



# The Persephone Biannually

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**Tel: +44 20 7242 9292**  
**[www.persephonebooks.co.uk](http://www.persephonebooks.co.uk)**

*Southern England 1944: Spitfires Attacking Flying-Bombs by  
Walter Thomas Monnington (1902-76) © Imperial War Museum*



# OUR BOOKS FOR SPRING/SUMMER 2015

Our first 2015 book is by Mollie Panter-Downes, the author of two previous Persephone books: *Good Evening, Mrs Craven: The Wartime Stories* and *Minnie's Room: The Peacetime Stories*. London correspondent for *The New Yorker* during the war, Mollie Panter-Downes not only wrote short stories but also non-fiction 'Letters from London'. These were first reprinted as *London War Notes* in 1971 and have now been republished as Persephone Book No. 111.

Yet, it is true, under Categories on the Persephone website we already have a total of seventeen books about the Second World War: how can we be so certain of this, the eighteenth's, originality and readability? Well, as ever, it's all in the writing. Mollie Panter-Downes's style has wit, integrity and incisiveness; and she has an extra, classic quality that singles her out from her contemporaries. As an early reader wrote to us from America: 'I'm just a few pages in to *London War Notes* and already think it is utterly stunning in its immediacy, oh, and gosh the writing! MPD is sort of a genius.' And that is the point – Mollie was indeed a 'sort of

genius' and this overlays everything she wrote. However, as always, 'no man is a prophet in his own country': her work was published exclusively in *The New Yorker*, yet only about 5000 of the *New Yorker*'s half-million or so readers were living in England; thus she became far more famous in the United States than in her own homeland.'

After Mollie's death in 1997, the *New Yorker* obituary writer, Gardner Botsford described her as 'a completely domesticated reporter, living in an Elizabethan house in Surrey with husband, daughters, dogs, stacks and stacks of books, and a ravishing garden. She was, in short, thoroughly, bred-in-the-bone English (actually Anglo-Irish, which is even more so) and it was this Englishness that gave her Letter from London such authority. She wrote her first Letter on September 3rd 1939; on May 12th 1945 she wrote her hundred and fifty-third.'

He continued: 'Other *New Yorker* correspondents were writing about the war, of course, often with great power and conviction, but they dealt with large incidents and events, while Mollie wrote of the quotidian



*An early 1940s rayon scarf designed and manufactured by Filmyra Fabrics. This is now displayed in the shop window.*



*A 1950s Heal's curtain material, provenance unknown, which was sold until the early 1960s.*

stream of English life, of what it was like to actually live in a war, of what the government was doing, of the nervous sound of the air-raid sirens, of the disappearance of the egg [which is a leitmotif in *Few Eggs and no Oranges*, Persephone Book No. 9], of children being evacuated – of all the things that made life in England bearable and unbearable. In a steady flow of copy, directed to editors she had never met at a magazine she had never visited, she undoubtedly did more to explain wartime England to American readers than anyone else in the field.’

**Y**et, Botsford pointed out: ‘She was a slow, painstaking writer; the seamlessness of the finished product belied the effort that went into it. She had a little writing house at her place in Surrey [there will be a Persephone visit to this at lunchtime on September 22nd], and every day she would shut herself up in it with her notes and gleanings to put together yet another of her lustrous constructions for her distant editors. Then, when the piece was finished and every comma in place, something close to farce would take over. A local boy on a rattletrap bicycle would wheel the copy over the railroad station, if he didn’t have a flat tire, and deliver it to a benign train conductor on the six-forty-three to London; this man, in turn, if he didn’t forget, would trot it over to the cable office, and the people there, if they hadn’t mislaid the address, would dispatch it to New York. Over the

years, every one of these possible disasters took place, but, true to form, muddling through eventually prevailed. It is doubtful whether the boy on the bicycle, as he mended his flat, had the slightest idea of how much pleasure and humour and feeling he had in his basket. But we knew, and know, and are grateful.’

**T**wenty-five years earlier, at the time of the republication of *London War Notes*, the *Times Literary Supplement* wrote: ‘For sheer range of mood and matter Mollie Panter-Downes leaves most of her rivals standing, but the main preservative is her relaxed air. Indeed, she finds cause to protest about BBC announcers who sound as if they are “understudying for Cassandra on the walls of Troy.” But Troy was also Prospero’s island, and the gifted reporter recognised it. Nothing more vivid has been written about those early days of soft sunshine when it was hard to disentangle the dream from the reality, a long summer afternoon in which fantasy flourished, and the barrage balloons glittered “like swollen fairy elephants lolling against the blue”.

**‘N**aturally Mollie Panter-Downes had an appreciative eye for the “battalions of willing ladies who have emerged from the herbaceous borders to answer the call of duty” and is delighted to note the success in a fire-watching contest of “a team of determined matrons who scuttled over trick old roofs like lady Tarzans”. She

has an ear for the colourful remark and notices that tulips in the London parks are the colour of blood. What is the best place to make for when caught in a raid? Miss Panter-Downes discusses the virtue of Harrods, where chairs are provided, as against the public shelter where you have to stand. The tone should not be misinterpreted. She can be witty, mocking and severe in as many paragraphs. She can even tell Churchill off where necessary. The communicators are frequently chastised. Reactions to the Rudolf Hess affair make the public doubtful whether it is “reading about Hitler’s righthand man or Gary Cooper”. Throughout we get the clear message that her loyalty is not to government but to “the great, patient, courageous mass of British people”.

**A**nd as the author of the new Persephone Preface, David Kynaston, comments: ‘I value and cherish Mollie Panter-Downes as a writer for I think three main reasons: her eye for detail, her humour, and her wisdom. The eye for detail – essentially a novelist’s eye – is abundant in *London War Notes*... The humour is understated and very much of the wryly observational rather than rib-tickling variety.’ And he concludes: ‘The great chroniclers of the *comédie humaine* also impart wisdom. For me as a historian... the most important thing that I have learned from Mollie Panter-Downes is the frequent (though not invariable) disconnect between the world of politics and

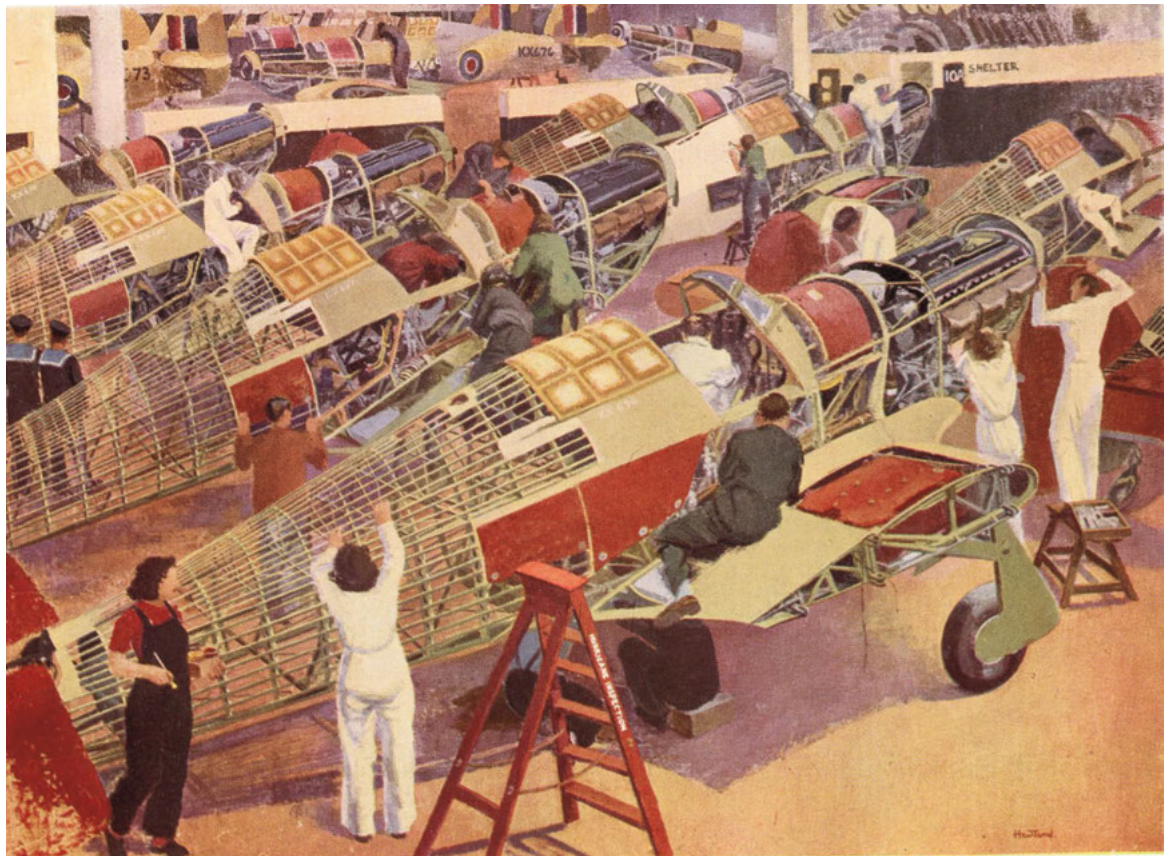
policies and issues on the one hand, the world of private individuals living their lives as best they can on the other. Accordingly, in *London War Notes*, the parliamentary passage in 1944 of what would become Rab Butler's historical Education Act 'might be happening on Mars, for all the interest Britons are apparently taking in it.' And, David Kynaston concludes, "There is other wisdom too, a wisdom ultimately grounded in an intense realism."

This is a theme echoed by the blogger Simon Thomas of *Stuck in a Book*, who wrote about *London War Notes* a couple of

years ago. He said: 'One of its keynotes is Panter-Downes's admiration for the resilience and good-humour of the British people during the war. I'd always assumed this was something of a war film propaganda myth, but since Panter-Downes is more than happy to note when people grumble and complain, then I believe the more frequent reports of cheeriness and determination. And, lest you think *London War Notes* is unremittingly bleak or wearily emotional, I should emphasise that Panter-Downes is often very amusing and wry.'

Her audience will be aware of major events in the war,

but the minutiae of everyday life – and London's response to the incremental developments of war – are related with the anthropologist's detail, to a sympathetic but alien readership. And nobody could have judged the balance of these columns better than her. The extraordinary writing she demonstrates in her fiction (her perfect *One Fine Day* for instance) is equally on show here. She offers facts and relates the comments of others, but she also calmly speaks of heroism and bravado, looks at humour and flippancy with an amused eye, and can be brought to moving heights of admiration.'



*'Assembling Hawker Hurricanes' 1942 Elsie Hewland © Manchester City Galleries*

**P**ersephone Book No. 112, *Vain Shadow*, was written in the early 1950s, put away in a drawer for ten years, and then came out in 1963; its 95 year-old author, who prefers to use the pseudonym Jane Hervey, continues to write but has not published another book.

‘**B**y the time her novel appeared, ‘women writers had begun to express themselves with more freedom and confidence than ever before’ writes Celia Robertson in her Persephone Preface. ‘So it was that it came out in the same year as Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*. *The Pumpkin Eater* by Penelope Mortimer and *The L-Shaped Room* by Lynne Reid Banks had been published just a year or so earlier. As a needle on the historical compass of the previous decade, it quivers with the anticipation of change, poised at the very end of what had gone before.

‘**D**espite the conventional setting, one soon realises that Jane Hervey’s black comedy about a death in the family is unique, astute and very funny. When she first submitted the novel to a publisher they complained that they couldn’t imagine why anyone would want to read about a funeral. But that is precisely this book’s appeal; people behave strangely and badly around death and a family funeral has a dark comic drama all of its own.

‘**T**he plot is simple; a wealthy family gathers at the family

home (a 2,000 acre country estate in Derbyshire) in the aftermath of the patriarch’s death; to mourn him, bury him and read his will. Jane Hervey restricts herself to four chapters, corresponding to four days, and the weight of the novel lies in the relationships between the old man’s surviving wife and adult children as they begin to realise what his death will mean.

‘**F**ull of dark inherited furniture, its windows dressed with swags of heavy fabric, tables laid with cut glass, Otterley Hall feels like the setting for an Agatha Christie novel. Most of the action takes place in the drawing room, the bedrooms and carpeted corridors of the house, the atmosphere thick with an apparently permanent conservatism. The present is in thrall to the past and seems to have no urgency of its own. But, as the four days unfold, the author reveals that things are on the point of changing forever.

‘**W**e hardly leave the domestic setting – not even to walk in the garden. There are a couple of brief expeditions to the farm and the shops and there is the funeral itself, but otherwise we are stuck with the family – and they with each other. To the contemporary reader this gives the novel a televisual quality – as if we’re following these people around with a camera, tracking them from room to room, looking over the banisters to the hall below, sitting with them on the edge of a satin

eiderdown. Every gesture, change of clothes, meal and argument is minutely detailed. One might baulk at the density of description and the lack of pace but the claustrophobia is deliberate.

‘**T**he focus is so intense that even their thoughts are overheard. From the first page, the surprising use of internal asides for each character means that the dialogue is constantly undercut by what each is really feeling – they are tripped up by unsolicited, shameful memories, caught out by their own trivial mental pictures and reactions. For this is a book about people who are unable to show or share their feelings, who are stumbling through the rituals and required etiquette demanded by the situation whilst not actually feeling any grief at all.

‘**T**he dead man was a tyrant who belittled and stifled his wife and dominated his children. They have an idea of what is the right thing to do but are caught in the confusion of not feeling what they ought. How does one behave after the death of someone one should have loved and didn’t? Banal thoughts filter into their heads, petty rivalry overrides anything more profound. So the relieved widow wonders if she’ll now be able to have her much longed-for peach bathroom, her sons compete over logistical details and the only person to shed real tears is one of the servants.



Jane Hervey in the 1960s

Jane Hervey is brilliant on the power play within a family: who gets what and who does what in the vacuum left by a dead parent. She observes the struggle between husband and wife, child and parent, older and younger siblings, those with status and those without and how that status is achieved. Her novel is restless with these constantly shifting positions as the characters jostle and bicker for advantage. It is clear from early on how well the title (taken from ‘The Burial of the Dead’ in *The Book of Common Prayer*) fits this drama: ‘For man walketh in a vain shadow, and

disquieteth himself in vain; he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them.’ And Celia Robertson concludes: ‘*Vain Shadow* is quietly successful, a steely and accomplished comedy of manners that makes one both laugh with recognition and breathe a sigh of relief that this is not one’s own family. It shows us – in the most undramatic but knowing way – how tyranny and casual violence exist in the most civilised of settings, how far – legally, at least – women have come since the 1950s, and how death remains impossible to get right.’

*Vain Shadow* was also published in America and in Italy and received excellent reviews. One reviewer said: ‘There is a touch of Waugh in all this but not in the derivative sense. Jane Hervey’s approach is fresh and enter-taining. The study of human frailty under stress allows her to show how the English upper class can crumble in its attempt to come to terms with reality. ... Her knack of being comically serious makes *Vain Shadow* a good candidate for a place on that long list of solid British satire.’ Another reviewer referred to the ‘stylistic beauty of the novel’, a third called it ‘short, honest and full of a delicate mixture of warmth and irony’ and the American *Parade of Books* said it was ‘a truly remarkable book with astonishing acumen’; and in the UK the *Times Literary Supplement* thought it ‘an admirable novel and, in its descriptions of people, alive with irony and humour.’

When Victor Gollancz, that great champion of women writers, published the book he garlanded it with a quote from Elizabeth Jane Howard: ‘It is most unusual with a first novel to achieve exactly what you set out to do. Miss Hervey displays a remarkable sense of proportion and writes with the most enviably skilful ease.’ After its 1963 publication *Vain Shadow* vanished. But we are delighted that a new generation can rediscover this very funny and superbly written book.

# ‘LETTER FROM LONDON’ 24 MAY 1940 THE NEW YORKER

**W**hile the greatest battle in history is being fought on the other side of the Channel, which has suddenly shrunk in most people’s minds to something no bigger than the Thames, an equally great revolution has been taking place here [wrote Mollie Panter-Downes]. In a single day so much constitutional ballast was heaved overboard in order to lighten the unwieldy ship for this swift and deadly new warfare that a number of revered statesmen must have positively writhed in their graves. If the British people had their way, several more – who were once revered but are now revealed in all their heavy guilt of responsibility for placing the country in its present critical peril – would shortly be joining them.

**E**ven the slowest minds in a race not famed for lightning perceptions have grasped at last, with anger and bitterness, the exact extent of that peril to which the years of complacent leadership have brought them, and they are ready emotionally for the most drastic measures Mr Churchill may choose to take. On the day the act was passed empowering the government to require all persons ‘to place themselves, their services, and their property at the disposal of His Majesty’, a coster on a donkey cart possibly summed up the universal

comment on the announcement of Britain’s total mobilization when he shouted to a crony, ‘That’s right! All in it together to knock ‘is bleedin’ block off!’

**A**ll in it they certainly are, donkey cart and Rolls-Royce alike. ‘There must be no laggards,’ warned Mr Attlee. ‘Victory is our goal. We must and shall attain it.’ Nobody doubts that to do so the government will use its new powers, more complete than any government has held since Cromwell’s time, to the utmost. The Englishman’s home is no longer his castle but a place that can be commandeered at a moment’s notice if the state needs it. Landowners must be prepared to give up their land; employers to close down their businesses or to carry on under government control, and perhaps at a loss; employees to change their jobs as they may be directed by the Ministry of Labour. It’s the stiffest dose of totalitarian principles that a democracy has ever had to swallow in order to save the democratic ideal from total extinction, but there’s a feeling of relief that the country is now united under a fighting leader who is not afraid to tell hard truths and to call for hard deeds when circumstances require them. Britons suspect that the present situation must be just as critical as it can be, because the

King is to broadcast to them tonight and they have come to associate royal broadcasts with solemn national moments, such as abdications, the beginning of a reign, or the beginning of a war.

**L**ondon has been a tense place in these last days of waiting, though the morale has been excellent. The first thing to strike one is the unusual absence of khaki on the streets; the soldiers have melted away, and with them has gone the booming prosperity of the theatres and restaurants, both of which are suffering badly. It’s a fine time to shop in the big stores, for they’re practically empty; the salesgirls huddle together chatting, eyeing a potential customer as a group of merm-aids might eye a deepsea diver.

**B**arbed-wire entanglements have been erected around government buildings in Whitehall, and other barricades are halting road traffic into London for inspection at various key points. One beautiful spring evening recently, troops in their shirtsleeves were to be seen setting up sandbagged machine-gun and observation posts near the Houses of Parliament, watched by the usual expressionless group of loiterers, who might have been watching them erect gala flag standards for some bit of royal pageantry.

It's ironic that this summer looks as though it were going to be the best, as far as weather and growing things go, that England has had in years. The displays of tulips in the parks have been so magnificent that it's too bad the garden-loving Britons haven't had more heart to go and see them; the tulips in the big beds outside Buckingham Palace are exactly the color of blood. People have no heart for reading, either, unless it's the papers, which as yet have contained only one list of casualties – possibly incurred in the Norwegian campaign. Since they can't settle down to read a book or sit through a movie, they have to talk.

Atrocity stories that everyone over thirty remembers from the last war have turned up again, as good as new but with different details. They produce, together with the photographs of refugees pushing heaped perambulators

along Belgian roads, a horrifying sense of living the same old nightmare all over again. In the country, farm laborers and gentlemen with estates are flocking to enlist in the local defence corps formed to deal with what a B.B.C. announcer referred to in an absent-minded moment as American, instead of enemy, parachutists. A quarter of a million such recruits have been given rifles as well as uniforms or armlets, without which they're liable to be shot out of hand as francs-tireurs, and the job of patrolling lonely spots looking for an air armada. Rifles must be left with the authorities and not carried home, lest they fall into the hands of local Quislings.

The Fifth Column menace is taken very seriously here, as well it might be. Motorists have been warned to remove not only the ignition key but also the distributor from their cars if they

intend to leave them for any length of time unattended, and it is particularly requested that garage doors be carefully locked at night.

Since many people believe that Eire is on the Nazi map as a jumping-off place for the attack on England, those who evacuated their families to the west in September are wondering if they picked on such a safe spot after all. Many more believe that with even the sleepest hamlet not a stone's throw, as the bomber flies, from some camp, aerodrome, ammunition dump, or aircraft factory, the beautiful word 'safety' has temporarily gone out of circulation. In the south of England, the guns can be plainly heard pounding away all through the day, and at night the nightingales are drowned out by the drone of planes on patrol or coming back from a bombing raid.



*Defiant City by Joseph Bato (Victor Gollancz 1942) p. 70. 'I had to collect my watch from Mr Brown the watch-maker. When I turned the corner, instead of his old little shop, I stared at a mass of bricks and shattered timber. High up on top of the ruins, a man with tin hat and pickaxe rose and called: 'Mr Bato, are you coming for your watch? I am just looking for it!'*



# THE PERSEPHONE PRIZE

The brief for the Persephone Prize was as follows: 'To celebrate fifteen years of publishing, Persephone Books invites submissions for 2–3,000 word essays on one of our authors or one of our novels, on a group of linked books or on a focus. We received 87 essays and sent each entrant a book token allowing them to have three Persephone books. Their essays were tagged with the number on the token: the five judges (Charlie Lee-Potter, Charlotte Mitchell, Jenny Hartley, Jane Brocket and Nicola Beauman) had absolutely no idea of the identity of the entrant.

The variety was enormous and the difficulty of finding a shortlist of six from among the excellent entries was almost insuperable. Here are some of the essay topics which we wish could have been among the final six (in no particular order): The Domestic Round and Round, Why is 'World' (as in The World that was Ours) still relevant and topical, Malachi Whittaker, The Blank Wall, Books that end up in Oxfam including, occasionally, Persephone books, The 1927 Eclipse of the Sun as seen by Virginia Woolf, There were No Windows, A Smacking Great Big Kiss (about our endpapers), Knitting in Persephone novels, The Fortnight in September, The World of DE Stevenson, The Appeal of the Diary Form, Persephone Heroines and the Role of Retail, Submissive

Feminism and Subversive Feminism, Marghanita Laski, Fruit Longing in WW2, Women Writers and Exiles, The Squire and The Home-maker, Persephone Cooks. The only disappointment was that there were only two essays about Dorothy Whipple. But this is not a bit surprising: one reason she is not as well-known as, say, Barbara Pym is that she is so very difficult to write about, as we have discovered over the years. Both pieces were very good (but in the end neither was on the shortlist).

Each of the five judges chose their favourite three pieces and we all read everyone else's (which overlapped a little bit but not a great deal). Over lunch we first chose a shortlist of six, discussed these and then picked a winner (although told no one).

We then wrote to the six and asked them to come to the party at Pushkin House in Bloomsbury Square on March 11th. This was the shortlist, again in no particular order :

'The Provincial Lady's Husband' by Charlotte Ford is a witty defence of Robert in *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, who is criticised by some for being dull and yet was uncomplaining and helpful and in fact has many Good Points.

'Reading Hands in *Good Evening, Mrs Craven*' by Lucy Razzall is an elegant and

perceptive way of looking at the imagery of hands (brushing against each other, shaking, reaching out) in Mollie Panter-Downes's short stories.

'Katherine Mansfield in the Archive' by Eve Lacey is an original critique of *The Montana Stories*, our own collection of the stories and fragments written by Katherine Mansfield in the last eighteen months of her life, cleverly linked to the concept of archiving.

In 'The Cinderella Dream' Emma West offers an engaging piece about the way the heroines of *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day* and *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* use clothes to reach their potential and to transform themselves.

In 'Nona Ranskill: The Accidental Radical' Sue Kennedy argues persuasively that *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* is both remarkable and radical, 'elegantly expressed and freighted with humour, anger and pathos.'

'The Short Story in the Twentieth Century' by Aimee Gasston shows that the stories in *The Persephone Book of Short Stories* represent a literary democracy, that they shine a light on things we live with but cannot always see, and that they are a splendid example of the everyday.

The runner-up for the Persephone Prize was 'Nona Ranskill: The Accidental Radical'

and the winner was 'Katherine Mansfield in the Archive': at the party Eve Lacey was presented with a cheque for £1000. This is what the judges said about her essay: one thought it 'witty and original. Even within such a small space it managed to say several different things and to talk not only about the Mansfield stories but also about Persephone Books, libraries, short stories and herself, in fresh ways and from unexpected angles.' Another thought that it had 'a rare quality; it conjures its ideas so deftly and inventively and, in combining them, creates

something combustible and innovative. Instead of obediently following a trail of breadcrumbs laid by a writer, it creates its own trajectory. It's an essay that excites the imagination but also the ear too – its wonderful, sure rhythm just calls for it to be read aloud. Some of the sentences are glorious: "these texts lost their endings to her illness" is poetic in its balance. And the repeated, plaintive use of the phrase "we haven't the ordering of it" from "The Garden Party" is the steady heartbeat throughout; it's the sure, steady sound of a librarian trying to put things in the right

place while conceding that any attempt to do so will always be open to question.'

We were delighted with the variety and excellence of the essays and are hoping the competition will be an annual event. Eve Lacey's piece appears in this *Biannually*. And we shall put all six essays on the website in the coming months (plus their footnotes, for which there is no room in the *Biannually*). Many congratulations to the six short-listed writers; and many thanks to all 87 Persephone readers who went in for the prize.



*From left to right: Emma West, Aimee Gasston, Eve Lacey, Sue Kennedy, Charlotte Ford, Lucy Razzall*

# HOW WE CHOOSE OUR BOOKS

This is the question we are asked most often – how we decide what to publish. We wrote about this in the *Quarterly* in 2001 and now it is time for a reprise.

The books we publish mostly date from the mid-C20th. But some appeared earlier (*Amours de Voyage*, *Reuben Sachs*) and some later (*The World that was Ours*, *Still Missing*). (We now have a list on our website of ‘books by publication date’, which is useful for giving someone a present written the year they were born.) But why this focus on the ‘30s and ‘40s? A quick answer is that women simply wrote so well then! But also they were well educated, yet society was not yet ready to allow them to work outside the home: writing was a good compromise.

We try to have many different genres – novels with a strong theme, cookery books, poetry, books about WWII, a ghost story, diaries, books for children, thrillers, a satire on Catholicism (*Patience*). (If you have not yet discovered Categories on our website, do take a look: there are over forty of them, ranging from *Abroad and Books by Men*, to *Gender and Race*, *Love Story*, *Translations* and *Young Love*.)

Ideally ‘the novel tells a story’ (EM Forster), in other words we prefer books that are page-turning. The mark of a good novel for us is that when you get

to the end you are completely ‘gutted’. This is a vulgar word for the feelings that overcome one when first of all you cannot put the book down and then at the end you are slightly stunned.

Occasionally we publish a book because there is an anniversary – *The Montana Stories* came out 80 years after Katherine Mansfield’s death, in 2016 it will be 60 years since *Madame Solario* by Gladys Huntington was first published.

We would prefer to bring out more books by US writers but they are slow sellers in the UK. (We are very envious of Vintage’s success with *Stoner* and wish we could do the same with *Fidelity*, *Heat Lightning* or *The Home-Maker*, which have similar themes – and are much better!)

People kindly suggest books. Henrietta Twycross-Martin told us that *Miss Pettigrew Lives for Day* was her mother’s favourite book, she then wrote the preface to what has become our bestselling title; the late Neville Braybrooke sent us his wife Isobel English’s superb novel *Every Eye*.

Some Persephone titles were written about in Nicola Beauman’s 1983 book *A Very Great Profession: The Woman’s Novel 1914–39*, now Persephone Book No. 78. This book, which is a mixture of social history and literary criticism, influenced our

choice of titles in other ways, for example in its focus on women’s everyday lives. As a result our titles are different from those of other feminist publishers: they are more accessible, more domestic, the feminism is ‘softer’; our main focus is on what, in a shorthand phrase, we think of as domestic feminism, and we propose to write about this topic more and to make it something of a central Persephone issue.

We only do a few books that have been reprinted by other publishing houses in the past as we feel they have ‘had their moment in the sun’.

We have to love every book. It is a cliché of publishing that a book will not sell unless someone is passionately behind it. Each book must have a special quality to justify the expense and commitment of its republication.

Finally, it is true that often we find books in rather odd ways. Of an early Elizabeth Jenkins novel a reviewer wrote that she ‘had not read anything so really lovely, so tenderly and exquisitely right since Susan Glaspell’s *Brook Evans*’ (of which we had never heard and then got hold of – and loved); *Lettice Delmer* was ‘puffed’ by TS Eliot on the flap of a book someone sent us because it was by their mother; the author of *A Happy Tree* was mentioned intriguingly in Virginia Woolf’s *Diary*; etc.

# THE PERSEPHONE 112

1. **William – an Englishman** by Cicely Hamilton Prize-winning 1919 novel about the effect of WW1 on a socialist clerk and a suffragette. Preface: Nicola Beauman
2. **Mariana** by Monica Dickens This funny, romantic first novel, which came out in 1940, describes a young girl's life in the 1930s. Preface: Harriet Lane
3. **Someone at a Distance** by Dorothy Whipple 'A very good novel indeed' (*Spectator*) about the destruction of a formerly happy 1950s marriage. Preface: Nina Bawden, R4 'Book at Bedtime' 2008
4. **Fidelity** by Susan Glaspell 1915 novel by a Pulitzer-winning writer brilliantly describing the effect of a girl in Iowa running off with a married man. Preface: Laura Godwin
5. **An Interrupted Life** by Etty Hillesum From 1941–43 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** Short stories first published in *The New Yorker* from 1938–44. Five of them were twice read on R4, and on R7. Preface: Gregory LeStage **An unabridged Persephone audiobook 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: 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: author
13. **Consequences** by EM Delafield By the author of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, this 1919 novel is about a girl entering a convent after she fails to marry. Preface: Nicola Beauman
14. **Farewell Leicester Square** by Betty Miller Novel (by Jonathan Miller's mother) about a Jewish film-director and 'the discreet discrimination of the bourgeoisie' (*Guardian*). Preface: Jane Miller
15. **Tell It to a Stranger** by Elizabeth Berridge Funny, observant, bleak 1947 short stories, twice an *Evening Standard* bestseller. 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 A 1934 novel about a man driven to committing fraud and what happens to him and his family; a 1943 film. Afterwords: Terence Handley MacMath and Christopher Beauman
20. **A Woman's Place** by Ruth Adam A survey of women's lives from 1900–75, very readably written by a novelist-historian: an overview full of insights. Preface: Yvonne Roberts
21. **Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day** by Winifred Watson A delightful 1938 novel about a governess and a nightclub singer. Read on R4 by Maureen Lipman; now a film with Frances McDormand and Amy Adams. Preface: Henrietta Twycross-Martin. **A 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', praised by 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 All the short stories written during the author's last year; with a detailed editorial note and the contemporary illustrations. Five were read on R4 in 2002.
26. **Brook Evans** by Susan Glaspell An unusual novel written in 1928, 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, the *Guardian's* Nicholas Lezard's Paperback Choice, R4 'Book at Bedtime' read by Jamie Glover. Afterword: Anne Sebba
- 29. The Making of a Marchioness by Frances Hodgson Burnett** A very entertaining 1901 novel about the melodrama when a governess marries a Marquis; a R4 Classic Serial. Preface: Isabel Raphael, Afterword: Gretchen Gerzina. **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 describing 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.
- 37. The Runaway by Elizabeth Anna Hart** A Victorian novel for children and grown-ups, republished in 1936 with Gwen Raverat wood engravings. Afterwords: Anne Harvey, Frances Spalding
- 38. Cheerful Weather for the Wedding by Julia Strachey** A funny, sardonic 1932 novella by a niece of Lytton Strachey, praised by Virginia Woolf. Preface: Frances Partridge. **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 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 illustrations by Edward Bawden
- 46. Miss Ranskill Comes Home by Barbara Euphan Todd** A wry 1946 novel: Miss Ranskill is shipwrecked and gets back to a 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** 1940s short stories with a unique voice and dark sense of humour; they were read on BBC R4 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** A 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** 1940 cookery book about 'food for free', full of excellent (and fashionable) recipes.
- 55. Flush by Virginia Woolf** A light-hearted but surprisingly feminist 1933 'life' of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel, 'a little masterpiece of comedy' (*TLS*). A 'Book at Bedtime' on BBC R4. Preface: Sally Beauman
- 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** A 1939 novel about what might happen if the moon crashed into the earth in 1946 'written' by 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 1944 novel, 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 1934 memoir 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 1938 novel about a daughter of the aristocracy who marries an Oxford don; her three children fail to turn out as she hoped.

**64. *The Woman Novelist and Other Stories* by Diana Gardner** Late 1930s and early 1940s short stories that are witty, sharp and with an unusual undertone. Preface: Claire Gardner

**65. *Alas, Poor Lady* by Rachel Ferguson** Polemical but intensely readable 1937 novel 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: 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 an American heiress married to an English aristocrat, whose beautiful and enterprising sister 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 5 year-old 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** Short stories drawn from the three collections published during Dorothy

Whipple's lifetime. Five stories were read on BBC R4 and on R4 Extra.

**75. *On the Other Side: Letters to my Children from Germany 1940–46* by Mathilde Wolff-Mönckeberg.** 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** 1958 novel about the 'captive wives' of the pre-women's lib 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 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 on topics such as the storeroom and larder, garden produce, and game.

**81. *Miss Buncle's Book* by DE Stevenson** A 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 1816 facsimile edition of an 1806 cookbook: 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 Bunclie Married** by DE Stevenson A hugely enjoyable sequel to *Miss Bunclie's Book* (No. 81): Miss Bunclie marries and moves to a new village. Afterword: Fiona Bevan

**92. Midsummer Night in the Workhouse** by Diana Athill 'Funny, engaging and unexpected' (*Paris Review*): 1950s stories by the editor and memoir writer. Preface: author, who also reads six of the stories as a Persephone Audiobook.

**93. The Sack of Bath** by Adam Ferguson A 1973 polemic, with many

black and white photographs, raging at the destruction of Bath's C18th artisan terraced housing. Preface: author

**94. No Surrender** by Constance Maud A fascinating 1911 suffragette novel about a mill girl and her aristocratic 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, ten by 'our' authors, ten from the last decade's *Biannuals* and ten that are newly reprinted. A Persephone bestseller.

**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, about five exiles returning to Vienna after the war: a meditation on 'going back' and a love story. Preface: Edmund de Waal

**103. The Squire** by Enid Bagnold A woman gives birth to her fifth child: a rare novel (written in 1938) about the process of birth. Preface: Anne Sebba

**104. The Two Mrs Abbotts** by DE Stevenson The third 'Miss Bunclie' book, published in 1943, is about Barbara Abbott, as she now is, and the 'young' Mrs Abbott, keeping the home fires burning during the war.

**105. Diary of a Provincial Lady** by EM Delafield One of the funniest books ever written: a 1930 novel, written as a diary, about everyday family life. Afterword: Nicola Beauman

**106. Into the Whirlwind** by Eugenia Ginzburg A Russian woman is arrested in 1937 and sent to the Gulag. Filmed as *Within the Whirlwind* with Emily Watson. Afterword: Rodric Braithwaite

**107. Wilfred and Eileen** by Jonathan Smith A 1976 novel, based on fact, set in the years 1913–15. Wilfred, badly wounded in France, is rescued by his wife. A four-part television serial in 1981. Afterword: author

**108. The Happy Tree** by Rosalind Murray A 1926 novel about the long-term and devastating effect of WW1 on the young, in particular on a young woman living in London during the war years. Preface: Charlotte Mitchell

**109. The Country Life Cookery Book** by Ambrose Heath This 1937 cookbook, organised by month (and thus by excellent seasonal recipes) was illustrated by Eric Ravilious. Preface: Simon Hopkinson.

**110. Because of the Lockwoods** by Dorothy Whipple Her 1949 novel: the Hunters are patronised by the wealthy Lockwoods; as she grows up Thea Hunter begins to question their integrity. Preface: Harriet Evans

**111. London War Notes** by Mollie Panter-Downes These extraordinary 'Letters from London', describing everyday life in WW2, were written for *The New Yorker* and then collected in one volume in 1971. Preface: David Kynaston

**112. Vain Shadow** by Jane Hervey A black comedy written in the 1950s but not published until 1963 about the days after the death of a patriarch in a large country house and the effect on his family. Preface: Celia Robertson

# ‘WINGS OVER MUGBOURNE’ BY MOLLIE PANTER-DOWNES

*This short story, reprinted here for the first time, first appeared in The New Yorker on 22 October 1938 shortly after the Munich Crisis.*

We entered the Dog and Pheasant and asked Mrs Wade, who happened to be taking a turn behind the bar, if an Air Raid Precaution meeting was to be held there that evening. ‘Some say there is and some say there isn’t,’ she admitted cautiously.

The some who said there was were found to be correct, and we tramped up the back stairs to a large room that was only just being vacated by lady members of the Mugbourne Morris-Dancing Society. The panting disciples of Terpischore, Maypole ribbons peeping from their attaché cases, filed out as the disciples of Mars filed sheepishly in. The dust raised by the recent capers still hung in the air, partially obscuring the photographs of whiskered Mugbourne cricket teams on the walls. Two Boy Scouts ran about busily dragging forms and arranging them in rows. The electric light (produced by an engine that could be heard popping ominously somewhere in the stables) was dim and flickering and succeeded in casting an interesting green pallor over everyone’s complexion. Strings of paper flags looped from the

centre light gave the scene a dismal kind of jollity.

We sat down gingerly, although expecting high explosives under our form. More people were arriving, nodding to acquaintances and marking a cross opposite their names in an exercise book passed round by Miss Potts, one of our sub-wardens. The green-faced gathering arranged itself instantly, with a psychic eye for the ghosts of feudal saltcellars, in three sections. The two front rows were occupied by the Quality, who this evening had omitted to dress for dinner and had come along democratically in their tweeds. Behind them sat the respectable tradesmen and small-holders of Mugbourne with their wives, arranged like a hand of Happy Family cards: Mr Pratt, the butcher; Mrs Ramage, the fish-monger’s wife; Mr Venables, the builder; and so on. Clutching their handbags and their bowler hats, they stared rigidly at the necks of their customers in the front rows. At the back of the room sat the Village, creaking and guffawing in a subdued way, smelling of ferrets, carbolic soap, and decent, uncomplaining poverty. A good many of the young men had turned up and were lolling against the wall, twisting their caps in their enormous red hands and staring at the housemaids from Moor Place. There

were also present several children, urchins of ten or twelve, who maybe were sick of Snow White and had come along to get the lowdown on mustard gas.

Our lecturer rather surprisingly turned out to be a man of God. But he soon set at rest any slight feelings of doubt that might have been raised in our minds by the sight of a Christian dog collar. ‘Believe me, I had plenty to do with high explosives in the last war. I know what I’m talking about,’ he told us breezily. The Church Militant then struggled to get a black-board in place against the wall. ‘Give us a hand, young man,’ he said to a Boy Scout. While we waited, coughing and shuffling our feet, Miss Potts sped across the room, rustling papers importantly, and whispered to Colonel Basing, the warden of the Stoke Diddling area. ‘Yes, yes,’ he said, nodding his head. We held our breaths. ‘Quite,’ remarked the Colonel. ‘Decidedly best.’ We relaxed, feeling that big things were afoot. Someone asked had we heard that Mugbourne was going to have an anti-aircraft gun. Whatever the cabinets of Europe decided, the village was prepared to put up a show.

At last everything was ready and our lecturer faced us, one hand informally in his trouser pocket, the other pointing a



piece of blackboard chalk toward us. 'Now then,' he began cheerfully, 'for the benefit of those who may have missed a lecture, I think the best thing we can do is to run quickly through the gases.'

For ten shuddering minutes we ran through these, or rather the lecturer ran while we dodged fearfully after him among the phosgene and the lewisite. He discussed the merits of each in a bright, judicious way, as though he were comparing various kinds of garden fertilizer. 'This one has only got a very faint smell, hardly noticeable at all,' and we felt that he was going to recommend it for the roses. Everyone had looked green to start with, so it was hard to say what effect the talk had on the audience. Presently he came to the real purpose of the evening's lecture, which was to demonstrate how everyone could make a cosy little refuge room right in the home. Mr Venables sat up and looked interested. There was hardly a Tudor cottage in the neighbourhood that he had not converted for eager Londoners until its beams hissed with plumbing, but cosy little refuge rooms sounded like a new line.

'Now here,' said the lecturer, 'is our house. I take it that you're like me and live in a pretty ordinary sort of house with front door in the middle and a window on either side.' The back of Mrs Molyneux-Thring (owner of Moor Place, built by Inigo Jones, water garden and herbaceous borders, open to the public two

Sundays in July in aid of the local hospital) indicated that he was taking it all wrong. Undeterred he drew a stark sort of square on the blackboard. The chalk squeaked loudly and one of the youths in the village section sniggered. The lecturer turned before demanding, 'But where in our house is our refuge room going to be? That is what we must ask ourselves.'

It proved to be a ticklish question. In the first place the cubic capacity of the room had to be calculated, and the required ration of cubic space allotted to each member of the party. The Village began to look faintly uneasy, though the lecturer told them soothingly, 'It's a question you're going to find again and again on your A.R.P. examination papers, but don't let it rattle you. You may feel that it's a long time since you left school and you've forgotten how to do these things. Just sit there quietly and draw yourself a little diagram of the room – perfectly flat, mind you – walls, floor, and ceiling.' He did it for us on the blackboard. Then he asked us whether it would be a good plan to have our refuge room at the top of the house. A gentle-faced little woman said that it would not be a good plan, no. Why not? Because of the incendiary bombs, she told us in a soft, placid voice. 'Exactly!' cried the lecturer triumphantly. Would it be a good plan to have it in a ground-floor room where the windows looked out on a brick wall or a pavement? No, Miss Potts

hastened to point out, because of explosives that would splinter against the hard surface; far better to be surrounded by nice soft earth where they could bury themselves harmlessly (or not) among the dahlias. We stared at the little square on the blackboard. From a downstairs room we could hear the click of billiard balls and men's voices murmuring cheerfully.

Having fixed on the location of our nest, we were told how to set about making it into a real refuge. An air lock was to be made up with double blankets over the door, the windows were to be sandbagged, and we could spend happy hours filling up every possible nook and cranny with wet newspaper beaten to a pulp and then allowed to dry solid. 'Every kindergarten kiddie knows how to do that,' said the lecturer. At the first alarm, he said, we were to hie us to the refuge room, 'and don't forget the cat and the bird cage.' As it was possible that we would be here for some time, we must see that the room was stocked with the necessary provisions. Brandy would be a good idea, he mentioned, as well as the usual first-aid things, and of course there would have to be some – ah – kind of sanitary arrangement. Oh, and the ladies would take their knitting, and the kiddies must have some sort of game to amuse them – cards were excellent for young and old alike – and there was always the crossword puzzle, was there not?

But supposing – just supposing – that in spite of all these precautions we think we detect the presence of gas in the room. What are we to do then?’ The lecturer waited, looking at us expectantly, jiggling the palm of his hand. Nobody answered. We were too numbed. A little boy about ten years old, who had been sitting at the side of the room with a woman who looked like his grandmother, sang out ‘Put on our gas masks!’ and everyone jumped. ‘Well done, sonny!’ beamed the lecturer. ‘Put on our gas masks, of course. Do you go to Sunday school, son?’ The little boy, suddenly shy, hung his head and mumbled that he did. ‘That’s a good boy. I thought you did,’ said the lecturer. The grandmother looked pleased and proud and the other children tittered.

‘Well,’ said the lecturer, ‘I think that’s about all for the evening. We’re in our refuge room, we’ve got our gas masks and our sand for incendiary bombs, we’ve got our provisions and various means to make the time pass quickly. Only one thing remains to be said – the golden rule throughout all such times of emergency.’ He paused impressively, and his glasses flashed in the light. ‘That is, *don’t panic.*’

Colonel Basing rose to his feet. We looked up at him hopefully. The colonel is a big man with a red, lined face, white hair, and bright-blue eyes, practically a walking Union Jack. He said in a crisp voice, ‘As far as the village is concerned, I can speak for us all and say that these directions are unnecessary.’ He straightened his shoulders and

snapped out, ‘Mugbourne would *not* panic!’ We all felt better after that.

As we went out we looked in at the bar parlour. It was stuffy and bright. Mrs Wade was polishing glasses while two men played darts and a row of old men with wrinkled, fresh faces sat along the wall drinking beer and looking on. Outside the night was fine, with a touch of frost. ‘Good night,’ we all called to each other. Lights shone on the cottages across the green. The church clock chimed the quarter as we found our car and drove home slowly and thoughtfully, wrapped in our dreams.



*'In for Repairs' Laura Knight 1942 Harris Museum BBC/PCF*

# THE PERSEPHONE PRIZE

## ESSAY BY EVE LACEY

I am training to become a librarian and it was through a collection of Persephone books that I came to Katherine Mansfield's swansong works: those stories written in the months before her death. I was intrigued by the Publisher's Note in *The Montana Stories*, and particularly the editorial admission that: 'For several reasons publishing her work as "The Montana Stories" is unlikely to have been how Katherine Mansfield herself would have wanted to be read. Few short story writers arrange their work chronologically, preferring to intersperse moods and themes. [...] Nor would Katherine have wanted fragments included – yet these unfinished pages can give just as much insight into her mind as a fully completed and polished story...' It struck me as brazen to go so explicitly against the author's wishes. Posthumous publications tend towards eulogy in their introductions and often bury all trace of editorial interference in the effort to preserve the author's reputation. The ordering of the text within a collection is usually presented as the gathered but untouched remains of the writer's work, a mausoleum of their final words. *The Montana Stories* marks a bold addition to Mansfield's afterlife – it remains in dialogue with her wishes, but not obedient to their demands. It favours the

archive over the art and takes its order from all that is extant, rather than what the writer herself deemed worthy.

I liked the editorial intervention. Having spent years studying the beauty in things, I was now being trained to see how that beauty was stored, learning the house-keeping behind the party and the technical legwork behind cultural heritage. Chronological order aims to leave nothing out, but this particular hubris of the archive meets its downfall at the end of a well-stocked shelf: space is limited, even if time is not.

For institutions that aim to conserve and chronicle, libraries often display an astonishing lack of foresight. The classification system we use, for example, has one number – 673 – assigned to English novels of the 20th century. There are eight decimal points chosen for the most prominent authors at the time, or the personal favourites of the librarians who created the system. All other writers from 1900 onwards are squeezed under 673.9, including all 21st century novels. This curious miscalculation is a telling error, and reveals the unpreparedness of the archive. In a system so fundamentally concerned with retrospection, futurity remains an afterthought.

As a librarian-in-training, I decided to prize the archive above the author in my reading. The books I was cataloguing were not yet ready to borrow, so I gathered a series of older editions: *The Collected Stories*, *The Garden Party & other stories* and *The Doves' Nest & other stories*. I jumped to and fro, within and across these books, sticking strictly to the order stated in *The Montana Stories*, and broke my reading up further by returning to the Persephone Publisher's Commentary after each story. This commentary records Mansfield's letter to Lady Ottoline Morrell: '[My cousin Elizabeth von Arnim and I] have occasional lovely talks which are rather like what talks in the after-life will be like, I imagine... ruminative, and reminiscent – although dear knows what it is really all about. How strange talking is – what mists rise and fall – how one loses the other and then thinks to have found the other – then down comes another soft final curtain...' Mansfield's ruminations here do away with time constraints, but there is a clear tension between the notion of an endless afterlife and the traditional framework of storytelling. Within the limited span of a book, problems must be raised, wrought and resolved, whereas with all the time in the world, a plot will lose its urgency. Continuing discussion past the

point of death leaves narrative in crisis: talks in the afterlife teeter on the brink of fiction's own vanishing point.

Katherine Mansfield's inclination is to play around with time, yet time has since played a trick on her. As I read on, it becomes increasingly apparent that her stories are conversations in the afterlife, both in their conception and, more so, in their posthumous publication. Mansfield expertly incorporated a sense of the hereafter into her writing, but she could not anticipate the extent to which the forced inclusion of her unfinished work would enhance that 'ruminative, and reminiscent' style after her death.

Once again, order proves crucial. Most of Mansfield's stories begin in the wake of a passing; her characters' lives only get going after a death. Persephone honoured this tradition in the timing of their collection – the death of the author came first. The location of her sickbed became the eponymous focus of *The Montana Stories*, and the sequence of its contents charts the countdown of her life.

There is a causality in Mansfield's priorities – death does not so much precede life as give rise to it. She reverses the normal chronology of a lifetime and, in a phoenix-like literary trick, positions death as the dust from which her stories will rise.

Figuratively, too, she uses the spectre of death to cultivate the epiphany trope of short stories. For example, in 'Taking the Veil', it takes an imagined afterlife in which Edna sees her fiancé in mourning at her own funeral for her to realise that she does love him after all. The story entails a coming-to-her-senses by way of a fantasy demise; death throws life into stark relief and a play at the brink is what drags the dreamer home.

The brink, as ever, is the sea. Mansfield's stories read as a litany of waves and shores, seas as beach holiday and seas as death. She has a littoral preoccupation with mortality – most evident in 'At the Bay' – and the sea becomes shorthand for an undulating, limbo-like style. The flickering of dark and light has a similar effect. In the unfinished manuscript of 'A Married Man's Story', images flare with religious luminescence, then fade: 'She sits, bent forward, clasping the little bare foot, staring into the glow, and as the fire quickens, falls, flares again, her shadow – an immense *Mother and Child* – is here and gone again upon the wall...' Conversations in the afterlife require the incorporation of absence into the story and Mansfield crafts a prose shot through with loss until, as the Married Man muses: 'The dark stretches, the blanks, are much bigger than the bright glimpses.'

The archive encounters a similar predicament. The

attempt to include everything requires the incorporation of unfinished work – the blanks. Rather than stopping at the blanks, both the story and the library must continue, heedless of the gaps, until each dark stretch speaks volumes. In 'Six Years After', this compulsion to carry on beyond absence manifests as social etiquette in conversations with the bereft: 'As a rule men were not fond of chat as Mother understood it. They did not seem to understand that it does not matter very much what one says: the important thing is not to let the conversation drop.' Mother's sentiment here may be read as the fundamental intention of the archive – if it must acknowledge its failure, it will, but that will not stop its accumulation.

'The Garden Party' takes place against the backdrop of a neighbour's death. Laura, the daughter of the host, leaves the party to take some food to the newly-widowed woman who lives down the road. Death proves difficult to stomach, and her sandwiches are left untouched at the end of the story. Through Laura and her chronically bad taste, Mansfield teaches the reader a lesson: 'She feels things ought to happen differently. First one and then another. But life isn't like that. We haven't the ordering of it. [...] And they *do* all happen, it is inevitable. And it seems to me there is beauty in that inevitability' (letter to William Gerhardie). It is the chaos of life

and death that Mansfield wishes to stress, the synchronicity of the two states, and the fact that, like the archive, *we haven't the ordering of it*. These are states which refuse separation, or cataloguing, or even effective description. And yet, they go on. Without sufficient words to describe or stories to order, life and death persist, and the archive continues to grow. All this production will not cease, Mansfield suggests, but we would do well to heed its intermingling. And so her stories conclude with the uneasy sense that the party, and the conversation, will not be dropped, but that all our fête-ing is held in the shadow of death.

Publishers were disavowing Mansfield's wishes long before the Persephone publication. Her widower, John Middleton Murry, began the tradition just one year after her death, confessing that, 'I have no doubt that Katherine Mansfield, were she still alive, would not have suffered some of these stories to appear.' The title of that collection – *Something Childish and other stories* – resonates with Mansfield's unsettling depictions of family life; there is indeed something child-ish about the stories she left behind, in the sense that they are legacy-like. The written word becomes an heir-of-sorts, which can subsume the will of the

deceased. Jurisdiction over a body of work expires on the author's deathbed when they are forced to relinquish absolute control. This is a surrender to chronology, which must always win at the long-game, and such a surrender allows the will of the archive to take over.

This difficult relationship with, and dubious control over, creative offspring is evident throughout Mansfield's work, and might explain why children – 'unaccountable little creatures' – so often appear as uncanny. In 'An Ideal Family', Mr Neave 'stared at his youngest daughter; he felt he had never seen her before.' Of his older daughter,



'Lisbeth Reading' 1904 Carl Larsson

he observes: 'Strange! When she was a little girl she had such a soft, hesitating voice; she had even stuttered, and now, whatever she said – even if it was only "Jam, please, father" – it rang out as though she were on the stage.' In Mansfield's prose, the process of growing up is a process of becoming strange and, in this case, the distancing is paralleled with a kind of publication. The daughter seems further from her father because she has moved from the home to the stage. In projection, her voice acquires an uncanny tone and rings with the shrill discomfort of children who masquerade as grown individuals with impetuous lives of their own.

Again, Mansfield taps into the disquiet of a child outside the home in 'A Married Man's Story': 'A queer thing is I can't connect him with my wife and myself; I've never accepted him as ours. Each time when I come into the hall and see the perambulator, I catch myself thinking: "H'm, someone has brought a baby!" Or, when his crying wakes me at night, I feel inclined to blame my wife for having brought the baby in from outside.' The narrator struggles to determine whether his son belongs within or without the house, and his distress emphasises the unhomeliness of the child. With an unfamiliar heir, the boundaries of inside and out, self and other, are blurred. It is this troubled lineage of the separate-self that situates Mansfield's story firmly in that

unsettling place she prefers, at the point of surgery, somewhere between domesticity and the wild limbo of the afterlife.

'The Fly' contains Mansfield's most explicit projection of an afterlife onto a text, and her most stark conflation of literary and biological progeny. Until his son's grave is mentioned in passing, the narrator had 'never thought of the boy except as lying unchanged, unblemished in his uniform, asleep forever.' From this fantasy of imagined stasis, the bereaved father turns his attention to a fly that has fallen into his ink pot: 'For a fraction of a second it lay still on the dark patch that oozed around it. Then the front legs waved, took hold, and, pulling its small, sodden body up it began the immense task of cleaning the ink from its wings. [...] The horrible danger was over; it had escaped; it was ready for life again.' He repeats the process over and over, continually resurrecting and eventually killing the insect. For the span of his cruel experiment the narrator discovers the magic of ink. It allows a creature to be killed off and brought back, only to survive another drowning. The weapon becomes the salve and the writing instrument, the gift of life. But the narrator who could see his son in a fly could not recognise him in a photograph. It is perhaps the stasis of a published self that makes one's legacy uncanny – the further an idea gets from its conception, the more static it becomes.

Librarians study this evolution from the cerebral to the physical. The theory behind cataloguing returns to the fundamentals of intellectual property, and relates to what Mansfield called 'the strange barrier to be crossed from thinking it to writing it'. Broadly speaking, it makes a distinction between the Work – an artistic endeavour; the Expression – the form in which this endeavour is realised; the Manifestation – the physical exemplar of that expression; and the Item – the single entity on the shelves. However uncanny this travel from concept to product may be, it is a necessary distancing if the author wishes to see her work embodied. Mansfield recognised this distinction and transition: 'This is a proof (never too often proved) that once one has thought out a story nothing remains but the *labour*.' For the living, work is effort and toil, for the dead it settles into an *oeuvre*. The archive is clinical, it flattens, and works can grow macabre when reduced to just their itemised remains.

Death is incorporated into publishing as a nuisance: 'widows' and 'orphans' are a burden to typesetters and editors alike. Incomplete stories and multiple drafted endings undermine the authority of a tale. In *The Montana Stories*, the unfinished works often unfinished at the point of death. 'A Married Man's Story' ends when the speaker 'did beyond words consciously turn towards [his]

silent brothers...’ ‘Six Years After’ concludes with the description of another falling curtain and, in ‘Widowed’, the final sentence describes a head injury: ‘For there was nothing to be seen of Jimmie; the sheet was pulled right over...’ Each of these stories stops abruptly, with a truncated sentence and ellipses. Repeatedly, Mansfield interrupts her own party with the kind of unfinished that runs syntax-deep and falls short of a certain end.

There’s an admission of powerlessness in such an ending, as though the story ran away from the author right in the middle of things. Mansfield wrote in her diary on 17th January 1922: ‘Chekhov made a mistake in thinking that if he had had more time he would have written more fully [...]. It’s always a kind of race to get in as much as one can before it *disappears*.’ A sense of belatedness pervades Mansfield’s work and the urgency is palpable because these texts lost their endings to her illness. The Persephone edition records how she abandoned her preferred stories in favour of the more commercial texts, whose magazine publication would pay her medical bills. So, even before she died, her editorial decisions were subject to morbid compromise. But the unfinished text lingers longer than those stories with a definite end. Syntactically they are forever marked by the author’s death, yet they need never yield to that final act of punctuation: they never have to die.



In Katherine Mansfield’s work, death disturbs the normal passage of time. In *The Montana Stories*, chronology is meticulously restored. This strict adherence to the precise sequence of her final writings lends the collection an asynchrony all of its own. Each story is subject to temporal disruption because each was punctuated by illness and composed beneath the looming spectre of death. However, custodians of the archive will observe that the only curator left is time, the only order, chronology, and that *the important thing is not to let the conversation drop*.

Today is the 14th October, Katherine’s 126th birthday, and three days after my own 25th. I finish this essay 93 years, to the day, after she finished ‘The Garden Party’. There again, time performs its trickery, organising coincidence, and prompting identification with the past. As readers, we are compelled to meaning-making – that is the pleasure of the text – and chronology, it turns out, can be an aesthete after all. I am halfway through cataloguing the Persephone collection at Newnham. The archive remains, though *we haven’t the ordering of it*, and all that survives must be stored. The work will go on without end.

# OUR BLOGGERS WRITE

‘**T**he *Happy Tree* is an evocative, sensitively written and powerfully moving novel that was a pure pleasure to read. What made me find this book so touching is because really it isn’t about war at all, but more the way in which life often takes us in directions we didn’t plan for, leaving us cast adrift from the vision of the future we believed we would have. It’s not exactly an uplifting read, but a thought-provoking, searingly honest portrayal of a woman’s life.’ Book Snob

‘**E**mma Smith has crafted her writing beautifully, and her turns of phrase are lovely. She writes descriptions with such clarity, and her ardent appreciation for nature is clear from the very start. The sense of place is so well described that it almost feels claustrophobic at times, particularly with regard to the Indian vistas. It presses in upon its characters, and the things which befall them along the way. I was swept away in the story, and found it very difficult to put *A Far Cry* down.’ The Literary Sisters

‘I’ve steered away from Persephone’s non-fiction books on cooking or home-keeping, but *The Country Life Cookery Book* spoke to me because of the way it features recipes broken down according to season. It’s a very different kind of cookbook from the

modern-day ones that clutter my kitchen, and there are recipes for some dishes that I would never dream of preparing today, but there are also a fair amount that I can actually see myself trying. And as a bonus, each chapter is illustrated with drawings by Eric Ravilious, an artist whose work I’m always interested in seeing.’ Miss Bibliophile

‘**B**ecause of the *Lockwoods* is a compelling read, filled with beautiful writing and wonderfully drawn characters. Dorothy Whipple is an intelligent and rather fascinating author, whose plot stays with the reader long after the final page has been absorbed. I, for one, am definitely a new convert to Whipple’s work, and can only hope that this reprint allows even more readers to discover her.’ Nudge

‘**O**f the sixteen Persephone books I have read, my favourite is *Reuben Sachs* by Amy Levy, and I appreciate Oscar Wilde’s appraisal of it: “Its directness, its uncompromising truths, its depth of feeling, and above all, its absence of any single superfluous word, make *Reuben Sachs* in some sort, a classic.” It was criticised as being anti-Semitic for its portrayal of wealthy Jewish family life and its drive for both financial security and political power. It is hard for me to see how this is anti-Semitic, since such drives are prevalent in most households of

accumulated wealth. In a lean 147 pages, Amy Levy leaves us with a sense of regret and poignancy that cannot be forgotten. Every gesture and expression and word of her characters stand in service to her disciplined telling of the story.’ Under the Gables

‘I sobel English used an unusual technique: the main protagonist is the narrator of both sections but using both present and past tenses. I found *Every Eye* intriguing and engaging. So typical of a Persephone novel (shaking head at the thought of how critics have dismissed so much of women’s writing), this is a story that has hidden depths belied by the slimness of the book. *Every Eye* is such a beautifully crafted story and written with real elegance. Tone, description and style all play off each other nicely making this one of my great finds of the year.’ A Work in Progress

‘**T**he *Young Pretenders* is a lovely and intriguing book. It’s intriguing because it works beautifully as a story for children, it sees the world from a child’s place in the world. And it does something else too. It speaks profoundly to the grown-up reader about how magical childhood is and how that magic can be bent out of shape by adults who fail to understand. It’s heart-breaking, watching the grown-ups getting things so



terribly wrong. Thank goodness that the children were resilient, that in their innocence it didn't occur to them that anyone could ever have anything other than good intentions, however inexplicable their actions might be.' Fleur in Her World

'It is difficult to explain what makes *Miss Buncler's Book* work so well. A tale about an ageing single woman who lives in a small town where nothing really happens, it explores the social interactions of Miss Buncler and her neighbours when their universe is disturbed by a book about their very town. With gentle humour, perfect characterisation, and an overall feeling of loveliness, this book about a book within a book quickly managed to enchant me. I simply did not want it to end. *Miss Buncler's Book* is the perfect comfort read.' Iris on Books

'Set in Dorothy Whipple's native Lancashire, *High Wages* follows Jane, an 18 year-old orphan beginning life away from her step-mother. She is living-in over a draper's shop in Tidsley, a northern market/manufacturing town. She has vision and ambition and won't be bullied or squashed and despite the oppressive life she leads with the drapers, she looks and learns and saves, moving onward and upward from haberdashery to ready-mades. Jane is a captivating character for whom one roots from the very beginning. But alongside the very charming story is a fascinating

social history of shops, shop girls and small town business in the 1920s and '30s.' Juxtapook

'By telling the story through a biography of Flush, Virginia Woolf shows that the lives of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and her dog are constrained in similar ways. However, the foreword by Sally Beauman invites us to look at *Flush* with yet another layer of meaning, whereby she links Virginia Woolf with the subjects of her book. The prose is fluid, beautiful and eminently readable. *Flush* contains life, love and the world, and really what more is there? It also provided a touching portrayal of the world of dogs as a species. This is a beautifully imagined and told tale of a dog and his mistress, a moving story that actually made me a bit teary at the end.' Kaggsysbookishramblings

'Gloriously written, *Operation Heartbreak* is quietly and unforgettably poignant. Willie Maryngton is devastated to have his military ambitions thwarted by the end of the First World War, and this sets him off on the road to a lifetime of disappointment. I don't want to say anything much about the ending of this novel, however – whatever you do, if you are reading this book don't read the last twenty-twenty-five pages or so on the bus. Based upon some true events of the Second World War, the ending alone means I will not forget Willie in a hurry.' Heaven Ali

'*Brook Evans* is a wonderful story about passionate love, for a lover and for a child. I first read it over ten years ago when it was reprinted by Persephone Books. As I mentioned in a post a few weeks ago, I want to reread some of those early Persephones from my pre-blogging days and I so much enjoyed reading *Brook Evans* again. Susan Glaspell's *Fidelity* was one of the very first Persephones I read and I thought it was an exceptional novel. I've read it several times since then but I'd never revisited *Brook Evans*. I'm so glad I did.' I Prefer Reading

'Beth Gutcheon's novel has been neglected, even though it reads quickly and is an anthropological, social and emotional study of 1980's Boston. I would highly recommend *Still Missing* to any crime fiction fans who are looking for a different novel and do not mind that it is now quite dated (no DNA, no mobile phones). Old school crime fiction at its best.' Murder, She Read

'This beautiful novel has so many themes delicately threaded through its plot: family, politics, wartime, love, friendship, jealousy and the notion and hardships of growing up. The sense of place comes together in *The Happy Tree* through Rosalind Murray's carefully tuned descriptions: a marvellous novel, filled with beautiful writing, fluid characters and such consideration for every scene.' The Literary Sisters

# THE TWELVE BEST BOOKS FOR READING GROUPS

We are about to have a page on our website recommending books for reading groups. We would always suggest books that have lots to discuss. Therefore we would not really recommend *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day* because apart from ‘oh, ah, isn’t it wonderful’ and a brief discussion of the plight of the unmarried woman finding it hard to earn her living (and a comparison with *AlaPooor*

*Lady, Miss Ranskill* and *Miss Buncle*) there is not a great deal to talk about. We would always recommend books with ‘issues’ that get people to participate in an animated discussion. Here are our suggestions: *Someone at a Distance* by Dorothy Whipple, *The Home-Maker* by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, *Consequences* by EM Delafield, *Saplings* by Noel Streatfeild, *Little Boy Lost* by Marghanita Laski, *A House in the*

*Country* by Jocelyn Playfair, *The Wise Virgins* by Leonard Woolf, *Miss Ranskill Comes Home* by Barbara Euphan Todd, *There Were No Windows* by Norah Hoult, *Princes in the Land* by Joanna Cannan, *Daddy’s Gone A-Hunting* by Penelope Mortimer and *To Bed with Grand Music* by Marghanita Laski.

Jenny Hartley’s *Reading Groups* is very interesting about how groups choose books and why. Here are a few responses to the questionnaires she sent out: ‘We have learnt to steer clear of magic realism’; ‘we find non-fiction difficult to discuss’; ‘favourite books tend to inhibit open discussion as people may hesitate to criticise the work’; ‘we learnt a lot of history from *Birdsong* and *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*’; ‘*Memoirs of a Geisha* and *The God of Small Things* introduced us to worlds we knew nothing about’; ‘George Eliot’s *Felix Holt* is inaccessible’; ‘with Mrs Oliphant’s *Miss Marjoribanks* we felt we had discovered an amusing unappreciated minor masterpiece’; ‘some books, like *The Horse Whisperer*, are thought too lightweight’; and ‘too much agreement can sink a book – when everyone loves a book the discussion peters out early’; in conclusion, ‘a key ingredient is range of opinion.’



*Carrington Eggs on a Table Tidmarsh 1924 Bloomsbury Workshop/Charleston Magazine*

# AND ANOTHER THING

The great new arrival in Lambs Conduit Street is Aesop – if there are Persephone readers who have never been given their amazing skin care products, we hope that our ‘destination shoppers’ will now also include Aesop (it is where The French House used to be), as well as other delights such as Pentreath and Hall, Darkroom, Folk, and Thornback and Peel.

We have just launched a new Home Page, please look at it and tell us what you think – criticisms gratefully

received. Please also tell us what you think about our social media pages. Would you like us to post more, and if so what kind of thing? And please don't forget to look at our Post, Letter and Forum which appear daily, fortnightly and monthly.

Next autumn's books are : *Greengates* by RC Sherriff with a preface by Juliet Gardiner. (We are very sorry that the title is so annoyingly similar to *Greenery Street* and *Greenbanks* but maybe some good shorthand version will occur to us); the translation of

*Ceux Qui Ne Dormaient Pas* by Jacqueline Mesnil-Amar, an extraordinary August 1944 diary, plus some post-war essays about children in Europe, and photos by Thérèse Bonney, which we shall call *Maman, what are we called now?*; and *Gardeners' Choice*, a 1938 book about gardening with illustrations by Charles Mahoney and Evelyn Dunbar, published partly to coincide with this autumn's Evelyn Dunbar exhibition at Chichester. On this page: two of her letters to the young Jane Carrington, taken from pp. 63–4 of Gill Clarke's biography.



# EVENTS

The first event of the spring is at 7.30 on **Tuesday May 12th** when Nicola Beauman will give a talk at Barnetts Bookshop, Wadhurst, E. Sussex: 'Persephone Books: The First Fifteen Years'.

On **Tuesday May 19th** the novelist Rachel Billington will talk at a Persephone Lunch from 12.30–2.30 in the shop about the Persephone fiction of WW1 (*William – an Englishman*, *Wilfred and Eileen*, *The Happy Tree*) and her own new novel *Glory: A Story of Gallipoli*.

There is an exhibition of Eric Ravilious watercolours at the Dulwich Picture Gallery until August 31st. To celebrate this the curator, James Russell, will give an illustrated talk on *Ravilious's Life and Works* at a Persephone Lunch on **Thursday June 4th** from 12.30–2.30 in the shop.

On **Friday June 5th** there will be a Persephone event as part of the new Derby Literary Festival – it will take place at the Cathedral Quarter Hotel when a cream tea will be served, there will be a talk ('The First Fifteen Years') and a selection of our books will be for sale.

On **Wednesday June 10th** at a Lunch from 12.30–2.30 Anne Harvey, Elizabeth Counsell and Charlotte Harvey perform readings of WW1 poetry called 'Scars upon My Heart', based on

the book of the same name. The programme has been previously performed at the National Theatre, the Imperial War Museum, and the Cheltenham Festival and broadcast on BBC Radio 4. Richard Furstenheim links the poetry, diaries & letters with music of the war years.



PERSEPHONE BOOKS  
020 7242 9292

Dawlish Repertory Company is performing the play of *Because of the Lockwoods* between 16th and 20th June. We are thinking of getting up a group of Persephone readers to go to Dawlish in order to see a matinée of the play, please ring the office if you are interested.

On **Wednesday July 1st** at 5 o'clock at Byfords Café in Holt, Norfolk, we are celebrating the publication of Jane Hervey's *Vain Shadow*, Persephone Book No. 112. Tea and/or a glass of wine will be served at 5, there will be a question-and-answer with Jane Hervey and Nicola Beauman and then at 6 o'clock a light supper will be served. The event will finish at 7 (so that anyone who needs to can catch the 7.56 train from Sheringham to Norwich and then Liverpool St) or of course Byfords is an excellent bed-and-breakfast place; and those not in a rush might like to stay on for dessert.

On **Thursday July 9th** we shall show the excellent and difficult-to-get-hold-of film of *Into the Whirlwind* starring Emily Watson. This event will be in the shop from 6–8, wine and sandwiches will be served.

On **Tuesday September 22nd** the owners of Roppelegh's near Haslemere, Mollie Panter-Downes's former home, have kindly invited us to a lunch from 12.30–2.30 to celebrate the publication of *London War Notes*. An actor will read one of the pieces and, as is traditional, we shall walk through the garden to visit Mollie's writing hut.

To book for all events (except May 12th) please telephone the office; the cost is £20.

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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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