



The Persephone Biannually

N°25 Spring/Summer 2019
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*Roger Fry 'Lady Seated in an Omega Interior', date unknown but
painted some time between 1913 and 1919*



OUR BOOKS FOR SPRING/SUMMER 2019

This spring we publish a second novel by Elisabeth de Waal who wrote *The Exiles Return* (PB. No. 102). *Milton Place* (PB. No. 131) is, like the previous novel, that rare thing for us – a book published from typescript rather than from a previously printed edition. *The Exiles Return* (11,000 copies sold) was published after Elisabeth de Waal's grandson Edmund sent it to us. *Milton Place*'s appearance as a Persephone book came about in the following way: we were at a Virginia Woolf conference, invited there to give a talk about Persephone Books and Bloomsbury and Leonard and Virginia and *Flush/A Writer's Diary*, about the fact that Virginia would have come in to the shop to buy bread (if she ever did her own shopping, which of course she rarely did). At the conference the critic Peter Stansky introduced himself and asked if we knew that an unpublished manuscript by Elisabeth de Waal was in an archive in Stanford, California where he teaches. It seems that in late 1967 she had sent it to her friend Eric Voegelin, the political philosopher, and the ms. then remained in his archive. Eventually, through the kindness of the Stanford librarian Paul Caringella, we were able to read and love it.

Milton Place (it was untitled, as *The Exiles Return* had been: we chose its title) is about a large house in the country in the early 1950s. Anita, a young woman who had lived in Austria throughout the war years and was now exhausted and unhappy, comes to stay with the owner of the house, an elderly man named Mr Barlow. They form a wonderful companionship, much to the dismay of his two daughters. So far so *Howards End* meets *King Lear*. But the book is also about the love affair between Anita and Mr Barlow at one end of the spectrum and Anita and his grandson Tony at the other. For some the love affair will be the central theme of *Milton Place*, for others it will be the survival – or not – of the English country house (cf. the piece on the subject on p. 26 of this *Biannually*); and for yet others the crucial theme will be that of England after the war and how it goes forward into the future.

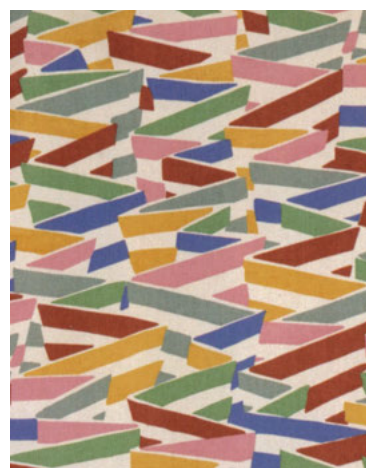
But whichever theme interests the reader most, no one will be able to deny what an excellent book it is: beautifully written and constructed; and anyone interested in English literature will read *Milton Place* unable to believe that it was turned down by three



A mid 1950s textile design SB469 by Sheila Bownas © Sheila Bownas Archive Ltd



'Tiger Lily', 1896, by Lindsay Butterfield for GP & J Baker © V&A Images



'Havana', a screen-printed cotton fabric design by Susan Collier and Sarah Campbell for Fischbacher Ltd © V&A Images

publishers in the late 1960s; and that even now we shall probably struggle to get its excellence recognised. This is what Voegelin wrote to his friend Elisabeth: 'I have read it in one day, because I could not stop. That is perhaps not the most important point, but certainly not unimportant, because it shows the novel is interesting. Then I was struck by the splendid organization... I admire the careful construction, the introduction of the themes (in the musical sense), their counterpoint and the inevitability of the end... Then I am full of admiration about the degree to which you have lived in the English landscape and town society... And the brief idiomatic characterisation of the various types is as competent as it is amazing. And finally the substance. Your sense of presence – the presence that must be gained from a life of planning into the future, that must be captured from activism before it is too late and there is no presence left. This sense of presence, if I understand you rightly, you find represented in the style of your Mr Barlow – a style that is on the point of being submerged by the new social forces without direction. In brief, you are in love with England – the England that is dying. In sum, this novel is a fine piece of work.'

In February 1968 Elisabeth replied: 'You are the *first and only* person who has understood what I was really trying to say when I wrote it. There are perhaps a dozen people who have read it, most have found that they

"couldn't stop" which is gratifying, because it attests that it isn't dull, but to me the story was only secondary. Some have read it as "light romance" and suggested a woman's magazine, some have said it was "well-written" as to style, and one or two "didn't care for that kind of book". After that I gave up, as I thought that what I had *really* intended hadn't come through. But if *you* could see it immediately, then that is the most encouraging thing that has happened to me for years!'

In his Preface to *The Exiles Return* Edmund de Waal quoted his grandmother accusing herself of lacking the common touch, of merely dealing in essences. 'It is the quintessence of experiences, not the experiences themselves, perhaps there is no body, the savour but not the fruit, the scent but not the flower.' But is Henry James reviled for having no body? Is Katherine Mansfield? Is Chekhov? Would any reader of *Milton Place* want the love affair to be described more explicitly? Certainly not. But, alas, 'body' was



'Country House Interior: Mobberley Old Hall' Mary Elwell 1929

what publishers were looking for in the 1960s, and this is one of the reasons why *Milton Place* never found a publisher during Elisabeth's lifetime. What Persephone readers will not be able to get over is that despite some rather familiar themes – the decaying country house with rooms shut up and faithful retainers, the newcomer, the two terrible daughters, the echoes of

The Go-Between – yet one reads the novel with open-mouthed admiration. Professor Peter Stansky writes in his new Afterword: 'Elisabeth had an abiding admiration for the English and for their conviction during the war that they would eventually triumph. *Milton Place* is in many ways a testimony to that indomitable spirit. The two central characters represent all

that is best in Elisabeth's world and her most lyrical writing is about the grounds and in particular the flowers that are found there, which mean so much to Mr Barlow and to his visitor Anita. What also means a lot is the sense of position, responsibility and moral values that are often embodied in an English country estate – if it is well run. Mr Barlow is a good man and his house is part of that equation.' *Milton Place* is important, witty and original. We are very proud to be publishing it.

The *Persephone Book of Short Stories* (PB No. 100), which celebrated our one hundredth book, has been a great success and so, six years later, in order to celebrate twenty years of publishing, we present: *The Second Persephone Book of Short Stories* (PB No. 132). Given that some people 'don't like' short stories (we often ask them why and the most frequent reason seems to be that once having started something, they like to get stuck in rather than it come to an end) it's interesting to explore the reasons why PB No.100 has been so popular. Firstly, it is an excellent present: for £13 you can give someone a selection of thirty short stories by (nearly) thirty women writers, all of which are top quality – and in our view unputdownable. Secondly, short stories are ideal for busy people, which is a characteristic of most Persephone readers: they can read a story before going to sleep, on the train or bus, or in the half hour before the baby wakes up.



'Cote d'Azur' used for the back endpaper for The Persephone Book of Short Stories and 'Havana' used for the back endpaper for The Second Persephone Book of Short Stories, from The Collier Campbell Archive by Emma Shackleton with Sarah Campbell (2012)

Thirdly, a collection of short stories is wonderfully diverse: every kind of life is here, every kind of experience; as you read through the book, we hope that you never quite know what is going to hit you next. When the blogger Dovegreyreader read the first collection she wrote: ‘My stately progress through *The Persephone Book of Short Stories* continues, and with a degree of lasting short-story-reading pleasure that I can’t recall experiencing for a very long time. [It’s] like meeting a lovely group of people, in this case women, all singing in harmony, but in their different parts and I am loving it. I only allow myself a single story at each sitting – because I am enjoying these so much I want the book to last ... a sitting can be while the bath is running ... or even just perched somewhere and in the midst of something else, when I suddenly get the urge to read one. Each story has a delicious kernel of quiet truth at its centre, as well as a good crunchy bite at the end, and I would be hard pushed to choose a favourite to date, but along the way I am meeting some authors whose voices resonate and I will seek out more short stories by them for sure ... to be honest, forget the 100th book, I’d love Persephone to publish a volume like this every year. There can be no shortage of stories and the collective approach makes for fascinating contrasts whilst, for all the years that pass, the concerns and themes surrounding the constraints and pleasures of women’s lives seem timeless and



Frontispiece to Gertrude Bone's Children's Children (1908) by Muirhead Bone

unchanging. [Although] I doubt I have read a more powerful and shock-inducing short story than Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery”, and its inclusion in this collection, buried deep amongst the rest, is an editorial masterstroke.’

Now comes this second volume and we hope that it brings the same pleasure to thousands of readers. Again, there are thirty stories, spanning nearly a century (from 1896–1984). Twelve are taken from the twelve volumes of stories we have published over the last few years; nine were previously published in our quarterly (later biannually)

magazine during the last decade; and nine have been selected especially for this collection. They are presented in the order they were written. A quarter are by North American women writers.

Our proofreader wrote: ‘VERY ENJOYABLE, though some of the stories eg. “Monkey-Barges” by Emma Smith are exceedingly painful. It seems to me the common themes are grief over the two World Wars. This is stronger in the earlier part of the book, how to cope with a new order being stronger in the latter. Completely fascinating. Book Groups will love it.’

ABOUT 'THE BEDQUILT'

Dorothy Canfield Fisher, a brilliant and highly educated linguist, was planning a career not as a writer but as an academic specialising in the phonetic changes in Old French; then she became 'detached from her textbooks', as she put it, after seeing some paintings by Velazquez in Madrid. In one, the image of the helplessly suffering face of an outcast dwarf who had no place in society and lacked 'what all human beings need for growth' ie. to be admired, to be accepted by the group. This reminded her of an insignificant, undemanding old spinster who had once been part of the Canfield family: Cousin Margaret, who did most of the hard work about the house, wore plain clothes, and was never noticed by anybody, in turn became the inspiration for Aunt Mehetabel in one of Canfield Fisher's first short stories 'The Bedquilt' (1906). This is included in *The Second Persephone Book of Short Stories* (and is also available free on the web).

In a story full of Biblical language and overtones, Aunt Mehetabel, whose very name connects her with one of the least known, least mentioned shadowy personages in the Old Testament (yet, it must be noted, she is a queen) gradually moves into the light. As she pieces her visionary quilt, she emerges from the dark, poorly-lit corners and eaves of the house, and the outer edges of

the family, into the well-lit centre of the circle. In this story of transformation, Canfield Fisher's domestic parable uses a bedquilt, made up of small pieces of fabric, with its notionally practical, homely associations, as a way of examining the similarly fragmented nature of female creativity that takes place in short snatches of time in lives broken up by the demands of home and family. It is therefore significant that Mehetabel is proud to see the back of her finished quilt with its neat 'squinchy seams' on display, representing as they do women's normally unnoticed work and their daily efforts to construct and hold together domestic worlds and family lives.

Despite a life dominated to date by the making of and caring for clothes and household textiles, she has been expected to do only the hard, rough work, away from delicate fabrics and fancy items, just like Jane Eyre with her plain sewing at Lowood School and the poor, unmarried, female Willoughby relatives who do the mending in Richmal Crompton's *Family Roundabout* (PB No. 24). Even with her productive needle Mehetabel has so far shown no vanity or self-interest and makes shabby, ill-fitting clothes and pattern-based quilts. The remarkably articulate Canfield Fisher is able to reveal Mehetabel's (by contrast) almost dumb-animal, mouse-like inarticulacy and its causes. She

shows how quilting becomes her language and her medium, the only way she can express herself and communicate with others. Indeed, so limited are her powers of speech that 'it looked real good' is all she can say of her magnificent finished quilt.

In quilting, Canfield Fisher chooses a craft with deep roots in American history which would have been familiar and 'readable' to many contemporary female readers. At the time when the story is set, that is the late nineteenth century, quilting was no longer a vital, early pioneer skill required for survival, (although most girls continued to learn to quilt) but one which was beginning to be seen as a popular women's craft. Accordingly, the family have previously taken no notice of Mehetabel's quilting which followed well-known patterns and designs because they are unexceptional and widely copied. It is not until she reveals unsuspected design genius and moves to a new, previously unseen and unsuspected level of artistry that they, and other members of the community, begin to acknowledge her skill and thus her existence. Her Biblical-style vision of a complete and glorious bedquilt, whose long creation elevates her to a new status, transforms her into a talent, a figure of respect.

All the more puzzling then, that 'The Bedquilt', and

other quilting stories, were claimed by feminist critics in the 1980s and 1990s as metaphors for women's writing. By reading the stories of fabric-piecing as metaphors for the female authors' own fragmented Modernist writing styles and literary aspirations, and by applying to women's creative work a hierarchy of modes in which the written word is the highest form of expression, they ignore or vastly underrate the value and meaning of women's needlework and textile design skills. In her essay 'Common Threads', the critic Elaine Showalter writes that 'the story of Aunt Mehetabel's prize-winning quilt is obviously applicable to Canfield Fisher's own literary fantasies' of a new fragmented, modernist form of the novel, and that in 'feminist literary theories of a Female Aesthetic, piecing became a metaphor for the decentred structure of a woman's text'. Canfield Fisher, though, clearly allows quilting to be seen as a form of supreme expression of female creativity, in contrast to the feminist critics who place it below the act of writing and suggest that it is not enough on its own but must be a metaphor for something else. In this way they privilege the output of a tiny number of published women writers over vast numbers of women who complete beautiful quilts.

Elaine Showalter sees Mehetabel's quilt as a reflection of the contemporary influence of Cubism and claims

that it is likely to be a crazy quilt. However, the story of its construction shows that Mehetabel is in fact creating a highly structured stitched narrative and is an example of how a 'non-writing person', rather than a 'writing person', uses a priceless 'moment of vision' – as Canfield Fisher explained in 1945. The author presents the bedquilt as a masterpiece in its own right and on its own terms, and allows Mehetabel 'the supreme content of an artist who has realised his ideal'.

It is interesting that the reader of 'The Bedquilt' never finds out exactly what is in the quilt and what it looks like. It remains a unique one-off, an unknown quantity without a name, unlike so many classic American designs with names like Log Cabin, Irish Chain and Drunkard's Path. Today, perhaps, Mehetabel's quilt would be in a museum rather than on a bed, but the discussion about the value of women's domestic and textile creativity would still be taking place around it.

© Jane Brocket, 2019



A Patchwork Quilt' George Wimpenny (1857–1939) Gallery Oldham

OUR BLOGGERS WRITE

‘The best books are the ones that capture all or part of a life – or lives – with real insight and beautiful expression, and the very best books do all of that and say something important both to its first readers and to readers who come to it years and years later. *The Call* is one of the very best books; telling the story of a pioneering young woman scientist who becomes deeply involved in the campaign for votes for women. As I read I was to find that Edith Ayrton Zangwill was very good indeed at people, and at their interactions and relationships. The story telling was engaging and accessible and was wrapped up perfectly in a wonderfully dramatic and emotional conclusion. The mixture of human drama and social history is perfect.’ Beyond Eden Rock

‘Light, charming, frothy, amusing ... *Guard Your Daughters* is all these, but it is also a novel with a dark undertow. There are clues from the first page that something is awry. This is a dysfunctional middle-class family living in genteel poverty in a rural area away from London. The reader is presented early on with the details of restrictions on visitors and the social life of the four daughters who still live at home. The plot moves slowly: a series of events gradually accumulate in the climax. Many of the episodes are amusing and some

are pitiful, some both. Sometimes their unconventionality and naivety is charming. The scenes become more and more disturbing until the shocking denouement. While the daughters are amusing, witty, welcoming, they are without sound judgment, having been failed by their parents. I found this to be a convincing and disturbing novel about the dangers that lurk in families.’ Book Word

‘In *Consequences* we encounter Delafield’s concern with women’s place in the world, but here there are none of the wry observances I remember from her most famous work, *Diary of a Provincial Lady*. It was in *The War Workers* that I first saw the anger that Delafield is also capable of. It is clear that in *Consequences* it is that same anger which fuelled her. The theme of this beautifully poignant novel is the fate of women of a certain class who do not marry. Her central character is Alex – an awkward girl, who in time becomes an awkward young woman. In this novel Delafield recreates upper class Victorian family life, convent school days, the anxious social whirl of a young debutante and the hard, privations of the religious life of a nun. There is a terrible inevitability to Alex’s fate – she has never learned to get along with people, is unable to empathise with them. The reader

knows even at this stage that Alex is unlikely to find her happy ending. Despite being over 400 pages, *Consequences* is hugely compelling – and Delafield’s writing made me sit up late turning the pages – I just had to know what was next for poor Alex Clare.’ Heavenly

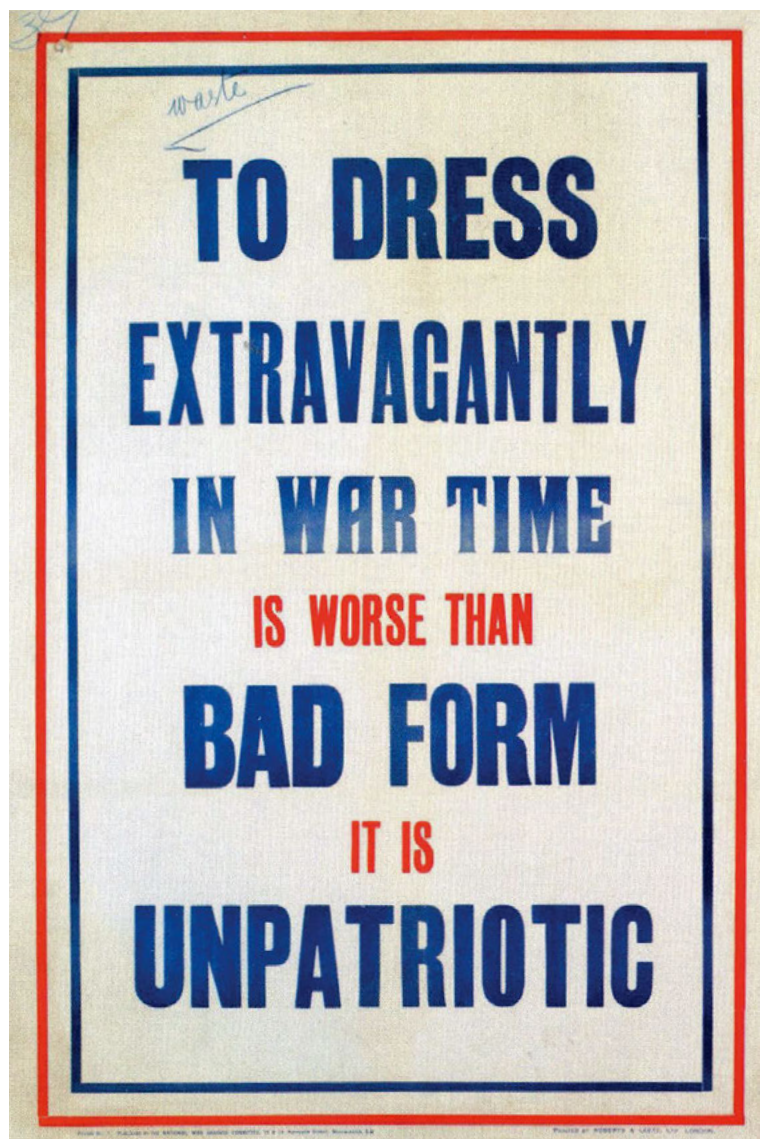
‘*Someone at a Distance* is my first experience of Dorothy Whipple’s work. The central story is a timeless one, focusing as it does on the systematic destruction of a loving marriage – and yet, Whipple captures everything with such insight and attention to detail that it all feels so compelling, pushing the reader forward to discover how the narrative will end. It’s certainly one of the most absorbing novels I’ve read this year. In writing it, Whipple has created a very good novel about the fragile nature of love and the lives we build for ourselves. The main characters are drawn with understanding and insight, and their motives explored with a real sense of depth. The emotions of shame, humiliation and rejection that Whipple explores are timeless – factors that ensure the novel retains a relevance in the contemporary world. Whipple also does a fine job in painting the secondary players in the mix. Individuals like Mrs Beard, the formidable manager of a local hotel/care home, and Louise’s humane parents are beautifully drawn

too, the humble, straightforward nature of their lives in small-town France contrasting sharply with their daughter's unnecessary airs and graces. All in all, this is a very fine novel, one that may well suit fans of writers such as Elizabeth Taylor and Elizabeth Jane Howard.' JacquiWine's Journal

'**T**he *Call* is long, it's sprawling and it calls on a catalogue of wondrous elements. It's fair to say it's one of my favourite ever Persephone Books (and I've read about two thirds of their 130 to date). The title can be interpreted in a number of ways: Ursula's scientific work, her devotion to women's suffrage, her commitment to her fiancé, her objection to the violence of war, or her determination to invent a means of extinguishing the 'liquid fire' that the Germans are using during the war. Edith Ayrton Zangwill writes in an accessible and enjoyable way, and even the potentially tedious 'science parts' are not alienating to a non-science type such as me. The descriptions of suffrage life are hectic and consuming but the sections about Ursula's prison experiences, especially the vivid and scalding descriptions of being on hunger and thirst strikes, are truly shocking. As they should be. This is a thoroughly compelling book. Re-publishing *The Call* is a credit to Persephone and this is exactly the kind of book that I hope they continue putting out.' Madam J-Mo

'**T**he synopsis of *Fidelity* suggests it could be a melodramatic romance novel and, therefore, easily dismissed as quality literature by the standards of today or of 1915. Yet Glaspell's novel takes the salacious and crafts out a biting criticism of how people scramble for "crumbs off the table of respectability", how society can be a policing force that people buy into against all logic.

I am loath to give away the ending so all I will say is, if a book published today were to take this turn, we would likely label it as a feminist novel. Glaspell's writing is quite lovely. It is a shame that she isn't as well known as Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, or other authors from this time but, as the introduction to this novel and the story suggest, some people are forced to carry their transgressions against society as



scarlet letters for the rest of time.’ Ardent Reader

‘**L**ong Live Great Bardfield, the autobiography of the wood engraver and painter Tirzah Garwood, wife of Eric Ravilious, has a lovely engaging tone that makes the pages fly by. It’s told in a rather flat, naive and artless style with many non-sequiturs which reminds me a bit of Dodie Smith, Barbara Comyns and Elizabeth Eliot, and is a charming and absorbing read, even though it’s quite a long book. Tirzah maintains this matter-of-fact tone throughout the book, from descriptions of early family rows and odd neighbours through domestic disasters to upsetting love affairs conducted by both her and Eric, but it’s curiously sweet and intimate. Her openness leads her to discuss her lovers and the complicated affairs of the group of friends but also her struggles with her periods, something not often discussed so openly. She’s relatively breezy and light-hearted on most subjects and is aware of this and not being “put out by misfortunes as much as most people” (p. 280): she puts this down to her ability to be absorbed in her art. A lot of artists and other characters come in and out of the narrative and are seen by Tirzah’s beady eye: she’s great at seeing the continuity in someone’s behaviour through the years. A lovely book which would merit a re-read, and a great addition to my Persephone shelf.’ Adventures in reading, running and working from home

‘**T**he Call is an amazing book. Originally published in 1924, and now reprinted, it is far from a book limited to the interwar period, as it features a woman far in advance of her time and a significant female role model for today. Zangwill has cleverly created a memorable character in Ursula who is already living an irregular life when she comes into contact with suffragettes, and it is that element of the book which fascinated me most. It’s written by a confident and able writer who chooses her material well, smoothly moving from disaster to triumph, challenge to success, but also from effort to failure and frustration. It has a vast compass, as a young woman becomes experienced in all that life can throw at her, but also demonstrates all she can offer. While this is a book of its time rather than a contemporary novel, I think it has much to say about women’s lives as the expectations of marriage are cleverly subverted and the strength of belief in a cause are clearly displayed as the main character suffers appalling treatment. The book deserves much more attention, offering a valuable insight into the lives of women in the early twentieth century, and I recommend it as a read for anyone with an interest in relatively early feminist literature.’ Northern Reader

‘**I**s this a good time to delve into a book called *Tory Heaven*? With Marghanita Laski behind the message, the answer

is an emphatic ‘YES!’. It’s 1945 and five British citizens have been living meagrely on an island near New Guinea after escaping from Singapore. Spending several years away from the luxuries of their former lives is a great leveller and everyone gets along. The group then hears the news that Britain is now under Conservative rule. And so it begins. Everyone is graded by family lineage, wealth, education and other factors. The government even dictates the accepted form of socialisation within the grades, as in A restaurants, B pubs, and D housekeepers for A families. When asked about his choice of occupation there is no hesitation in James’s reply... ‘Man-About-Town’. As ridiculously snobby as that sounds, he is the Tory’s dream man. Anyone who reads *Tory Heaven* will be in awe of the astuteness with which Laski writes of the perils of what is, at its root, a dictatorship. What makes this story even more astounding is that Laski was Jewish and would obviously have known about the atrocities in Germany. To write this story shortly after WWII, with a sentiment of charm and humour, while at the same time sending a very forceful message that no one is better than anyone else is to Laski’s credit. *Tory Heaven* is an excellent read. Both sombre and fun, this is a story that will stay with you and provoke no small amount of thought about the many ways people are still being “graded” today.’ Cosy Books

‘This book is a real delight – Persephone refer to it as a “hot water bottle novel” and that’s exactly what it is. A book you can curl up with on the sofa and escape into. Mostly set in England between the world wars, *Mariana* is the coming-of-age story of Mary, whom we follow from childhood right through to the early years of the second world war where she is desperately waiting to hear whether her husband has survived the bombing of his ship. We see Mary’s idyllic childhood summers at her grandparents’ country home, her school days and life at home in a London flat with her widowed bohemian dressmaker mother and actor uncle, her hilarious adventures at drama school and eventually her travels to Paris, and all the misguided decisions, in love and all else, she makes along the way. It is a very funny and heartwarming book all at once, for Mary realises, looking back at her younger years, that perhaps they weren’t as perfect as they seemed, and that the grownups did a good job of hiding harsher aspects of reality from her. For most of the book, Mary is less concerned about making her own way in the world and more about filling in time before she meets Mr Right. By the time the book is nearly over, she has realised that her husband is potentially now dead and she will have to carry on, independently; that she will only ever really have herself, and that she doesn’t need anyone else to complete her. Quite a revolution-

ary thought for 1940!’ Philippa Moore

‘*Young Anne* follows the life of Anne Pritchard from a young girl of five to a grown woman in her early twenties. There are highs and lows dealt with compassionately and with a deftness of hand that makes the story feel all the more true. This is a story about a life. There are no great reveals, action scenes or taut moments. It could be said that nothing much happens but Dorothy Whipple wrote in such a way that she made the reader invested in the characters. She wrote about growing up, about finding your feet, about first love and relationship issues in such an engaging, often lively, way that the reader can’t help but be drawn into the story. Later there are moments of quiet, understated romance, of expressions of feelings that could almost pass the young protagonist by, but which are told by an older, perhaps wiser woman in a way that shows the underlying intentions of the person behind those acts. They lend weight to the story, one which becomes more apparent as the tale progresses. There are flashes of humour throughout, with some standout lines of prose that hint at the strength of work that could still be expected after this debut novel. Some of the text is so brilliant in its simplicity of manner that it requires an immediate re-reading to take in the insight and wit at work, and which resonate still today. The story is filled with simple, yet not

simplistic prose, a character study of people and of a time still relevant and interesting today. *Young Anne* was my first foray into the writing of Dorothy Whipple. It will not be my last. Highly recommended.’ From First Page to Last

‘*Family Roundabout* is a gently-paced novel following two families headed by two very different matriarchs through the years before the Second World War. Mrs Fowler is a hands-off kind of a parent; Mrs Willoughby is quite the opposite. The plot follows their children, who are all grown up or almost grown up at the beginning of the book, through more or less ill-advised marriages, love affairs, careers, and attempts to leave the home town. Crompton is very good on the nuances of family dynamics, on the equally strong desire to escape and to be supported, of small feelings that become big problems. And the sense of comic timing that makes the William books hilarious serves her well here, although of course it’s more subtle, somehow meshing wonderfully well with the wistfully optimistic tone. The characters are neither too bad nor too good; one rather wishes that some of them would get their respective acts together, but sympathises with them nevertheless and understands why they just can’t. There’s always a danger, re-reading old favourites, of a visit from the Suck Fairy – who has in fact left most of this untouched.’ Kathleen Jowitt

THE PERSEPHONE 132

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 **Also a Persephone Classic**

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' **Also a Persephone Classic**

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' ninety years before. Preface: PD James

7. **The Home-Maker** by **Dorothy Canfield Fisher** An ahead-of-its-time 'remarkable and brave 1924 novel about being a house-husband' (Carol Shields). Preface: Karen Knox **Also a Persephone Classic**

8. **Good Evening, Mrs Craven: the Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes** Short stories first published in *The New Yorker* from 1938–44. Five were read on R4. Preface: Gregory LeStage **An unabridged Persephone audiobook read by Lucy Scott. Also a Persephone Classic**

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 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*, PB No. 105, 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** Observant and bleak 1947 short stories, 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 **Also a Persephone Classic**

17. **Marjory Fleming** by **Oriel Malet** A deeply empathetic novel about the real life of the Scottish child prodigy who lived from 1803–11; translated into French; 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 1946 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 night-club 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. Also a Persephone Classic**

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 author of *William*, a 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.

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.

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. Also a Persephone Classic

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. Also a Persephone Classic

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*. Also a Persephone Classic

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'. 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* and not known 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. A film with Felicity Jones. Also a Persephone Classic.

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 dark sense of humour; read several times on BBC R4. 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 set before and after the 1964 Rivonia Trial. Mandela was given a life sentence but the Bernsteins escaped to England. Preface and Afterword: the author Also a Persephone Classic

51. Operation Heartbreak by Duff Cooper A soldier fails to go 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 Beaman

56. They Were Sisters by Dorothy Whipple A 1943 novel by this superb 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 the lovely and selfish 'menace' – but is she one? 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 married to 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.

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. Also a Persephone Classic

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*, PB 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 Stories drawn from the three collections published during the author's lifetime. Five were read on BBC R4.

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 counter-point to *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, PB No. 9. 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 Working-class life in Lambeth in the early C20th: witty, readable, poignant and fascinating – and still relevant today. 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, beautiful, profound, and very 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' said the 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 1955 novel by the author of *Mariana* about a widow with three rather unsympathetic daughters who finds happiness in the end. Afterword: AS Byatt
- 91. Miss Buncle Married** by DE Stevenson A very enjoyable sequel to *Miss Buncle's Book* (No. 81): Miss Buncle marries and moves to a new village. Afterword: Fiona Bevan
- 92. Midsummer Night in the Workhouse** by Diana Athill '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 Fergusson 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 and path-breaking 1911 suffragette novel about a mill girl and her aristocratic friend. Preface: Lydia Felgett
- 95. Greenbanks** by Dorothy Whipple A 1932 novel by our most popular author about a family and, in particular, a grandmother and her grand-daughter. Afterword: Charles Lock
- 96. Dinners for Beginners** by Rachel and Margaret Ryan A 1934 cookery book for the novice cook explaining everything in exacting 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. Five exiles return to Vienna after the war. A meditation on 'going back' and a love story. Preface: Edmund de Waal
- 103. The Squire** by Enid Bagnold In 1938 a woman gives birth to her fifth child: a rare novel about the process of birth. Preface: Anne Sebba
- 104. The Two Mrs Abbotts** by DE Stevenson The third 'Miss Buncle' 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. Illustrated by Arthur Watts. 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 devastating effect of WW1 on the young, in particular a young married 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) is illustrated by a dozen beautiful wood engravings 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 Waugh-ish 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

113. Greengates by RC Sherriff A 1936 novel about retirement: Mr Baldwin realises the truth of 'for better for worse but not for lunch' but finds a new life by moving to 'metroland'. Preface: Juliet Gardiner

114. Gardeners' Choice by Evelyn Dunbar and Charles Mahoney Two artist friends collaborated over the text and drawings of this rare and delightful 1937 gardening book. Preface: Edward Bawden, Afterword: Christopher Campbell-Howes

115. Maman, What Are We Called Now? by Jacqueline Mesnil-Amar The author kept a diary in July and August 1944: an unparalleled insight into the last days of the Occupation in Paris. Photographs: Thérèse

Bonney. Preface: Caroline Moorehead

116. A Lady and Her Husband by Amber Reeves A 1914 novel about a woman who realises that the girls in her husband's chain of tea shops are underpaid – and does something about it. Preface: Samantha Ellis

117. The Godwits Fly by Robin Hyde A semi-autobiographical lyrically written 1938 novel by the major New Zealand writer, who published ten books in ten years and died in London in August 1939 when she was 33. Preface: Ann Thwaite

118. Every Good Deed and Other Stories by Dorothy Whipple A 1944 novella and nine short stories written between 1931 and 1961 which display the author's 'wonderful power of taking quite ordinary people in quite unromantic surroundings and making them live.'

119. Long Live Great Bardfield: The Autobiography of Tirzah Garwood. A touching, funny and perceptive memoir which came out in a limited edition in 2012. Our version has many wood engravings and photographs (eg. of Tirzah's husband Eric Ravilious). Preface: Anne Ullmann

120. Madame Solario by Gladys Huntington This superb novel in the Henry James/Edith Wharton tradition is set on Lake Como in 1906. Published anonymously and with incestuous undertones, thus a *succès de scandale*. Afterword: Alison Adburgham

121. Effi Briest by Theodor Fontane. An 1895 classic of European literature by the great German novelist: neglected in the UK yet on a par with *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary*. Afterword: Charlie Lee-Potter

122. Earth and High Heaven by Gwethalyn Graham A 1944 Canadian bestselling novel about a young woman falling in love with a Jewish man and her father's, and Canada's, upsetting anti-semitism. Preface: Emily Rhodes

123. Emmeline by Judith Rossner A 1980 novel, set in the 1840s, about a 13-year-old girl working in the mills

at Lowell; she is seduced, and tragedy ensues: a subtle, unusual feminist statement. Preface: Lucy Ellmann

124. The Journey Home and Other Stories by Malachi Whitaker Four volumes of these startling stories came out in the early 1930s; we reprint twenty of them. Preface: Philip Hensher. Afterword: Valerie Waterhouse

125. Guard Your Daughters by Diana Tutton A 1953 novel written in a light, very readable style which has dark undertones: four sisters living in the country have to defer to their demanding mother.

126. Despised and Rejected by Rose Allatini A pioneering 1918 novel about a gay conscientious objector and his friendship with a young woman who also opposes the war. Afterword: Jonathan Cutbill

127. Young Anne by Dorothy Whipple A quasi-autobiographical and extremely readable novel by our bestselling writer about a young girl growing up. Preface: Lucy Mangan

128. Tory Heaven by Marghanita Laski A dark 1948 satire about a Britain under Tory rule with everyone divided up (by the As) into A, B, C, D, and E. Preface: David Kynaston

129. The Call by Edith Ayrton Zangwill A 1924 novel about a young woman scientist (based on Hertha Ayrton) who gives up her work for 'the cause'. Preface: Elizabeth Day

130. National Provincial by Lettice Cooper A 1938 novel about politics in Leeds in 1935–6, surprisingly page-turning despite its often serious subject matter. Preface: Rachel Reeves, MP for Leeds West

131. Milton Place by Elisabeth de Waal A novel set in a large house in the English countryside just after the war. A young woman from Vienna changes everything. Preface: Victor de Waal, Afterword: Peter Stansky

132. The Second Persephone Book of Short Stories A second volume (to follow our hugely successful first volume, PB No. 100) of thirty stories by women writers.

‘SOMEONE AT A DISTANCE’

We reprint this 1932 short story by the novelist Phyllis Bentley because Dorothy Whipple must have remembered its title when she came to write her last novel in 1953.

‘In ordinary life,’ observes M. Estaunié in one of his subtle psychological novels, ‘we come and go, we talk, we haven’t the slightest evil intention; and because we turn to the right rather than to the left, speak one word instead of another, someone at a distance is injured, someone of whom we did not dream, of whose very existence indeed we are probably ignorant.’

When one begins to consider, one is surprised to find how many cases one knows where that has been the truth. Old Mr Trumpington, for instance, knew Richard Marden only vaguely, by sight, and did not in the least wish him ill; while of the existence of Philippa, George Steevens, and the fair fluffy little girl in Yorkshire he was completely ignorant. Young Smithers was even less to blame, for he did not even know Richard Marden. And yet –

* * *

Philippa Marden heard a taxi come round the corner of Cardigan Place. She drew her dark brows together in a look of pain; no doubt that was her husband, returning from his fortnight’s business trip abroad.

O God, why had she ever married him? There were too many answers to that question, unfortunately, and none of them the right one; at the time of their meeting at a seaside resort she had been flattered that he, an experienced man of the world, ten years older than herself (which made her feel young), should pay her attention; he was rich; she was tired of living at home amid a large family and working for her bread in a narrow world which seemed to have neither appreciation of her sombre beauty nor scope for her social gifts; life in a London suburb sounded rather attractive to her provincial ear; Richard Marden’s cool, competent manners pleased her; he was handsome, too, in a way, with his rather prominent grey-blue eyes and well-groomed greying hair, his height and his ‘well-preserved’ slender figure.

She had used all these reasons to persuade herself to marry him; had done so, and seemed likely to regret it all her life. Not that he ill-used her, starved her, kept her short of any money, neglected her, or in short gave her any excuse for a display of temper; he was apparently a most correct and affectionate husband; it was just that Philippa felt nipped by his cool, implacable egoism as by an east wind. All her warm and generous impulses were dying, had to die that she might stay alive. Were

they at the play or at a concert, did they discuss an idea or a book, his sneering criticism always took the bloom from Philippa’s enjoyment, froze her enthusiasm for what was beautiful and good.

Perhaps he detested enthusiasm only when it was directed upon objects other than himself, however; for Philippa had seen him moved furiously enough when his self-love was wounded; he had come home once, for instance, raging about an office-boy who had ruffled him by some piece of unintentional rudeness so slight that Philippa could scarce forbear to smile at it. The boy, however, had lost his place, for Marden never forgot or forgave an injury, however small. Philippa had already had personal experience of this; her husband still, for instance, six months after their marriage, sometimes jested, with an icy irony which chilled her to the bone, about a trifling delay of hers upon their honeymoon which had caused them to miss an unimportant train. Yes, all the generous warmth of her heart, all the fires of nobility which had surely once flamed in it, were sinking, chilling, dying, beneath her husband’s freezing glance. It must be so, or she could not have acted as she had towards George Steevens.

Steevens was the new junior partner in her husband’s firm. He was very tall and very fair, but not handsome or heroic, at

any rate at first sight; a rather vague young man, with rather rough manners and a rather bad Northern Country accent – when he spoke at all, which was not often. He was not married, though he was understood to be engaged to some girl or other at home away in the north – Philippa visualised her, from the stray hints he let drop, as a fair fluffy little thing with a giggle – so he lived in lodgings which Marden had found for him not far away in Burton Street.

Naturally he came to the Mardens' a good deal, but he was not a great asset in ordinary society; he sprawled about as though the chairs were too small for him, blushed when spoken to by a woman, and treasured some very antiquated provincial notions about manners.

He had two great qualities, however, which appeared elsewhere; he was a fine engineer, and a fine tennis-player. Philippa had first seen him in this latter capacity; Marden had taken her to see his junior partner play; and as she watched the magnificent display of strength and skill presented by Steevens's fine young body she felt her heart slowly warm again. Afterwards, when Steevens was presented to her, Philippa had been a little disconcerted at first by his crude bashfulness; but soon that was only an added attraction to her, for it made her feel more strongly than ever that she was the one woman in the world for him. She with her social tact and cleverness – even Richard admitted that she had

that; indeed she sometimes suspected it was the reason he had married her – her quick understanding, her gift for easy expression; Steevens with his solid ability and his driving power: what a pair they would have made! What a career she could have made for him! Ah! If only she had met him before she married Marden!

If she had met him before she married Marden, Philippa reminded herself, the situation would still have been hopeless, for there would still have been that fair fluffy giggling child whom Steevens had promised to marry. She probably adored him. If Philippa had met George Steevens before her marriage to Marden had chilled her heart, she would have played fair by that fluffy giggling child, she would have scorned to rob another woman of her love. But Philippa had married Marden, and her heart was chilled, and rob another woman of her love was precisely what she had set out to do and done. It was not difficult; there were plenty of opportunities; Marden had positively asked her to be kind to George Steevens; the lad, he said, was farouche, difficult, capable of flaring up and rushing away if his susceptibilities were injured, and goodness knew where his susceptibilities lay; let Philippa soothe him and play him and keep him attached to her husband – his abilities were great, and the partnership was a splendid opening for him; it would be a kindness to the young man himself.

Not that Marden meant, of course, that Philippa should by the very slightest step depart from the path of her wifely duty. No! Philippa did not accuse him of that; such baseness was not in his character; she recognised with a shudder that he trusted her – his pride was too great for him to do anything else. Well! She had betrayed his trust; she had talked to George Steevens, and taught him to talk to her – that they were both strangers to London and to the suburb was a help. She loved George Steevens, and taught him to love her. She was beautiful, and she knew it, and she could not help feeling that, despite everything, she was the one woman in the world for him; she was older than he was, more experienced, more articulate, she knew what she wanted; and so they had passed from the few minutes' conversation which Marden approved to appointments, letters, secret meetings in park or street. And then Marden had been called abroad for a fortnight.

It was because Philippa had touched the heights and depths of love in that fortnight that she had given Steevens up. She loved, and her heart grew warm and generous again; she remembered that poor child in Yorkshire, who would be left weeping and desolate, robbed of her love; she remembered her broken faith to her husband; she remembered her own noble youthful dreams; she remembered that Steevens was younger than herself; she saw ghastly



Perhaps in her secret heart she may have hoped that he would be stubborn and refuse to do her bidding; but he had always allowed himself to be persuaded by her, and he did not assert himself now. They bade each other a tragic farewell and parted.

That was last night. It seemed remote, distant across centuries of pain, but it was last night only; today was the day of Marden's return. And now Marden was approaching in a taxi, had drawn up to the door, was on the threshold; had crossed it and taken Philippa with cool correctness in his arms. Well, he must never know, never, never know, thought Philippa as she asked if he had had a pleasant journey, took off his coat, fussed affectionately over him, and, though it was rather late, rang for tea; he should never know; she, with her social gifts, her tact and cleverness, would keep the secret from him always.

* * *

Just then old Mr Trumpington and young Smithers came out of their office building together. Young Smithers, who was a decent sort of fellow, stepped aside with a kindly smile to let his venerable colleague pass. 'Poor old chap!' he thought to himself, noticing the old solicitor's snow-white hair and beard, his faded blue eyes peering with a kind of pathetic perplexity out of his gentle, thin, almost waxen old face, his bowed

visions of his ruin if her husband should ever discover the intrigue between them.

Well, he should never discover it; Stevens should not be ruined, the little Yorkshire girl should not be desolate; Stevens was young and would soon forget Philippa; they would give each

other up. Or rather, since with this pair the initiative had always had to come from Philippa, she would give him up. In his grubby, uninteresting little sitting room which had become so dear to her she made this plain to him; their only honorable course was to give each other up.

shoulders and tottering gait, the way he leaned heavily on his neat umbrella. 'Poor old chap! He isn't the man he was. He's getting feebler. The hot weather's trying him.' He thought of Mr. Trumpington's long and honorable career and spotless reputation, and felt a wish to say something to show the respectful compassion which he entertained for the old man.

'You still walk to the office and back every day, sir?' he murmured, in an admiring tone.

'Oh, yes!' threw out Mr. Trumpington with a negligent air. (Young Smithers saw, however, that he was pleased.) 'Yes. I have always done so.'

He quickened his step as if to show how lightly he regarded the practice of walking, how easy it was to him; and he stumbled a little by the gate.

'Mind the step, sir!' called young Smithers behind him.

'Thank you! Thank you!' replied Mr. Trumpington. He slightly touched his hat to show his gratitude for the warning, but his tone was rather testy; and he did not turn round, but tottered rapidly away.

Indeed, he had felt a sharp pang at the sound of Smithers's kind young voice. Was he, then, getting so old that he had to be warned to mind steps? Was he getting so old that he looked as though he needed help on the streets? Was he, Harry Trumpington, the gay, the dashing, the brilliant Harry Trumpington, really getting old? Surely not, he told himself staunchly; he felt as young as

ever; his mind was still perfectly clear – except perhaps round the middle of the day, but what of that? As young Smithers had said, he still walked to and from the office every day, and that was quite a long way, almost a mile – or say three-quarters. Or perhaps, after all, half a mile was nearer the mark, he reflected honestly. But even so, that was two miles a day. Not many men of eighty could walk their two miles a day, six days a week. He threw up his head and stepped out more briskly. But no, it was only five days a week, after all; on Saturday he did not come to the office in the afternoon. That was one mile on Saturday, then, and two miles on five other days; how much was that, now?

Suddenly he felt confused and puzzled; he was not quite sure; it seemed such a complicated sum.

'Ah, young Smithers was right, was right,' he thought: 'I am getting old; I can't multiply two by five and add one now; I am getting into an old, doddering man; I stumble over steps, I have to go to sleep for an hour or two every afternoon, or else I get confused and muddle the beginnings and endings of my words; I am set in my habits; if my chair isn't in its usual place by the hearth, or if a meal is late, I feel quite upset, my heart beats fast and irregularly; as for this walking to and from the office that I'm so proud of, even that I do mechanically, just because it's a fixed habit. I always walk the same way; down Burton Street and along the square to the office, along the square and up

Burton Street when I'm going home. I timed it and found it was a minute quicker than going by Cardigan Place – how many years ago? It was when we first took that house, I suppose; how many years ago was that? Twenty? Oh, more than that, many more than that; it was before Edith died; it must have been thirty years ago. Thirty years! And ever since then I've always walked along the square and Burton Street. Ah, yes! Young Smithers was right; I'm an old man. Can it really be so many years since Edith died?'

As he tottered along the side of the square, old Mr. Trumpington now thought about his wife. At first he thought of her as she had been in her last sad years, and then he went back to that sweet and lovely time when they were in the spring of life together; she was young and rich and pretty, with such spirit! Ah, what a bright, winning, lively creature she had been! And he was young and poor, with all his way to make; but he was clever, and tenacious, and daring, and bold, and sure to do well, so everybody said; he was not a doddering old man who stumbled over steps then, he was not set in his habits then. He recalled some of his old triumphs, and chuckled, and threw back his head; his blood flowed more freely through his chilled old veins, he laughed to himself again and gave another knowing shake of his head.

So young Smithers thought he was a stumbling old dodderer, did he? Set in his habits, was he?

He'd show them! He'd show them! After all, a man was as old as he felt; and he felt very little older than the dashing Harry Trumpington who had cut out Smithers's father with Edith, carried her off under his very nose; Edith's father had preferred Smithers, but Harry Trumpington had dashed boldly in and won her. He'd show them that Harry Trumpington was not an old fossil yet; no, not by a long way, not by a very long way indeed. Striking the ferrule of his umbrella triumphantly upon the pavement, old Mr. Trumpington, a smile upon his face, turned firmly and decidedly to the right, and, breaking the habit of thirty years, went homeward up Cardigan Place.

* * *

Tea was over; Philippa was talking volubly, with intent to conceal.

'You're not looking very well,' said Marden. 'I shan't have to leave you alone again.'

Was it mere fancy, or did his tone really sound ironical? Had he heard anything? Could he possibly have made a guess? Oh, he must never know, he must never guess, thought Philippa, wildly; and she redoubled her efforts to amuse him, to distract his mind, to convince him that nothing particular had happened in his absence, that she was glad to see him home again. Fortunately, she was clever at that sort of thing.

But presently Marden said: 'Have you seen anything of

young Steevens while I've been away?'

How was she to answer that? After a sickening pause, which she felt her husband could hardly but notice, she decided to go as near the truth as possible. 'Yes,' she said, quietly. 'I've seen him several times. He's a queer boy.'

'We might perhaps ask that girl of his here for a week or two,' suggested Marden. 'What do you think?'

'Oh, Richard!' cried Philippa involuntarily. Controlling herself, she added at once: 'Need we? She's sure to be very crude.'

'As you wish,' said her husband indifferently.

Philippa breathed again. He had noticed nothing, then; the danger was over; she was safe. Now to turn the conversation to some distant topic, turn it naturally, with ease. His travel experiences were exhausted; she glanced about in search of a subject.

'Why!' she exclaimed, thinking she has found what she sought. 'Here's that nice old man with the beautiful white beard coming down the Place.'

'What, old Trumpington?' said Marden curiously. He rose and strolled to the window.

'I don't know his name,' said Philippa. Delighted to have distracted his attention from the Steevens topic, she followed him, and, putting her arm about his shoulders, slightly leaned on him.

'Yes, it's old Trumpington all right,' said Marden. 'What is he doing here at this time, I

wonder?' he went on. He looked at his watch. 'Yes,' he said in a puzzled tone, 'he must be going home.'

'And he usually goes up Burton Street, doesn't he?' said Philippa, eagerly pursuing this safe topic.

She felt her husband's hand on her arm, his fingers digging into her flesh; and saw his face, furious and distorted, close to hers. Panic seized upon her, a sense of disaster filled her heart.

'How do you know he usually goes by Burton Street?' demanded Marden.

His voice was terrible. 'How do I know?' repeated Philippa stupidly.

'Yes, you, a stranger,' urged her husband. 'How do you know? You who don't even know his name?'

Ah, God, of course it was from Steevens's rooms...

'Everyone knows,' stammered Philippa. She turned pale, 'I've heard it said -'

'You're lying,' began Marden, coldly.

Old Mr. Trumpington turned out of Cardigan Place into the main road. He knew Richard Marden only vaguely, by sight, and did not in the least wish him ill; while of the existence of Philippa, George Steevens and the fair fluffy girl in Yorkshire he was completely ignorant. Young Smithers was even less to blame, for he did not even know Richard Marden. And yet -

© Phyllis Bentley, taken from *in The Whole of the Story* (1935)

WHIPPLE IN 'THE OLDIE'

‘Some novels bring the period in which they were written so sharply into focus that they feel less like fiction than documentary journalism. The voice of an author heard through his or her protagonists is apparently unmediated by considerations of literary form but nonetheless creates an extraordinarily vivid portrait of something, somewhere, some people, some families who seem very particularly of their time and place.

The novels of Dorothy Whipple do this to the inter-war period, when British middle-class families were often struggling economically, their place in the world uncertain and their futures made fragile by the damage inflicted by one world war and the looming threat of another. Whipple writes about people hanging on and eking out. She describes women (because women are her subject) making sad, sometimes angry, compromises to keep things together; about the loneliness of being alone and the even more painful loneliness of an unhappy marriage. The novels are set for the most part in northern towns and southern suburbs, and Whipple is the chronicler of family members torn apart by adultery, debt and the uselessness of men – ashes from which her women emerge, stronger, more independent, their eyes opened to ways of living that they had never

allowed themselves to contemplate before.

Born Dorothy Stirrup in Blackburn in 1893, she worked as a secretary and married her boss, Henry Whipple, 24 years older, in 1917. They spent their married life in Nottingham where Dorothy published her first novel, *Young Anne*, in 1927. What was Henry Whipple like? It's an interesting question because the men in his wife's novels are by and large strikingly awful. The best of them are weak and the worst are venal (in the case of the shadowy financial string-puller in *They Knew Mr Knight*, quite literally diabolical). Of the three husbands in *They Were Sisters*, only one has anything to recommend him: the other two are, respectively, a bore and a monstrous bully (the latter played in the 1945 film version with sadistic relish by James Mason). When Whipple's male characters are successful, they are vain or boastful and when they are failures they are vain and boastful too. Born to rule in both the large world and the small, her men are incompetent and complacent, quite often spoiled by doting mothers. They get their education paid for, their wild oats forgiven, their follies indulged, while their cleverer sisters must sit at home and hope to be rescued by a husband who is slightly less of a dullard than the average.

Whipple's fury at the waste of female talent breathes through

these books. Her astuteness is very satisfying, her characters almost always acutely drawn and fully coloured. She is especially good on how the interior resilience of her women is often perceived of as threatening by men – how chasms of blank misunderstanding loom between them. But her females are not simply saintly foils to ghastly menfolk. They are complex, often angry, sometimes unpleasant – but when their survival skills are tested they find the challenge surprisingly exciting, exercising mental muscles atrophied through under-use. And the art of survival is not only reserved for the virtuous. In *Someone at a Distance*, she slowly unravels the seduction of a contentedly married man, a worldly publisher, by a scheming French minx. Poor Avery, easily flattered because it's never occurred to him to doubt himself, it's all too embarrassingly easy for a hard-boiled seductress to scoop him up.

Whipple particularly has it in for the kind of handsome elder son who lets his privileges go to waste. Take Major Marwood in *The Priory*, who has inherited a beautiful house and through idleness and ineptitude lets it all go to ruin. Nurse Pye, the managerial midwife, the kind of person Whipple thinks should be running governments, is appalled by his incompetence. One wonders if Whipple was thinking of the first war and the

opportunities that had opened for women's work and then closed during an economic depression. Certainly she is in no doubt that work liberates. When her characters' marriages break up or their fortunes fail, she sends her women out into the working world, to labour in beauty salons and secretarial agencies or running bed and breakfasts. Through their own paid labours they find satisfaction, a sense of self-worth and an experience of female

camaraderie. Better, is the Whipple message, to be alone and financially independent than dependent on a man you despise – which is the sorry end for Freda Blake in *They Knew Mr Knight*, who wanted to be rescued and ended up trapped.

The Second War changed society for good: managerial women like Nurse Pye would come into their own again, and with men out of the way, they would be running things their way. Things look different now,

but not so different. Whipple's novels are not quite period pieces. Most modern readers will have encountered a Whipple kind of man, a Whipple kind of marriage. In 1939, she turned her fictional dream house, *The Priory*, into a (somewhat improbable) utopia of female cottage industry and productive management. But no possible plot contortion could make it happen without the intervention of a rich man.'

© Lucy Lethbridge October 2018

THE UNSELFISH HEROINE

Early in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Dorothea Brooke's sister Celia convinces Dorothea to sort through the jewelry she has inherited from their late mother. Pious Dorothea wants a ring and bracelet for herself, but struggles to reconcile her selfish desire for possession with her impulse toward self-denial. 'She was inconsistent,' her sister Celia thinks. 'Either she should have taken her full share of the jewels, or renounced them altogether.'

It's through renunciation that Dorothea believes she can have an improving influence on the lives of others. She marries Mr. Casaubon with the intention of devoting herself entirely to her husband and his work. But in the course of the novel she will learn to deal more honestly with herself. For Dorothea, the novel is a journey toward greater sympathy and self-knowledge,

and toward finding the proper balance between care for others and care for herself.

There's an echo of the jewel scene from *Middlemarch* in Whipple's *Someone at a Distance*, as Ellen and Louise sort through the belongings of Ellen's late mother-in-law. Louise is selfish and acquisitive, and takes the best of the jewelry for herself. 'Wishing to appear fair,' Whipple writes, 'she gave Ellen the chance of the worst things.' But Ellen shows no interest in the jewelry, and can't see the value in it that Louise sees.

Ellen is thoroughly domestic and unselfish to a fault. She likes 'looking after things' – her family, her house, her garden. Her impulse toward self-sacrifice is so strong that she ultimately sacrifices her own marriage. The opportunistic Louise feels no compunction in seducing Ellen's husband because, as Louise

reflects, 'the woman didn't deserve what she had if she couldn't keep it.' Ellen refuses to fight for what is hers and is left struggling to regain a sense of self that her own selflessness has been complicit in destroying.

Many of the women in Persephone novels find themselves navigating this borderland between selfishness and the loss of self. While they often react against the damaging ideal of feminine self-sacrifice, they often turn to altruism as a corrective.

The tension between selfishness and unselfishness is a central concern of Lettice Cooper's 1936 novel *The New House*. Already in her thirties and in the midst of the upheaval of moving to a new house, Rhoda has to decide whether to continue devoting herself to the care of her widowed mother in Yorkshire, or to accept employment in London and gain

a measure of independence. Throughout the novel, she struggles to reconcile her selfless devotion to her mother with what she considers a selfish desire to have a separate life of her own. Rhoda's older brother Maurice concludes that it's 'a mistake to be unselfish' because unselfishness has left Rhoda with nothing of her own.' He wants his own daughter, Tatty, to avoid the kind of life of self-denial that Rhoda and, in the generation before her, Aunt Ellen have fallen into. 'He said to himself that he would teach Tatty to be selfish,' Cooper writes, 'yet he knew that he was fonder of her for the ungrudging way in which she gave her love and her small possessions.'

In her 1938 novel *National Provincial*, Cooper looks at the problem in a different way, making the distinction between women who want to have things

and women who want to do things. Those who want to have will take things for themselves; those who want to do will give of themselves.

While most of these novels and stories focus on relationships with families, writers like Dorothy Whipple and Lettice Cooper – and George Eliot – realise that families are microcosms in which the conflicts of the larger society are often played out. The consequences of selfishness and altruism are magnified throughout the system as the interpersonal becomes geopolitical. When Dorothea discovers Rosamond Lydgate and Will Ladislav in what appears to be a compromising situation, she comes away wounded and angry, but she takes time to reflect and to come to a better understanding of the situation and her reaction to it. In her enlightened

unselfishness lies the potential for reconciliation.

Ellen, in *Someone at a Distance*, is less successful than Dorothea at reimagining the compromising scene she witnesses. But she does have a clarifying moment: 'It had been a shock to hear herself described as a nice type of person whose husband had gone off with a French girl. Forty-three, but active. She wanted to laugh... But, holding on to the back of the chair, she suddenly had such a shattering vision of herself, that all impulse to laugh left her. That she should have thought the description funny showed the extent of her vanity and self-importance. She admitted, in all soberness, that it was a perfectly proper description.' Ellen belatedly comes to know herself and, eventually, to see what has happened from her former husband's perspective. In the end, Ellen, too, is offered some hope of reconciliation.

These novels suggest that, in navigating between excessive selflessness and excessive self-regard, empathy and self-knowledge provide a moral compass. George Eliot defined morality as 'the conduct which would follow from the fullest knowledge and the fullest sympathy.' Like many Persephone authors, she believed that reading fiction could place us into the experience of others, and in doing so help us to better understand ourselves and our place in the world.

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Detail from George Clausen *The Quiet Room* 1929



THE RUNAWAY, PB NO. 37

Clarice Clavering, 15 years old, is walking ruminatively in the garden of her country home on the edge of London. Her mother is dead, her father is 'something in the City' and her chief companion is her governess, a pleasant enough lady but 'of few original ideas, no fancies, a reserved manner, and a well-regulated mind.' 'If only anything would happen,' Clarice thinks and, on cue, there is a rustling in the shrubbery and something does happen as Olga emerges on the path. "Goodness" cried Clarice. "What is it?" "It's me" said the girl, naturally ungrammatical at such a moment. "Oh do hide me; you will won't you? Oh, please do."

Thus begins Clarice's longed-for adventure, as she smuggles Olga into her bedroom and becomes complicit in her plan to go to Scotland. It seems that her parents live in India, she had been sent to a boarding school in Yorkshire but had run away, although, being a scatterbrain, she had got on the wrong train and had ended up hiding in the garden of Clarice's suburban home down south.

Scatterbrain does not fully summarise 13-year old Olga's intrepid but thoughtless determination to do things her way and this story of her secret stay in the Clavering household amounts to a succession of crazy escapades that put at risk Clarice's comradely efforts to

hide her. Irrepressible, Olga persists in madcap exploits. The reader comes to wonder at the ingenuity of her various contrivances until a tremendous climax which involves the almost simultaneous arrival of police, a magistrate, and, in timely mode, Olga's Papa.

The Runaway was first published by Macmillan in the year that they also published *Through the Looking-Glass* and *What Alice Found There* (1872) and, as I hope may be seen by the above brief synopsis, it shares with that book a light-heartedness and (with Olga too) an inventive delight in 'doing fun' which is wholly at odds with the reputation of Victorian writers for children as dealers in religiosity and doom. (An unworthy thought strikes that Mrs Hart may have been couching a lance against Charlotte Yonge.)

The craftsmanship of the story, its pacing, its convincing household scenes, the credibility and differentiation of its characters are such that one may also wonder why it fell from

grace. Indeed, it may well still be entirely forgotten had it not been for the intervention of that great artist, Gwen Raverat, who had loved the book as a child and who was responsible for persuading Macmillan to bring out a new (very slightly altered) edition in 1936. This she illustrated herself with a plethora of superb wood engravings which place the book in the top rank of illustrated stories for children. Macmillan relinquished rights to it in 1953 when Duckworth were able to issue a new edition and Persephone Books brought it into the twenty-first century in 2002. It still remains, though, too little known.

Brian Alderson in *Books for Keeps* No. 232. September 2018



ENGLISH COUNTRY HOUSES

Ten years before the important *Destruction of the Country House* exhibition at the V & A in 1975, Elisabeth de Waal wrote her own plea for the great English house to be preserved: throughout *Milton Place* she is asking two questions, what is to happen to the house, and what is to happen to its owner? In asking the first she also anticipated Richard Gill's important book *The English Country House and the Literary Imagination* (1972). In it he wrote: 'Of all the available symbols of community, the outstanding one for the English

novelist is the country house. As an institution representing the structure and traditions of English society, it is a microcosm which has the advantage of being public and familiar, yet malleable enough to serve the protean interest of individual novelists. Not only identifiable symbolists like James, Forster, and Woolf, but documentary realists like Wells and Galsworthy, as well as satirists like Huxley and Waugh, have all found in the country house a means of embodying the qualities and values of community, whether in a state of decay, transformation, or renewal.'

In his book Gill groups together some outstanding works of modern fiction that 'employ the country house as a symbolic setting and demonstrate what the house contributes to their structure and meaning. Like a great stage, the country house quite literally gathers people together and shows them meeting, separating, colliding, uniting. The appearance, scale, and style of the house may bespeak the taste and sensibility of the occupants or expose their surrender to vanity and ostentation; the reach of park and spread of acre may imply a wish for apartness and distance from others or an expansive openness of spirit; within the house, individuals may withdraw themselves to lonely rooms or join one another in hall or on terrace. And the whole regimen of country house life may manifest a stable order based on unchanging custom and comfortable habit.'

Yet, Gill goes on, 'during the twentieth century the country house in the traditional sense has largely ceased to exist: it is now an economic disability. Paradoxically, its decline seems to have strengthened its possibilities as a symbol. Today writers and readers are less concerned with what the house was or is and more with what it suggests: an image of community antithetical to the dislocation and isolation they actually know.'



Rex Whistler View of Faringdon 1935, oil on canvas, in a private collection

FINALLY

This is being written on the morning of April 2nd 2019. The *Biannually* goes to press tomorrow (it takes two weeks for it to be printed, 'bagged up' and delivered to the 20,000 on our mailing list; a little longer this year because of Easter). We had promised news about the future. But our future is still undecided. And here we must pick our words carefully: a proportion of our readers are Leavers and write and tell us. Of course readers of the daily Post and monthly Letter (available free on our website, just go to www.persephonebooks.co.uk and search for them in the top right-

corner) know how we feel – we do not mince our words there as people read those entirely by choice. But apart from the fact that we feel more European than ever, and nearly cried when Donald Tusk sent his lovely message to the million marchers, we simply cannot plan for the future. That our books are printed in Germany is almost the least of it. Like every other small business in this country we are in despair. More importantly, we have lost our élan, our calm. So we have made no decisions about the future yet; but promise you, our loyal readers, that you will be the first to know what is

happening. For now, please go on supporting us by buying our books, coming to the shop and cheering us up.

We started Persephone Books in an abandoned pleating factory in a basement in Clerkenwell. It was the spring of 1999. Two years later we decided to leave the underworld and come up into the light. Here is the page from the (much missed) *Guardian* supplement called 'Space' that appeared in March 2001. We saw the 'To Let' sign, made inquiries and moved in on June 4th.



EVENTS

At 4 o'clock on **Tuesday May 21st Elisabeth de Waal's son Victor de Waal** will talk at a **Tea from 4–5.30** about his mother and her novel *Milton Place*.

On **Friday June 7th** at 3 o'clock we shall visit the *Mr and Mrs Ravilious* exhibition at the Fry Gallery in Saffron Walden and have tea afterwards at Tea Amo in Cross St. We are not charging for this event because participants will be paying for their own train fares, admission ticket and tea.

On **June 12th** 'a Wednesday in mid June' there will be our annual *Mrs Dalloway Walk*. It begins at 11 o'clock in Westminster. Lunch will be at Lamb's Conduit Street afterwards.

The psychiatrist Dr Jeremy Holmes will give a talk called '*Saplings: why psychology needs the novel and vice versa*' on **Tuesday June 18th** at a **12.30–2.30 Lunch**.

The film of *They Were Sisters* will be shown on **Wednesday July 3rd**. Tea will be served at 4 o'clock and the film shown at 4.30. Madeira will be served afterwards.

The film of *Mr and Mrs Bridge* based on the classic novel by Evan S Connell will be shown on **Wednesday September 11th**. Tea

will be served at 4 o'clock and the film shown at 4.30. Madeira will be served afterwards.

As part of this year's *Insiders/Outsiders Festival* celebrating the contribution of refugees from Nazi-dominated Europe to British culture, Dr Nadia Valman will give a talk on 'Anna Gmeyner and Elisabeth de



Waal' on **Tuesday September 17th** from 6–8. Wine and cheese straws will be served.

In celebration of the writer Elizabeth von Arnim and our republication of her novel

Expiation, the film of *The Enchanted April* will be shown on **Wednesday October 2nd**. Tea will be served at 4 o'clock and the film shown at 4.30. Madeira will be served afterwards.

Our edition of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* will be launched at a **Lunch** at the Hosking Houses Trust's Church Cottage, Clifford Chambers near Stratford (a charity which provides women writers with a room of their own while they work on a book) on **Thursday October 10th** at 12.30.

Please ring the office to book for an event. The Lunches are £20, the Films £15, the Drinks and Tea £10.

The three books we plan to publish in October (assuming we do publish and as we go to press on April 2nd this is far from certain) will be *Expiation* by Elizabeth von Arnim, an inexplicably neglected novel now re-published for the first time in 90 years, with a new Preface by Laura Godwin; *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf with a new Preface by Dr Clara Jones; and *One Woman's Year* by Stella Martin Currey, a 1953 book of household hints, illustrations, commonplace book and recipes dedicated to her friend Tirzah Garwood.

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020 7242 9292

Printed by the Lavenham Press, Lavenham, Suffolk CO10 9RN.

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

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