel of Booksnob came into the shop and we suggested she read *Heat Lightning*. This is what she said on her blog: 'Helen



Helen Hull in the 1930s

Hull's writing is exquisite, evocative, ripe for the picking; every line is beautifully crafted, every character teeming with life. She effortlessly paints a picture of a dappled, sun-bleached town filled with clapboard houses and grey dust, peopled by housewives in printed calico and sulky teenagers quivering with frustration. As her characters clash and struggle, so does the world outside of them, as the depression hits and all financial security is lost. Amy, come from the big city to

shelter in this backwater, comes to realise that there is no escape from the realities of life; they are just as prominent in the rural Midwest as they are in Midtown. This sort of domestic, "small town" tale is woefully under-appreciated by the literary establishment; like Dorothy Whipple, Helen Hull's perception, her clarity of expression and her ability to tease out the quiet, unspoken thoughts and fears that ripple under the surface of each of our lives is magnificent. Like it or not, most of our lives are lived out in our homes, amongst the people we are related to, and it is within this domestic arena that the real drama and struggle and flight of life reigns supreme. It takes true skill to rivet the heart and mind while remaining within the four walls of the family home, and I can't praise Helen Hull's abilities enough.'

The idea for this, her sixth novel, came to Helen Hull after she read a chance sentence in a magazine article which confronted her with an idea she knew intellectually but had never really thought about as it related to everyday family life: 'Here in America we stem from many races, we have no homogeneous roots, no common traditions... within one group you might find men and women a generation only from Sweden, Poland, Italy, France, or Ireland.' As Amy comes to realise, the Westover family, into which 'foreigners' have married, is a microcosm of the larger society, each member 'with his own code, derived

blindly from distant soil.' The result, which is what Helen Hull is describing, is that 'the individual has nothing firm upon which he can lean, nor has he even any definite way of life against which he can rebel: he is under the necessity of determining for himself how he shall act and think.'

So Helen Hull planned her book to be about the difficulty of formulating a philosophy of life in these circumstances. And

for this reason, 'although *Heat Lightning* focuses on domestic life,' writes the American academic Patricia McClelland Miller in her Persephone Preface, 'it is, at its core, a novel of ideas, even though not all of the book's readers would have recognised it as such.' Indeed, the book with which most Persephone readers will compare it is Dorothy Whipple's *Greenbanks*, Persephone Book No. 95, and few Whipple devotees would call this a novel of ideas. Yet in many ways

it is one, since it is a deeply moral work which implicitly asks questions of the reader about how the characters should lead their lives and, by extension, how we ourselves should lead our lives.

The *New York Times* praised *Heat Lightning* on its publication as 'a very interesting and beautifully written book' and for being 'quiet and controlled, always hovering on the verge of violent action and never quite falling in. It reproduces by great artistry the very lifelike quality of constantly arousing in us the expectation of some exciting event, and then bringing forth nothing but the most commonplace of everyday experiences. Helen Hull has made the reader feel the petty squabbings and jealousies of the too-closely packed family; and yet the honest and very real affection which exists between them.'

Persephone Book No.102 is a Persephone first, a novel that has never been published before. The yellowing typescript of a book by Elisabeth de Waal (1899-1991) was lent to us by her grandson Edmund de Waal; and we were so struck by its subtlety and sensitivity that we transcribed the typescript, did some light editing, decided on a title and have published it as our second book for the Spring/Summer of 2013. *The Exiles Return* is set in Occupied Vienna in 1954-5. It describes five people who grew up there before the war and have come back to see if they can re-establish the life they have lost.

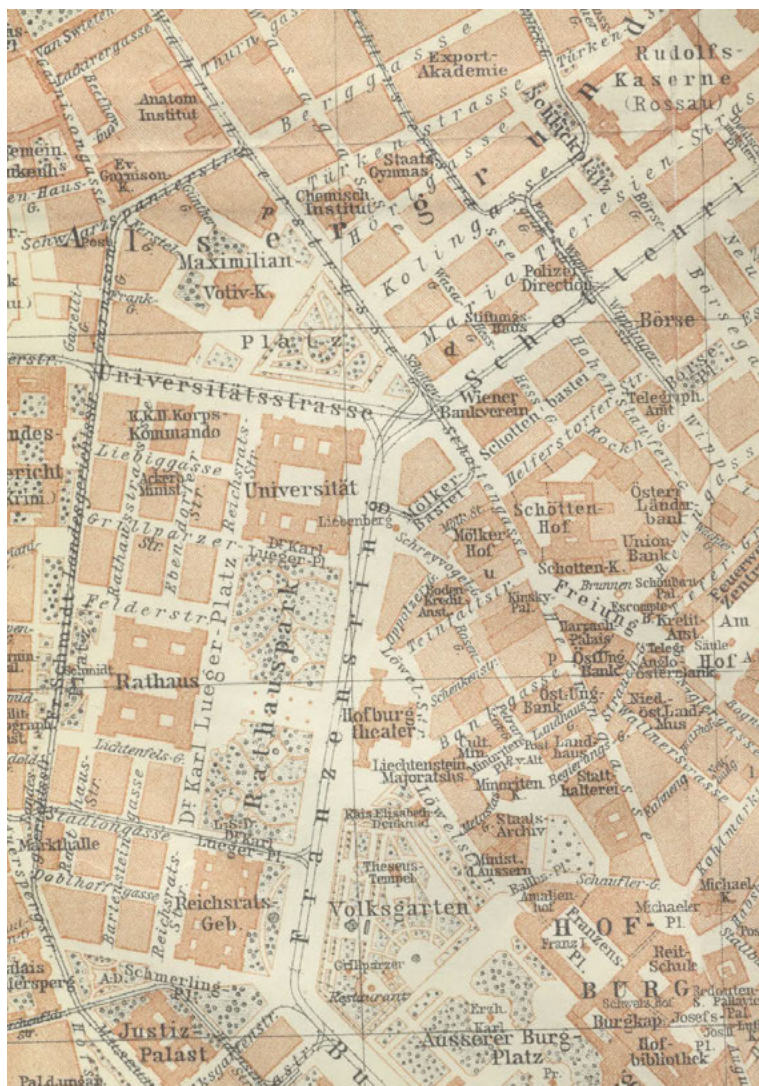


The novel begins with Professor Kuno Adler, who is Jewish and fled Vienna after the Anschluss (the events of March 1938 when Hitler's troops marched into Austria). He is returning from New York to try and take up his old life as a research scientist. As the train approaches the city of his childhood, he thinks about his ancestors and the home he left behind. We realise through his confrontation with officialdom and with the changed fabric of the city (the lime trees are there no longer, it is hard to know who behaved well during the war and who was a Nazi sympathiser) that a refugee who goes back has a very difficult time.

Next we are introduced to a wealthy Greek named Kanakis. Before the war his family had lived in great style with a coach and horses and many servants, and now the 40 year-old Kanakis has come back to try and buy an eighteenth-century *hotel particulier*, a little *palais*, in which to live a life of eighteenth-century pleasure. He meets Prince Lorenzo Grein-Lauterbach (who owes more than a little to Tazio in *Death in Venice*). Bimbo, as he is known – and the nickname is an accurate one – is a 24 year-old who, because his aristocratic, anti-Nazi parents were murdered by the Germans, was spirited away to the country during the war years and afterwards. He is penniless yet retains an overweening sense of entitlement. Kanakis and he develop a homosexual relationship (a brave thing to

write about in the 1950s) and he is kept by his older lover. Yet he has a sister, Princess Nina, who works in a laboratory, the same one to which Adler returns. She lives modestly in the attic of her family's former *palais*, is a devout Catholic, loyal to her brother and the memory of her parents, intelligent and hard-working, but, as she perceives it, is stocky and unattractive. Lastly, there is 18 year-old Marie-Theres, whose parents went to America just before the war; they, and her

siblings, have become completely American, but Resi (as she is known, possibly with a deliberate echo of Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*) has never fitted in and is *déplacée* – there is a poignant scene when one of her schoolteachers realises that she needs the help of a psychiatrist but her parents swiftly reject this. So she goes back to her Austrian aunt and uncle to see if she can make a life in the home country (from her parents point of view to see if she can be married off) yet





Palais Ephrussi, from 'Wiener Palais' by Muller and Krane: the palais is in the centre of the map on the previous page, towards the top, ie. in the north-western part of the city.



*'St David's', the house at 8 Blatchington Road, Tunbridge Wells where the de Waals lived from 1939 onwards and *The Exiles Return* was written. The road is peaceful but the shops and the station are not far.*

here too she is an innocent abroad, unable, to put down roots. Her tragedy is at the core of this moving and evocative book.

Each of the five exiles is an aspect of the author herself. Elisabeth de Waal was brought up in the Palais Ephrussi, so wonderfully evoked by her grandson Edmund de Waal in his bestselling *The Hare with Amber Eyes*. Her mother, the former Baroness Emmy Schey von Koromla, was 18 when she married a wealthy banker of Greek/Russian Jewish descent, the 39 year-old Viktor Ephrussi, and, until the Anschluss, led a life of monied contentment. This is the life for which Resi ('startlingly beautiful' like Emmy) was bred and should have grown into. Elisabeth, however, was much more like Princess Nina, 'a serious young girl who is allowed to sit at dinner with grown-ups... She walks with her father to the bank each morning. She is building up her own library in her bedroom.' She was, as Edmund de Waal said recently in an interview with Mark Lawson on BBC Radio 4's *Front Row*, 'desperate to get from one side of the Ringstrasse in this crazily marble and gilt edifice to the other side where there was this fantastically exciting university full of philosophers and economists, and she did it through sheer dogged will power.' Yet, although there are aspects of Resi and of Nina in Elisabeth, we can imagine that Professor Adler was the character with whom she identified most. And, although

she obviously would have shrunk from identifying with Kanakis and Bimbo, she knew that they were in her family background and that even those two, the wealthy Greek playboy and the dissolute young aristocrat, had elements of what she might have been.

In 1928 Elisabeth married a Dutchman and lived first in Paris (at the same time as Jacqueline Groag, cf. p 25) and then in Switzerland. In 1938 she fearlessly went back to Vienna and did everything she could to help her parents to escape to Czechoslovakia. Then, from 1939 onwards, she lived with her father, her husband and her children in Tunbridge Wells. Hendrik de Waal took the train to London every day to work for the Dutch government in exile, the family went to church at King Charles the Martyr on Sundays, and ‘Elisabeth, who had never cooked in her life, learnt to prepare meals. Her former cook, now living in England, sent her letters with recipes for Salzburger Nockerl and schnitzel, and meticulous instructions: “the honoured lady slowly *tilts* the frying pan” (*The Hare with Amber Eyes*). Meanwhile the two de Waal boys, Victor and Constant, now Henry, became thoroughly and completely English.

Elisabeth was a wartime and post-war housewife, like so many of the women in Persephone books. We can imagine her struggling with *How to Run your home without Help* and *Plats du Jour*. She coached

children in Latin, maintained a large correspondence, and wrote a few reviews for the *TLS* – but mostly what she did was write novels, two in German and three in English. *The Exiles Return* is the first to be published.

The book explores a very complex and interesting question: if an exile returns, how should he or she behave morally? Some have moral fastidiousness (Adler, Nina), some are ruthlessly on the make (Kanakis, Bimbo), some have no moral code because they have never been educated to acquire one (Resi). Edmund de Waal wrote about this in *The Hare with Amber Eyes* and quoted the inimitable passage when Adler is told that he can have his job back but only at the level he was at when he left fifteen years before because ‘you did choose to leave a little early. I mean you resigned before you could be dismissed – and you left the country.’ He also

quotes the scene when Kanakis goes to see an estate agent and notices two nineteenth-century paintings that belonged to a Baron E who ‘unfortunately died abroad, in England, I believe. His heirs, after they had recovered what could be traced of his property, had it all sold at auction’ and so the pictures were acquired ‘all quite openly, publicly and legally you understand.’

Elisabeth’s memories were of a polyglot upbringing in a polyglot city. And her writing was born from an unselfconscious ease with different languages’ writes Edmund de Waal in his Persephone Preface. Just like small town Michigan, Vienna was a melting pot, although on a far larger scale. Helen Hull and Elisabeth de Waal lived in different countries and in different milieux. But their preoccupations were oddly the same.



DOMESTIC SPACE

We recently hosted a launch party for *The Domestic Space Reader* edited by Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei. These extracts from their own 2004 article (pp325–30 in the book) show their interests are extremely similar to ours – even if the academic language is very different!

‘**B**oth home and novel are constructions that represent, imitate and enable people to live, interact, engage publicly or retreat into privacy. Thus for writers like Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield, novels and houses furnish a dwelling place that invites the exploration and expression of private and intimate relations and thoughts.

Representations of the domestic interior mirror the inner thoughts of women, children, servants, those ‘spectral’ dwellers within the house who may appear to be at home but in a space not of their designing: readers repeatedly encounter the architectural in fiction, the importance of the home, and houses, as personae. The critic Philippa Tristram describes the novel as invincibly domestic because it functions like the house as a little world we think we can control. She calls attention to the correspondences between domestic architecture and novels, manifest in terms like structure, aspect, outlook, character, content, liminal, threshold, entry point, perspective, kitchen sink drama, drawing-room

comedy, Aga saga, country house mysteries, the locked room mystery and the domestic novel.

As in the C18th, which saw the rise of the novel, the inter-war period experienced a domestication, feminisation, and privatisation of society. The middle class believed family and home were central life interests and that the house, which enshrined these institutions, had an importance far beyond other material objects. A ‘return to the home’ was energetically promoted through the commercial sphere – for example by women’s magazines. Resisting the facile glamorisation of the housewife, however, domestic novelists simultaneously privileged and critiqued the home and homemaking, at times resenting the demands of the family on the ‘domesticated female’ but often

imbuing the home with lyrical and evocative qualities. The resulting textualisation of the house and home offered women writers a pattern within which, or against which, to write.

The effort to study and validate domestic life parallels a resurgence and revaluation of the domestic novel and of novelists who have been traditionally marginalised because of their focus on that which has accumulated at the side of the story – the unnoticed, the inconspicuous, the unobtrusive. In their turn to domestic space and the domestic interior, domestic novelists of the inter-war years inaugurated a turn to interiority, feminine subjectivity, and the everyday, thus privileging the private and the ordinary and the lives of middle-class women.’



Vanessa Bell 'Nursery Tea' 1912 © a private collection

THE BLANK WALL BY ESH

In January of this year Stark Press in America republished The Unfinished Crime by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding, author of Persephone Book No. 42 The Blank Wall. It contains a preface by her granddaughter Rose Ardron which we are pleased to be able to reprint.

‘I am writing about someone I hardly met – my grandmother. I grew up with her daughters – my mother and my aunt – her darling girls. From them, I learned some of her myth as a mother and of her strength and struggles as a woman. She came from a dynasty of strong women who were independent spirits in a world that had rigid ideas of a woman’s role and place in the economic order. From the depths of the Depression, she took responsibility for the economic survival of her family and harnessed her art, her craft, a questing mind and a social conscience to that goal. She was a free thinker; she loved to swim, at ease in the open sea.

When going through some family papers, I found two large cardboard boxes stacked high with lined foolscap sheets. Her small, close, uniform and intense writing covers sheet after sheet, ink now fading. These are her manuscripts. Hundreds of thousands of words, crafted by hand, bring her strength of will, her drive to produce, into the room. What did it take to sustain that determ-

ination over those furlongs of faded foolscap? I want to put on record how hard-won her achievements must have been.

She was a conscientious worker and craftswoman. She took her craft seriously, relying on deliberate thought, planning and hard work. She set herself the discipline of sitting down to write every morning. In the first seven months of 1928, she completely re-wrote a 90,000-word novel and wrote a 60,000-word serial and eleven short stories. Her day was organised into a routine that she strictly adhered to, not pausing for a cigarette or coffee until the appointed hour. Her daughters knew not to disturb her when she was working.

This was no hobby – it was an all-consuming effort. She could not find peace without knowing she could provide for her mother, herself and her girls’ future. The family fortunes were unpredictable, plagued by insecurity and lurching from the sale of one story to another. She experienced the misery of her writing getting stuck, while being tormented by a sense of haste to get working before she became penniless again. The Wall Street crash and the Depression left her penniless, unable to sell any work. Her family went without. Her sense of honour meant that she agonised over the inevitable debts that accrued.

It was a wearing way to live. Her health was not good. By the time she was 39, her energy and confidence were low and she had trouble sleeping. Fatigue and depression continued to plague her but she strove to overcome all this by sheer force of will, driven by her fierce loyalty to her daughters. In spite of her ill-health, her last novel was published in 1953, just two years before she died at the age of 65.

She rarely had the luxury of working without these financial pressures, of experiencing a sense of satisfaction from what she produced, of standing back and working on the big canvas of her novels. In her lifetime, she never reaped the benefits of great rewards or the critical acclaim that her work eventually came to attract. But her spirit and strength of character lives on in our family – six grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren and four great-great-grandchildren. There is something of her in all of us. We are proud to celebrate this internationally esteemed writer as our own. I would wish for her to know that her work is still valued and enjoyed well into the twenty-first century. It’s still out there engaging people’s minds and intelligence. I would want her to rest reassured that her labour still bears fruit in her legacy to us, her family, and to her readers.’

OUR BLOGGERS WRITE

‘I read *Consequences* knowing that it was all going to end badly, and yet I was unable to tear myself away. If there is a strand of hope to which we can cling in this tragic tale, it is that EM Delafield purposefully set it in the past: she is critical of Victorian values and hopeful of the changes that are to come. It left me with a great deal on which to ponder. I was utterly enthralled, totally wrapped up in Alex’s horribly sad story, perpetually close to tears. It’s a profoundly affecting book, and only afterwards can one be dispassionate enough to see that it is also an angry and absolutely vital feminist statement.’ Emily Books

‘I am about to start reading all the Persephone books in order and the book that played a part in getting me thinking about doing so was *The World That Was Ours* by Hilda Bernstein. One of the things I have liked about all the Persephones that I have read so far is that they have all been, twee isn’t the right word, erm, ‘rather delightful’ might be better. This has made me read them sparingly as ‘safe’ choices. I am now thrilled that *World* felt like a very dark and dangerous book, a rare first-hand account of 1960s South Africa. Hilda Bernstein is an incredible writer, at the same time she writes in a style that makes the book feel like a thriller. Yet she manages

not to make the book seem like a historical document. Thank goodness Persephone have chosen it as a book to reprint for us to discover because it is just the sort of book that everyone should read.’ Savidge Reads

‘Happiness came at a great cost to the heroine of *Lady Rose and Mrs Memmary*, who was a victim of Victorian society, and of the limited roles it gave to women. She was expected to bury her personal needs to maintain the status quo of an aristocracy that was above the passions and indiscretions of the lower classes. Anyone who dared to break free was punished severely; deviance would not be tolerated. This is a much deeper and darker novel than it at first appears, and is both inspiring and profoundly moving. A damning indictment of a society that crushed its inhabitants and a beautiful, haunting exploration of what it means to live a good life, I loved every minute of it. Don’t let this pass you by; it’s a real gem.’ Booksnob

‘Each story in the *The Persephone Book of Short Stories* has a delicious kernel of quiet truth at its centre, as well as a good crunchy bite at the end, and I would be hard pushed to choose a favourite to date, but along the way I am meeting some authors whose voices resonate and I will seek out more short stories by them for sure...to

be honest, forget the 100th book, I would love Persephone to publish a volume like this every year. The collective approach makes for fascinating contrasts whilst, for all the years that pass, the concerns and themes surrounding the constraints and pleasures of women’s lives seem timeless and unchanging.’ Dovegreyreader

‘*On The Other Side* is effectively Mathilde Wolff-Monckeberg’s diary, framed through letters to her children in Britain (although she never sent them), and documents what life was like in Germany during WWII. She is a delightful person, easy to empathise with. The part I found most fascinating concerned Mathilde’s experiences after the war was over. This book is serious and important, by contrast *The Winds of Heaven* is at the light, frothy end of the scale, yet both books exemplify what makes Persephone Books wonderful – they are books which enrich the reading life, whether through delightful fiction or thought-provoking non-fiction. *Winds* is not a finely-drawn, perceptive novel – it is light and broad and completely, wonderfully entertaining – yet I admire authors who can create an action-packed, page-turning novel, with underlying seriousness, and still produce a credible narrative.’ Stuck in a Book

‘There is a lot of lightly ironic humour throughout *Greenbanks* but sad and even tragic things also happen; Dorothy Whipple’s flat, almost toneless style allows the narrative to express both humour and sorrow without awkward changes of gear and the characters are treated with even-handedness. Together with *High Wages*, this is the Dorothy Whipple novel I’ve enjoyed the most, for its episodic style and its gentle interest in the lives of women throughout this fascinating historical period.’ Twentieth Century Vox

‘While *The Persephone Book of Short Stories* is a large book, chock full of stories, my interest hasn’t waned in the least, which happens occasionally with short story collections. If anything I tend to want to keep reading rather than wait until the following weekend to proceed to the next story. Honestly, they’re a treat – like choosing a truffle out of a box of chocolates, so often exquisite and nearly always satisfying.’ Danitorres

‘*Patience* is sheer delight from start to finish, witty, amusing, touching and sad, I read it straight through in one sitting. I pay this book the compliment of saying that I was very sad when I had finished it: and that feeling of discovering something wonderful and new was gone and left me feeling a bit lost. However, I am pretty certain I will read it again and again as its subtle style of writing and humour will benefit from

another look. Absolutely staggering that this book is written by a man, so spot on is he on feminine thought processes and attitudes. Maureen Lipman calls this book “delicious” and tells us to “savour it” and I did – every single word of it.’ Random Jottings

‘In *The Children who lived in a Barn* I particularly like Sue, who faces up to the challenge of being in charge of five children – and of trying to live a normal life, not a Famous Five summer of ginger beer and picnics. Eleanor Graham gives us details in abundance and to me they are all fascinating. The ending is a mad mixture of *deus ex machina* and jaw-dropping coincidence, but this doesn’t matter too much because its only purpose is to bring about the necessary conclusion. The real strength of the story is not its ending, but its middle – the way the children meet and overcome the challenges of their situation.’ ThisisSchool

‘There is always a point in a Dorothy Whipple novel where I put the book down, stare into the middle distance for a while and murmur, ‘This woman is a genius’... I daresay we all have our individual definitions of what makes great writing, but this is mine: it takes the wholly recognisable stuff of ordinary life and reveals the yawning depths of emotion underneath. And just because she can, Whipple does this effortlessly, sometimes in the space of the most casual of

throwaway lines. You can keep your sensational family stories, your misery memoirs, your issue-based novels. Give me Whipple’s astute and compassionate evocation of the immense drama that is everyday life any time.’ Tales from the Reading Room

‘*The Blank Wall* is a really suspense-filled tale of how Lucia tries to save her family in her own rather bumbling yet highly strung and reactionary way: there is the entertaining element of whether she should wash up, make the beds and clean the baths or go and meet with a blackmailer (this had me in hysterics). Whilst it does have a domestic setting, *The Blank Wall* is a great thrilling novel that slowly but surely notches the suspense up as you read. I picked it up and could barely be parted from it. A truly entertaining, and also rather endearing, suspense novel from an author who deserves to be much more widely read.’ Savidge Reads

‘Demurely risqué, ostensibly proper but slyly subversive, *Patience* is a sophisticated 1953 novel, and its combination of light comedy and farce is either a winning one or an implausible conceit, depending on the reader’s mood or point of view. *Patience* herself will either enchant or infuriate. Snappy and smart of dialogue, sure in its characterisation, this is a bright and funny and charming novel, but one you might not guess had come from the pen of a man.’ Cornflower Books

THE PERSEPHONE 102

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 Beaman

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 Ety 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 Beaman

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 Beaman

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 night-club singer. Read on R4 by Maureen Lipman; now a film with Frances McDormand and Amy Adams. Preface: Henrietta Twycross-Martin **Also available as an unabridged Persephone audiobook read by Frances McDormand**

22. Consider the Years by Virginia Graham Sharp, funny, evocative WW2 poems by Joyce Grenfell's closest friend and collaborator. Preface: Anne Harvey

23. Reuben Sachs by Amy Levy A fierce 1880s satire on the London Jewish community by 'the Jewish Jane Austen' who was a friend of Oscar Wilde. Preface: Julia Neuberger

24. Family Roundabout by Richmal Crompton By the *William* books author; 1948 family saga contrasting two matriarchs and their very different children. Preface: Juliet Aykroyd

25. The Montana Stories by Katherine Mansfield Collects together the short stories written during the author's last year; with a detailed publisher's note and the contemporary illustrations. Five were read on R4 in 2002.

26. Brook Evans by Susan Glaspell A very unusual novel, written in the same year as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, about the enduring effect of a love affair on three generations of a family.

- 27. The Children who Lived in a Barn** by Eleanor Graham A 1938 classic about five children fending for themselves; starring the unforgettable hay-box. Preface: Jacqueline Wilson
- 28. Little Boy Lost** by Marghanita Laski Novel about a father's search for his son in France in late 1945, chosen by the *Guardian's* Nicholas Lezard as his 2001 Paperback Choice. A '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 cookery book 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: a unique portrait.

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. Five of them were read on BBC R4 in 2007 and recently on R4 Extra.

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-war 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 Beauman** 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 1942. '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: Merryn 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): Miss Buncle marries and moves 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, by the celebrated editor and memoir writer. Preface: the author. **Six of the stories are available read by the author as a Persephone audiobook.**

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

94. No Surrender by **Constance Maud** A 1911 novel centring on the struggle for the vote by a mill girl and the aristocrat who becomes her friend. Preface: Lydia Fellgett

95. Greenbanks by **Dorothy Whipple** A 1932 novel by our most popular author about a family and, in particular, a grandmother and her 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 rather punishing detail: eye-opening and useful.

97. Harriet by **Elizabeth Jenkins** A brilliant but disquieting 1934 novel about the 1877 murder of Harriet

Staunton. Afterword: Rachel Cooke

98. A Writer's Diary by **Virginia Woolf** Extracts from the diaries, covering the years 1918–41, selected by Leonard Woolf in 1953 in order to show his late wife in the act of writing. Preface: Lyndall Gordon

99. Patience by **John Coates** A hilarious 1953 novel about a 'happily married' Catholic mother of three in St John's Wood who falls 'improperly in love'. Preface: Maureen Lipman

100. The Persephone Book of Short Stories Thirty stories to celebrate our 100th book: ten by Persephone authors, ten from the last decade's Biannuals and ten that are new.

101. Heat Lightning by **Helen Hull** A young married woman spends a sultry and revelatory week with her family in small-town Michigan; a 1932 Book-of-the-Month Club Selection. Preface: Patricia McClelland Miller

102. The Exiles Return by **Elisabeth de Waal** A novel, written in the late 1950s but never published before, about five exiles who return to Vienna after the war: a meditation on the theme of 'going back' as well as a love story. Preface: Edmund de Waal



'Great Ormond Street, at the corner with Lamb's Conduit Street' photographed in 1905

'FOR GOOD' BY ALICE ADAMS

'How I hate California! God, no one will ever know how much I hate it here,' cries out Pauline Field, a once-famous abstract-expressionist painter. It is lunchtime on a ferociously cold Sunday late in June – in a beach house near San Francisco: Pauline's house – and her lunch party that is assembled there in her enclosed patio, drinking sangria. Almost no one (in fact only one person) pays any attention to Pauline, who tends to speak in an exaggerated way. She is a huge strong woman, dressed outrageously in pink; she has wild white hair and consuming dark-brown eyes. It is possible that she has made this impassioned complaint before.

The house is some three or four years old; those years (the years, incidentally, of Pauline's most recent marriage) and the relentless wind have almost silvered the shingled walls, and beach grass has grown up through the slats of the planked-over patio, where now all those guests, twenty or so, are standing with their cold fruity drinks, their backs to the wind and to the sea. The drive home, over steep winding hills and beside great wooded canyons, will be somewhat dangerous even for a sober driver; these weak drinks are the inspiration of Pauline's (third) husband, Stephen, a cautious former alcoholic.

The one person who paid attention to Pauline is also the only person who is looking out to

the churning grey sea: a young girl, about twelve, Nell Ashbury, from New York; she is visiting her father and her stepmother. She listened to Pauline because her hostess has come across to her more vividly than any of the other adults present (discounting her father, Jason Ashbury, the writer, about whom she has the most passionate curiosity, not knowing him well at all). Pauline, to Nell, is more *present* than anyone else there. Her mother's Village circle includes a lot of writers, editors, agents; Nell is tired of literary people, who all talk too much. Perhaps she herself will be a painter, like Pauline? And Pauline listens; so many grown-ups (her mother's writers) ask questions and then don't wait to hear the answer. Pauline is kind; she has in fact wrapped reed-thin Nell in an old Irish sweater of her own, in which the girl now sits, enveloped – it comes down to her knees – looking out across a grass-tufted rise of sand to the turbulent sea, and thinking, Pacific?

But at Pauline's words – 'I hate California' – Nell has turned to listen, and it occurs to her that she does not like it here much either; it is terribly windy and cold, not at all like a summer day at a real beach, not like Crane's Beach, at Ipswich, where she and her mother go for the month of August every summer. Nell has a tendency to take people at their word (she believes that Pauline

hates California), and partly because she is so young, she believes that what is said is meant, for good.

Nell also (half-consciously) understands Pauline to mean that she does not like her party, her guests – and possibly she does not like her husband, the blond man, rather short, who is pouring out the reddish drinks.

'It's not a place that's fit for human beings,' declaims Pauline, who has not had a show of her paintings for years, although she still works, if spasmodically, and who has unhappily become used to inattention. 'Perhaps mountain lions,' she continues. 'Feel that wind, in *June*.'

Pauline's size is a further reason for Nell's instinct about her not liking her husband. 'Women who hate their husbands always put on weight,' Nell's mother has said, herself purposely thin (and unremarried), and Nell has as yet found no evidence against this theory. Her stepmother, who visibly 'adores' her father, is even trimmer than Nell's mother is. Given the ten years or so difference in their ages, they look rather alike, Nell thinks – and would of course not say to either of them. Brown-skinned blondes, blue-eyed, rather athletic. What her father likes?

In fact Nell has seen rather few fat women among the friends of either parent, and this too gives Pauline a certain interest: what *nerve*, to be so large. And her size

is somehow sexy, all that energetic flesh. The other guests look vaguely alike and are dressed quite similarly: they are in stylishly good shape; they wear pants and expensive old sweaters.

Nell herself is physically a curious replica of her father: sandy-haired, with light grey eyes. Everyone has remarked on the likeness, and Nell has sometimes wondered if this is one thing that makes him uneasy with her: it must be strange for Jason to see his colouring, his own long nose and impossibly high brow on a girl, a thin young girl. Sometimes Nell catches him staring at her in an unnerved way, and he seems not to know what to say to her. The phrase 'pale imitation' has unfortunately stuck in her mind. They were divorced so long ago, Jason and her mother, when Nell was a baby and Jason a hugely successful novelist. On the heels of his greatest success – that rarity, a book that six or eight superior critics praised and that several hundred thousand people bought – he stopped writing entirely. He has lived a lot in Italy, in southern France and Greece.

Although she is the one complaining about the weather, Pauline has not dressed to defend herself from it: the long-sleeved pink cotton smock from which her spatulate-fingered, muscular brown hands extend is thin ('Fat women always love bright colours,' Nell's mother has said, safe in navy or black); she is barefoot, and the

sand adheres to her large brown feet. She says, 'I can't bear this wind!'

'Well, Pauline,' says Jason, in his glancing, non-serious way that no one seems to know how to take (is he serious?), 'you could chuck it all and run off to some warmer clime.'

So, Nell thinks, he too has been listening to Pauline?

Pauline's great eyes flash across him; she says, 'I just may.'

But her husband, blond Stephen, has spoken much more loudly than she. 'Pauline would rather stick around and make dramatic complaints,' he says, sounding smug in the knowledge (and possession?) of Pauline.

Obviously these two men, Nell's father and Stephen, do not like each other much, and Nell begins to regard the party with slightly more interest. Just possibly something could happen? In general, her parents' friends do not make scenes, just talk, and she had sometimes thought that it would be more fun if they did.

'In fact I might join you there, wherever,' Jason continues, as though Stephen had not spoken. 'It is awfully goddamn cold.' He turns to his small blonde wife. 'And how would you like that, my love?'

Neither what he said nor his look has been clear: did he mean that he would take his wife or



'Lunch' 1918 oil on canvas by Harold Harvey © Belgrave Gallery

leave her there in the California cold? Nell's stepmother visibly does not know, but in a calm, controlled way she says, 'Well, in the meantime I think I'll go inside. It is terribly cold.' She starts in, and everyone begins to follow her, as though an excuse or perhaps a leader was needed.

Jason laughs, as Nell wonders why: At what private joke?

'I will need help!' wildly says Pauline as people are trooping past her into the house, and then, in a more rational way, she addresses Nell – who has taken her seriously and is staring in dismay. 'Nell, do come in the kitchen with me. You look as

though you were good at sorting things out.'

The kitchen is further away and thus more separate from the living room than is usual in the houses Nell has known. She and Pauline walk down a hall, past bedrooms, to what is the largest room in the house: a huge square, two stories high, with a backward-looking view of steep, ravined hills, all shades and shapes and varieties of green, here and there patched with sunlight, in other areas cloud-darkened, almost black. 'There's only one painter out here who can do that,' says Pauline (sadly? enviously? Nell can't tell). 'I've

never tried. Perhaps I should? This is my favourite room,' she says. 'I like to be alone here. I can't bear people who come out to try to help me – I can't be helped.' She laughs, a short harsh definite sound. 'Of course I don't mean you, little Nell – I asked you in.' And Nell is then given a large handful of silver which, for a moment, she is afraid that she is supposed to polish; this has not been done for some time.

'Just sort it into little piles,' instructs Pauline. 'You know, to be wrapped in a napkin. Something for everyone. And now tell me all about your mother.'

'She's fine,' Nell automatically says, and then asks, 'Did you know her?'

'Oh, yes,' says Pauline, sounding bored. 'We all used to know each other. But that was terribly long ago. In the forties, in fact. Of course we were terribly young.'

The *forties*. Wanting to know more (what was everyone like then? what was her father like?), Nell has understood that Pauline does not want to answer questions – she will talk more or less to herself.

Pauline is drinking vodka from a wineglass. 'God, how I hate sangria,' she abruptly says, in much her tone of hating California. And then she asks, 'Are you very tired of conversations about why your father doesn't write anymore?'

Nell hesitates, at a loss. 'No, we don't talk about that much,' she honestly says, at last.

'Oh, I suppose not. Your



'The Exile' 1930 by Thomas Cooper Gotch (1854–1931)
Alfred East Art Gallery, Kettering

mother would have lost interest, lucky for her. Out here it's quite a favourite topic, among his friends. That's partly what I mean about California. It's as vacuous as it is windy, in fact it's a chilly windbag of a place.' And she laughs, in a pleased way – she will clearly say this again. 'The truth is,' she then continues, 'Jason is scared. His last book was so good that it scared him to death, almost.'

Nell smiles politely. She is the sort of child to whom adults often talk, perhaps in some (erroneous) belief that innocence prevents her understanding. She is by now used to nearly incomprehensible remarks that later make considerable sense, and so now she tucks away this notion of California, and of her father's work. And she wonders: Is Pauline talking about herself?

The salad that Pauline is making, in a huge wooden bowl on the large butcher-block table, also looks (at first) familiar to Nell: several kinds of lettuce, thinly sliced onion, parsley. But then other things from dishes in the giant refrigerator are added: fish-smelling things, pink, and indistinguishable in shape. 'Mussels and clams,' Pauline says. '*Fruits de mer*. They'll absolutely hate it. Everyone except your father. He loves all this stuff too.'

Did Pauline once love her father? Did they have an affair, back in the forties? This thought, or question, has been slowly forming in Nell's mind. Nell's mother and her friends talk a lot about people having affairs, which Nell takes to mean making

out with someone you're not married to. She is very interested, although she herself has so far only observed other kids at parties smoking grass, making out.

And she of course enjoys being talked to by adults, but only up to a point. She does not like it – is in fact frightened – when voices begin to slur, when eyes grow vague and at the same time wild. She now with alarm observes the onset of these symptoms in Pauline, as Pauline says, staring at Nell too intently, 'If I could only get thin again, then I could work. It's all this fat that holds me.'

Nell can no more imagine being fat than she can being dead, and she has only the vaguest ideas about work. But she has, still, a strong sense that Pauline even semi-drunk is someone to whom she should pay attention.

Pauline says, 'The really important thing is never to marry.'

Well, Nell had decided that for herself already, years ago.

Just then a dark man whom Nell has not much noticed before comes into the room, and Pauline embraces him in a way that Nell has seen before: grown-ups in a kitchen (usually) lurching at each other.

Pauline croons, 'Ah, my long-lost love, why couldn't everything last?'

There are tears in her manic eyes that to Nell look real, but the man seems not to take them seriously. He pats her shoulder in a dismissing way; he even says, '*There,*' and he goes back out,

looking embarrassed.

Pauline gives Nell a sober, calculating look of complicity; was she then pretending with that man to be drunk, or much drunker than she is, in order to make fun of him? What will she do next? Nell fully believes in Pauline's desperation.

Now Pauline goes over to the oven, and efficiently (undrunkenly) with asbestos gloves she removes a huge steaming garlic-smelling casserole. This and the salad and the napkin-wrapped silver are placed on a wire-wheeled cart, and propelled into the living room. Nell follows at a little distance in her wake.

People line up to help themselves. Not sure what to do, or where to be, Nell is surprised to see her father coming towards her, carrying two full plates, saying, 'Come on, let's go over there.'

And then, when they are seated, in a tone unusual for him, with her, he says, 'I hope this isn't too bad a party for you? I didn't know there'd be so many people. And somehow I wanted you to meet Pauline. Anyway, sometimes it's easier to talk in the middle of a crowd, have you noticed that yet? And we haven't had much of a chance to talk, have we? Have I seemed preoccupied? The thing is – please, you won't mention this to anyone? I'm sure you won't. I wanted to tell you –'

Nell is to find that life often provides too much at once; just as her heart jumps with pleasure at her father's telling her something important, in

confidence – just at that crucial moment they both hear Pauline shouting from across the room; they see Pauline wildly waving her arms – Pauline making a scene. ‘Well, goodbye, one and all. I’m off for a walk. Don’t eat and run – I’ll be gone for hours. Unless – would anyone like to come along?’ There is a terrible pause, especially terrible for Nell, who believes that the invitation, or summons, was for her – who is frozen in her corner. ‘Well, then, OK. Sorry I asked.’ A door is slammed, and Pauline is gone.

Nell looks at her father, and she sees her own feelings apparent in his face, written across his features so similar to her own: Jason looks stricken, deeply shocked, as she is. And Nell is aware of real panic: a friend of her mother’s, a woman writer who often drank too much, committed suicide at last. What will happen to Pauline? Will she plunge drunkenly into that cold bleak ocean, that terrible Pacific?

She looks questioningly at her father, who only says, ‘*Well*,’ in an exhausted way.

Unable not to, Nell asks him, ‘You wanted to tell me –’

He looks at her forgetfully. ‘Oh, just a novel. I’ve begun one.’

Naturally enough, people do eat and run. In a flustered way Stephen serves coffee, which everyone seems to gulp, and then there is a general movement towards cars.

The drive home, to Nell, does not seem dangerous; she trusts her father’s skill at the wheel. And the scenery is

extraordinary: once they have left the beach, and the now golden glimpses of the sea, they climb steeply into what could be a rain forest, dense variegated vegetation, trees, giant ferns – into what must have been the view from Pauline’s kitchen, and Nell remembers what Pauline said about its being a country for mountain lions. It smells of bay leaves.

Her stepmother is talking about Pauline. ‘Well, I never saw drink hit her quite like that. She has put on weight, hasn’t she? Anyway, she always manages to put out a great lunch. Although I could have done without all those bits of seafood in the salad. I wonder why she ever married Stephen. She seems to fall in love with giants and marry pygmies. What do you suppose struck her, finally? Three ex-lovers all suddenly at the same party?’

Nell finds all this vaguely disturbing, less vaguely unpleasant. She is still worried about Pauline; why is no one else worried?

Her father makes a sound that for him is completely in character; that is brief and impossible to read. And Nell is suddenly aware of a rush of the most intense and private love for him.

A month or so later Nell and her mother are sitting on the beach – Crane’s Beach, at Ipswich. A perfect beach, of fine white silk sand that squeaks underfoot. Dunes, grass. And a perfect hot still day. From time to time Nell has been thinking of

Pauline. (She has gathered that nothing horrible happened to her; someone would have said.) Now she wonders if this was the way Pauline thought a beach should be, and that summers should produce this sort of day? Yes, probably, she decides, and then she experiences again a tiny pang of guilt – regret at not having gone for that walk with Pauline, Pauline leaving her own party, so furiously. Although, of course, it was impossible at the time; she was talking to her father.

These days Nell’s mother is extremely happy, almost giddily so: a man she knows, in fact an old family friend, is getting a divorce, and he and Nell’s mother are going to get married. He works for a firm that is moving to Houston, and that is where they will all live. Houston, Texas. ‘We can take wonderful trips to Mexico, and New Orleans,’ her mother has said, with her new young laugh. Nell wonders about parties in Houston, and what will happen to her there.

The sea is very calm today; the barest waves, translucent, lap the sand, where at the edge, on their crazy useless-looking legs, the sand-pipers skitter past. And overhead white gulls wheel and dip, as though drunk with sunlight. Pauline would love it here, is what at that moment Nell thinks. She is also thinking that there are only about four more months until Christmas, which is when she can go to visit her father again. It has been agreed that she can now go more often.

Her mother, reading letters beside Nell on the sand, suddenly laughs. Nell has seen that this one is from her father, whose letters to his former wife do not usually make her laugh. 'Well,' her mother says, 'everyone seems to be breaking up these days.' (Does she mean Nell's father? Will she have a new stepmother? This quick notion is enough to make Nell queasy for an instant as her mother reads on.) 'You met Pauline Field, didn't you, darling? Well, she's up and left poor old Stephen, and she's gone off to San Miguel de Allende, to study painting there.'

Nell makes an ambiguous noise, not unlike her father's noncommittal sound. Then she asks, 'That's probably good for her to do, isn't it?'

'I suppose. She was quite

terrific, in her way.' Nell's mother adds, 'I never understood that marriage to Stephen. Or any of her marriages, for that matter.'

Nell says what she has not said before: 'She was sort of upset at her party that we went to. *She* said' – they both know that this 'she' refers to Nell's stepmother – 'something about three ex-lovers at the same party. Can a husband be counted as an ex-lover?'

Her mother laughs a lot. 'Darling, what a marvellous question. Well, actually one of them would of course have been Jason. They had a tremendous love affair, just before me. Sometimes I thought he'd never get over it, and I used to wish he'd married her. Instead of me. Maybe he would have gone on writing, or at least got her out of his system.'

Digesting this news, which is

not news at all, but something deeply known or felt before, Nell experiences a kind of gladness. Things seem to fit, or to have sorted themselves out, after all.

And, later still, although she has been told that San Miguel is in the middle of Mexico, nowhere near the coast, and although she has not been told that her father and stepmother are separating, what she imagines is – Jason and Pauline (a Pauline brown and thin, renewed) on a bright hot windless tropical beach. For good.

This undated story appears in The Stories of Alice Adams (Washington Square Press 2003). The American novelist Alice Adams (1926–99) published five collections of stories and eleven novels. None of them are available in the UK but all may be bought on abe.com.



Lamb's Conduit Street looking north in 1923. Photograph taken from Bloomsbury & Fitzrovia Through Time (2012) by Brian Girling.

OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

‘To celebrate having reached their one hundredth volume,’ wrote the *Guardian*, ‘here is Persephone’s marvellous collection of short stories by women, *The Persephone Book of Short Stories*. They are very well chosen: some are by first-rank authors, including Katherine Mansfield, Edith Wharton, Dorothy Parker, Irène Némirovsky and Penelope Fitzgerald; others from well-known writers who have been championed by the imprint and deservedly gained fresh recognition, such as Dorothy Whipple and Mollie Panter-Downes. There are thirty stories in all, and all remarkably unhampered by their time. The first, Susan Glaspell’s story of love and lexicography, seems as bold as the last, by Georgina Hammick, though you might not have found such an unflinching description of a gynaecological procedure

103 years ago. Put-upon mothers, exasperated wives, discarded mistresses – shared tropes bind these disparate stories into a coherent whole.’

‘The short stories in *The Persephone Book of Short Stories* span the C20th and with entries from big names and lesser known authors, they showcase the gifted judgement of Persephone. The true joy of short story collections is being able to dip in and out wherever I fancy, no one tale connected to the other. With this collection I could read the exact story tailored to my mood, whether I cared for the richness of Edith Wharton’s writing or the wry wit of Dorothy Parker. The name Persephone symbolises female creativity and this collection says it all. From Susan Glaspell’s ‘From A to Z’ (1909) to Georgina Hammick’s ‘A Few

Problems in the Day Case Unit’ (1986), the writing is fresh, moving, funny and still relevant to women today. Phyllis Bentley’s ‘The Photograph’ (1935), where Miss Timperley frets about being too old for a job, could, unfortunately, be applied to the discrimination still experienced by many looking for employment. But Phyllis Bentley gives us hope when – hurrah! – experience overcomes youth. A bookcase addition to be proud of.’ *Stylist*

‘Persephone Books concerns itself principally with reissuing obscure books by women’ said the *Guardian*. ‘It makes an exception for John Coates’s 1953 comic novel *Patience*, as he seemed to have no difficulty inhabiting the mind of the eponymous heroine – a devout Catholic and biddable young wife who for seven years has “lived in a state which varied from supreme contentment when having tea with her babies, to passive unresistance when being made love to by her husband.” The story concerns Patience’s discovery that sin may be more fulfilling than duty, having fallen passionately in love with a young pianist, while her husband Edward – who turns out to have been not entirely faithful himself – huffs and puffs at this show of disobedience. Coates created a nimble satire, blowing on the dying embers of Victorian double standards before the permissive society took over.’



Collier Campbell skirt: a *Sunday Times* special offer in 1977, photo © Lyn Stephenson

BOOK-OF-THE-MONTH CLUB

The *Book-of-the-Month Club* was founded in the USA in 1926. Janice Radway wrote about its history in *A Feeling for Books* in 1997: here are some of the points she makes that are relevant to *Persephone Books*.

1) **Dorothy Canfield Fisher** (in the picture on the right; author of *The Home-Maker*, *Persephone Book No. 7*) was for many years one of the BMC judges, insisting that literary judgements, evaluations and descriptions needed to vary with their audiences and their objects. She thought that ‘one trouble with book reviews could be eliminated by firmly specifying the kind of person for whom it is intended. One sort of review is written for actual readers of books,’ whereas literary criticism stressed judgement and evaluation rather than information and advice: ‘the literary sort of review is not intended for mere readers of books but for other critics whose self-appointed business it is correctly to appraise the position of each new piece of creative writing in relation to what has gone before in the history of literature.’

2) Because Dorothy Canfield Fisher believed that there was a fundamental continuity between literature and life, she treated all books as *instrumental guides for living* and argued that even fiction could enable readers to broaden their experience and to lead richer, more intense and honourable lives. ‘She has the

freshness eye and the warmest heart of all of us,’ wrote one of her fellow judges, adding that ‘she tended to like books in which good came out triumphant; she was herself a lay saint, and a book that made an appeal to the heart and to morality made a great appeal to her, though perhaps those books weren’t always the best books of the month.’ An appreciation for what the judges called warm-blooded humanity, free-flowing sentiment and intense affect was



a privileged part of the taste or style cultivated at the BMC: the titles the judges recommended with the greatest relish were often those that could be described, in the words of Dorothy Canfield Fisher, as ‘personal, human, and emotionally moving.’

3) In the vocabulary of the BMC judges *sentiment was not a singular thing to be avoided*. The judges praised books when they engaged the sentiments of the reader with a strong emphasis on the plural here, and believed strongly that reading ought to

generate a full range of affects.

4) A good book *took the BMC editors out of themselves*, swept them away, made them feel intensely; whereas academic literary critics had no interest in relating their own concrete experience of a text or in appealing to the emotional responses of their readers as they stressed the importance of linguistic complexity and formal intricacy and asserted that ‘authentic literature’ and ‘real art’ had to be challenging and difficult to read and was characterised by intricacy, ambiguity, and irony. The swift gesture of arrogant dismissal whereby sentimentalism, the middlebrow, suburbia and the *Reader’s Digest* were offhandedly but nonetheless ubiquitously dismissed so as to clear a space for the more rigorous and ‘critical’ reflections of Henry James, William Faulkner, Wallace Stevens and others was a familiar and ritualised gesture in universities.

5) The BMC editors were wary of *academic ways of reading* and writing, and that wariness was closely bound up with an articulate critique of academic habits of evaluation.

6) The BMC was driven by attention to ‘standards’ and the search for quality as much as it was by the search for corporate profit. To manage this was to achieve the nearly impossible feat of *balancing* two mutually exclusive principles, *the commercial and the literary*.

A PAEAN TO PERSEPHONE

J *PBLaw.wordpress.com*, 'Peter's Occasional Soapbox', had this (totally unsolicited!) blog about us.

I discovered Persephone Books quite by chance a few years ago, when I read an article in the Weekend *Financial Times* with the inimitable title 'I am Doing It for the Books'. So I ventured onto their website for a look around and maybe order a book or two. Almost immediately it became my new favourite publisher...

The whole experience of buying the books was a delight: an easily navigable, attractive website with detailed attention paid to making it as easy as possible to peruse the catalogue and find the right book. The same meticulous approach can be found in the books themselves, as an object that is likely to occupy pride of place in your briefcase or handbag; every one of them an individual marvel, with their smart uniform Persephone Grey dust jackets and cream 'labels' belying the unique, period endpapers and matching bookmarks that for them alone would be reason enough for collecting the books.

While I understand the books may not be widely available or even that visible on the high street, whenever I do mention Persephone to the right sort of someone, more often than not they're already well acquainted with it. And for those of a

nervous disposition, placing orders is very straightforward, either through the website, on order from your local bookseller, or even from the elephant in the room who shall remain nameless. For whatever reason you may come into contact with them, the staff are an absolute delight to deal with. All in all, it's not surprising that Persephone and its readers have come to form a real community if not a club that does not require membership.

And a personal comment about what I've found so special about the Persephone world in the couple of dozen or so books I've read so far, each of which is exceptional. While obviously this post hasn't much to do with lit. crit, here are one or two personal remarks about things that have particularly struck me after a first reading, though I suspect I'll be re-reading my collection many times with great pleasure for years to come. The most common preoccupation, not actual subject matter but looming in the background like an ominous grey thundercloud, is the War. What's so fascinating is to read books written at the time, not as historical or period pieces, but as current events when in many of these novels and short stories even the outcome of the war wasn't known. Authors actually knew what they were talking about in describing how people went about trying to live their

lives, how they felt and what it was really like, whether it's an adulterous young bride whose husband is dispatched indefinitely overseas or a family trying to preserve its heritage in the face of unstoppable social change. Elsewhere, there are wonderful novels about minorities and the aristocracy; not forgetting the downtrodden and dispossessed, so to speak, on both sides of the pond; and in one of my particular favourites, while telling a story about your regular working man and the simple pleasures of his couple of weeks annual family holiday by the seaside, the author still doesn't neglect social realism.

What's fascinating and to my mind possibly unique about this period, and one reason why it may have seen such a flourishing of women writers, is that, again because of the war, they were the only ones around who lived, or at least aspired to, any semblance of a normal life, let alone were in a position to read or write about it. Every book I've read so far has been a gem, even if (unsurprisingly) I doubt anyone would take equal pleasure in every title. I don't think it would be over-stating the case to suggest that Persephone will be seen as a real national treasure for resurrecting and preserving this part of our heritage for future generations according to almost Reithian ideals, and doing it with such style.

THE EXILES RETURN:FABRIC

The extracts in the article below are taken from Jacqueline Groag by Geoffrey Rayner, Richard Chamberlain and Annamarie Stapleton published by the Antique Collectors Club in 2009.

Jacqueline Groag was one of the small group of talented pioneer women designers who were influential in the development of Modernist design and culture in early C20th Europe. Few received recognition of their achievements in their lifetimes, or at least not until comparatively late in their careers – careers that were, in the main, overshadowed by those of their male counterparts. Jacqueline's chosen path, that of

pattern design, further served to obscure the brilliance of her international achievement.

This marginalisation, and neglect of pattern design and decoration, has its origin in the early C20th, when design theory was dominated by the functionalist concepts of male architects such as Le Corbusier; within mainstream Western European Modernist culture the sparse minimalism of Bauhaus-influenced design was seen as the ultimate achievement. Opposed to this purity was the perceived 'decadence' of a more decorative modernity, such as that associated with the Vienna Secession, particularly the avant-garde domesticity of the later

work of Josef Hoffmann and the Wiener Werkstatte or the decorative Expressionism of Bloomsbury and the Omega Workshop.

Although Viennese in attitude and culture, Jacqueline Groag (1903–86) was born Hilde Pickova in Prague. After the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918, Czechoslovakia became an independent state but Vienna, the old imperial capital, with its sophisticated intellectual and artistic life, remained the cultural lodestone for many of the Empire's former subjects.

The 1890s saw the founding of one of the first proto-modernist movements in Europe,



Floral design roller-printed spun rayon fabric for Haworth Fabrics 1953 / Jacqueline Groag photographed in 1957 © John Garner

the Vienna Secession. Originally a group of young painters, led by Gustav Klimt, who broke away from the constraints of the central bastion of the Viennese art establishment, it also included architects and designers such as Joseph Maria Olbrich and Josef Hoffmann.

In 1903 Hoffmann and his colleagues founded the Wiener Werkstätte, set up for the production of high-quality modern furnishings and decorative art. From early on many of the designers in the textile department were women, including, for example, Clara Posnanski [who in 1927 designed 'Paul', the textile we used for the endpaper for *Manja* by Anna Gmeyner, Persephone Book No. 39]; by the 1920s the Werkstätte was remarkable for the influence of women designers on its style and products, and in the process evolved an 'avant-garde domesticity' which, with the addition of fashion, created an essentially feminine interpretation of Modernity.

Jacqueline became part of this sophisticated milieu surrounding the Werkstätte when, in 1926, she arrived in Vienna to be a student at the Kunstgewerbeschule; the following year she was awarded first prize in a competition for a textile design for the Werkstätte which, over the next few years, bought many of her textile designs. Josef Hoffmann's teaching influenced her for the rest of her life as she continued to

develop and spread the ideas and styles of the Vienna Secession and the Wiener Werkstätte.

In Paris in 1930 she designed fabrics for Chanel, Schiaparelli Lanvin, Worth, and Poiret. In Vienna the same year she met her husband Jacques Groag, also Jewish and also from Prague. They married in 1937 and she now called herself Jacqueline (!); the Groags (who did not have children) became a key part of the intellectual and artistic life of the city, in a group that included Kokoschka, Schiele, Max Reinhardt, Freud, Schnabel, Klee, Rubinstein, and Wittgenstein. But after the Anschluss they went back to live in Prague and in 1939, just before the Czech border closed, after an adventurous journey via Paris and Holland, they managed to get to England. Here Jacqueline began a long and illustrious career as a textile designer, introducing to both Britain and the United States the tolerant, inclusive and decorative modernity associated with the Vienna Kunstgewerbeschule and the Werkstätte. By the mid-1940s, Jacqueline, arguably the most influential designer of surface pattern in Britain, was designing textiles for export, although war restrictions resulted in very limited textile printing.

For some twenty years Jacqueline Groag had a leading part in the renaissance of pattern design which occurred in the aftermath of the war, when people longed for decoration

and colour in their homes and daily lives, a longing that continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Although largely a reaction against the strictures of the war, it was also a rejection of the functionalist and somewhat authoritarian precepts of pre-war International Modernism; despite the missionary activities in the post-war period of the principal propagandists of rational design – in Britain the Council of Industrial Design and in the United States New York's Museum of Modern Art – popular demand for pattern and decoration proved irrepressible.

Jacqueline was unusual in being able to move easily from abstract design to the representational and to produce equally good work in both disciplines. The rational underlying grid structure of pattern design associated with Hoffmann is often apparent in her work, as is, paradoxically, the richness and eclecticism of her design sources, which owe much to the influence of the Werkstätte.

This is true of the inexpensive mass-market textiles she designed for David Whitehead in the early 1950s. Apart from the quality of their manufacture, David Whitehead textiles were exceptional for the quality of their design, commissioned from leading avant-garde artists and designers such as Henry Moore, John Piper, Edouard de Paolozzi, Terence Conran – and Jacqueline Groag.

‘ANNUNCIATION’

Monica Ditmas was born in 1924. She was a history teacher all her life and is still writing poetry. Recently her niece sent us one of her poems, which we thought readers of the *Persephone* Biannually would like to read. Monica Ditmas herself has written: “Annunciation” won the international poetry prize at the Cheltenham Festival in 1966. I need to explain the origins of the poem. At Cheltenham Ladies’ College, the Citizenship class had a special programme of which I was put in charge, with outside visits that included the Assizes in Gloucester and the local brewery. On this occasion it was to the General Hospital for a talk by Sister Tutor. In that age of innocence many girls had not really thought of sex and motherhood as something that would lie ahead for them; the visit was a sudden encounter with this reality, and I was very moved by watching their reactions. Incidentally, “green girls” is because their uniform was green, not just because they were naive!

The quick pale fingers of Sister Tutor,
springing from bare wrists, the cuffs rolled back,
deftly unscrew the squat jar’s lid.

We cannot identify its contents,
amorphous in the dull formalin-fuddled liquid. But her quick bright voice
steadies the creeping sickness.
Finger-tips delve. ‘Come along, little fella.’

She lifts him out, the five months fetus,
whose putty-coloured indiarubber limbs,
thin as bird-bones, curl coldly on a forgotten pillow of warm flesh.

The watching eyes of the green girls
are still as pools. Only a long, long exhalation of pure pity,

strangely unanimous, flickers and dies
momentarily over the packed membranes
of unexpanded lungs. We breathe for him.

‘Look, even the little tongue is perfect,’
pinching the wrinkled cheeks so that the mouth opens.
It does not squeak ‘Mama’. This one is real,

from whose shrunken abdomen still snakes
thick and tortuous, the cord that carried life
generously at first, but death in the end.

The quick starched fingers of Sister Tutor
force him again through the jar’s mouth.
He floats in a sac of primal tears.

Out file the green girls into careless streets.
The public gardens, prim with flowers, invite
no sudden revelations. Yet limbs stiffen

against strange delicate fibrillations
that will not be denied. Within each one,
immaculately conceived, a new life stirs.



John Minton Landscape (possibly Lake District) painted 1930s © private collection

EVENTS

On **Wednesday May 22nd** at 3.30 there will be a *Tea with Diana Athill*. The author of *Midsummer Night in the Workhouse*, Persephone Book No. 92, will read from one of her short stories and answer questions about her life and work.

On **Wednesday June 5th** Wendy Bray, who in 1953 designed the endpaper for *Patience* by John Coates, will come to a **Lunch** to celebrate the launch of the Museums and Galleries Notebooks with her designs which we sell in the shop. She will be in conversation with Rachel Cooke, who in September will publish *Her Brilliant Career: Ten Extraordinary Women of the Fifties*. One of these is Patience Gray, author of *Plats du Jour*, but of course Wendy Bray, who has been an extraordinary woman for the last sixty years, was interviewed for the book.

The third event this summer will be a showing of the new film of *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* starring Felicity Jones and Elizabeth McGovern. This will be at the BFI in Stephen St on **Wednesday June 12th**: a drink and a sandwich lunch will be served at 1 pm and the film will be shown at 2. It is hoped that at 3.30 the film's director Donald Rice, screenwriter Mary Henely Magill and one of the stars will join us for questions and discussion.

Maurice Wren, the Chief Executive of the Refugee Council (which is the recipient of the royalties for Persephone Book No. 102, Elisabeth de Waal's *The Exiles Return*) will speak at a **Lunch on Thursday June 20th** about the work of the Council and about *The Exiles Return*.



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On **Saturday July 27th** there will be a Persephone outing to the *Towner Art Gallery* in Eastbourne where we shall view the exhibition of *Lyons Lithographs*; have lunch at 12.30; go to a 2pm lecture by Neville Lyons; and repair to the beach for ice cream.

By kind permission of the present owners, at 4 on **Thursday September 12th** there will be a *Tea* at Roppelegh's, the house Mollie Panter-Downes lived in near Haslemere. This celebrates the renovation of the writing-hut where she wrote all the stories in *Good Evening, Mrs Craven* and *Minnie's Room*, Persephone Books Nos 8 and 34. An actor will read one of the stories for us.

A date for the diary: to mark the Persephone publication of *The Squire* by Edith Bagnold, the *Ninth Persephone Lecture* will be given by the noted biographer *Anne Sebba* on **Thursday November 28th** at the October Gallery. Her lecture will be called *Enid Bagnold: Writer and Mother*.

Please ring the shop to book for an event; each one costs £20, but July 27th is £30 to cover the cost of the lecture ticket.

Two other events at which Persephone Books will appear: afternoon tea at The Bookshop, Kibworth on Saturday May 18th and a talk at West Meon in Hampshire on Saturday July 13th.

The two new books for the Autumn, Persephone Books Nos 103 and 104, will be *The Squire* (1938) and *The Two Mrs Abbotts* (1943), D E Stevenson's third *Miss Bunclue* book.

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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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