



The Persephone Biannually

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Rex Whistler 'Rosanagh Crichton Convalescing in Bed' (dated 21st July 1938) in a private collection. Rosanagh Crichton b.1932 married Baron Michael Raben-Levetzau in 1956 and had five children. She died on 13th June 2019.



OUR BOOKS FOR AUTUMN/WINTER 2019-20

Persephone Book No. 133 is a first for us: a novel which has been entirely overlooked and yet is by a well-known writer. Most of Elizabeth von Arnim's novels are in print with other publishers; one, *The Enchanted April*, was turned into an extremely successful film; and *Vera* remains one of the great books – the only reason we have not reprinted it is that it is available in several editions. Yet *Expiation*, that we publish ninety years after its first appearance, has been ignored. Why?

Well, the title (a synonym for atonement) is not very catchy. Then the theme is faintly shocking, or was in 1929, since the book is about adultery: a 'happily married' woman has, it transpires, for years been meeting her lover once a week. (This is not a plot spoiler as the reader learns this early on.) Lastly, although nowadays we read the novel as a satire, at the time the characters and their milieu may have seemed rather tame. After all, the Botts are the backbone of 'Titford': 'That important south London suburb appreciated the Botts, so financially sound, so continually increasing in prosperity...They subscribed, presided, spoke, opened.' (This last sentence, on p. 2, was what

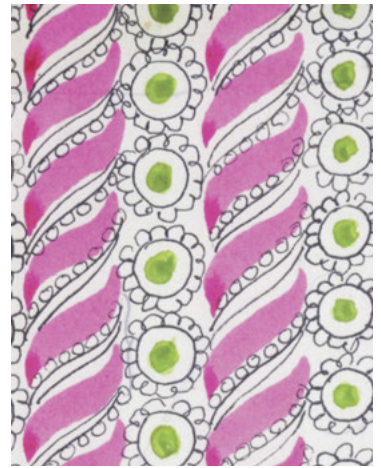
deliciously, and instantly, convinced us that this was a book for us.)

But what was mostly ignored in the years after *Expiation*'s first publication was how laugh-out-loud hilarious it is, so funny that we genuinely believe it to be much better than the more well-known books by 'Elizabeth' (the name she wrote under). It is also extraordinarily atmospheric and perceptive about the English: in some respects it is Forsterian (the greatest compliment we can pay). It too would make a wonderful play or film. Finally: the effects of Milly's behaviour are forensically explored and scrutinised, yet, in the end, and upliftingly, the power of simple human kindness wins through.

By the time she wrote *Expiation*, Elizabeth had published a dozen novels, brought up five children and had two husbands and several lovers. But by 1929, when she was 63, she feared her younger lover was about to leave her. Also, although it was a decade since she had escaped the coercively controlling Francis, Lord Russell, and eight years since she wrote *Vera* about him, they had never divorced. This was one reason why *Expiation* was so painful to write:



A 1924-5 silk and rayon fabric used on a day dress, in a private collection



'Stripe', a 1930 textile design by Vanessa Bell © Warner Textile Archive



Early 1950s fabric by Sheila Bownas © The Sheila Bownas Archives

although funny, it is also dark. As Valerie Grove writes in her Persephone Preface: 'For all her seeming indifference to social disapproval of affairs, including with married men, Elizabeth did feel something akin to Milly's guilt.' And yet, throughout *Expiation* 'she is like an old friend in whose company there are no dull or banal moments, who tells stories against herself and never takes anything too seriously... what was constant was her lively, caustic wit, her perception of human folly.'

And what did her contemporaries think? The greatest praise came from her nephew, the intelligent and civilised Sydney Waterlow (E M Forster's friend). He told her: 'Well, in my opinion *Expiation* is quite the top of your form. There is that in it which I admire most, and which I miss in all other writers practically now – power, clean and economical. There is increasing tension and excitement – and what certainty of touch.'

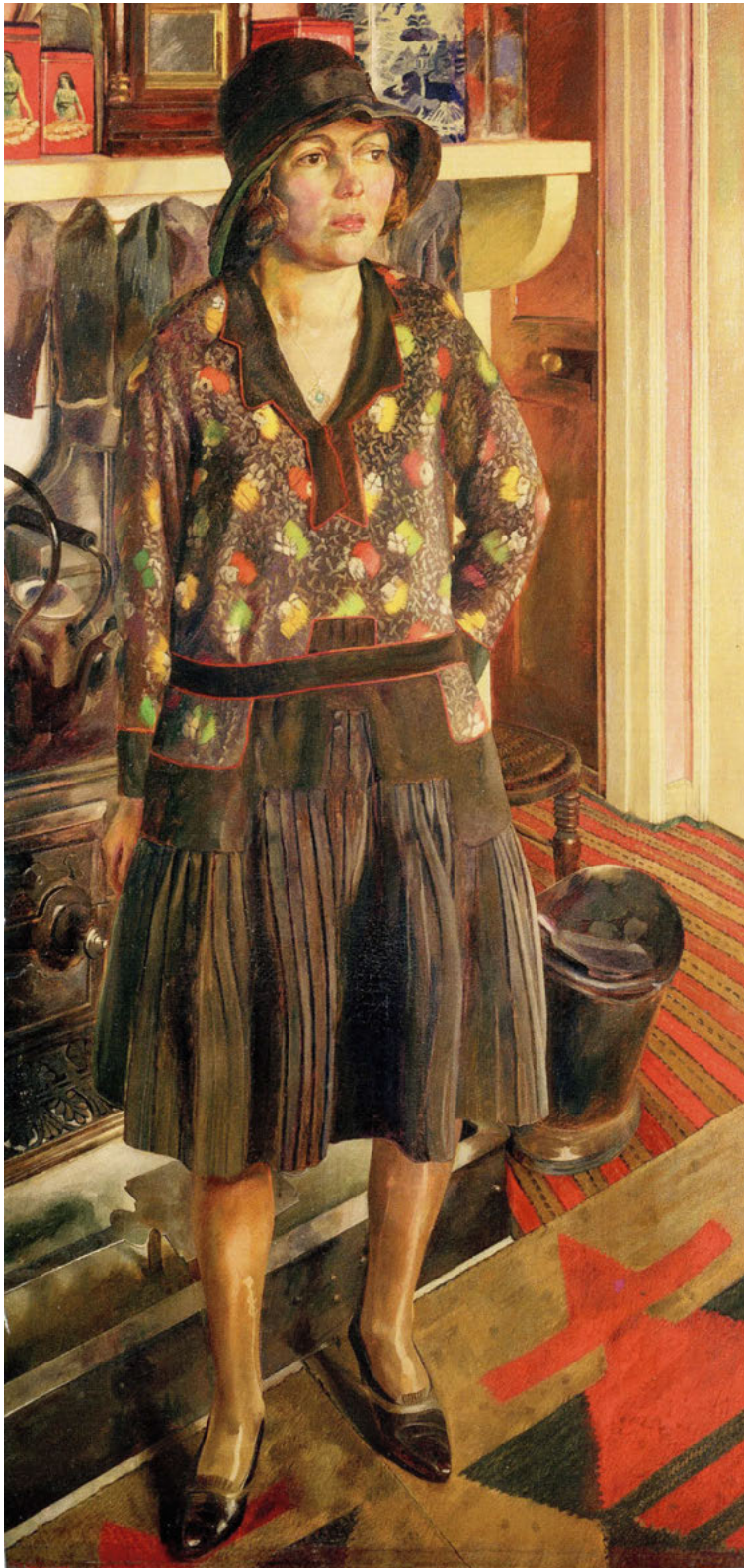
But the reviewers were equally enthusiastic (after an avalanche of them, Elizabeth wrote to her publisher in February 1929: 'I am much relieved and comforted by the reception of *Expiation*'). So in the *Evening News* J B Priestley admired 'the easy writing... Every scene in this story seems to arrive almost casually, and yet not a word or a gesture is wasted. There may not be such fun in the life she shows us, but it is fun watching her show it.' *The Spectator*

thought *Expiation* 'both entrancing and incisive; it has the tingling derision of a restoration play, only softened by compassion for a victim.' *The New York Times* called it 'a very clever book, written in Elizabeth's own delightful style, full of delicate irony, and with many capably done scenes.' *Country Life* observed: 'Shocking words can alone describe Milly's conduct, and yet what a sweet, generous, loving little soul the sinner has remained. The truth is that

Elizabeth has achieved a most difficult thing, she has left the sinner ugly and a little sordid, but made the sinner lovable.' The feminist weekly *Time and Tide* thought that Elizabeth had tapped into 'the whole of life – certainly all fiction' which is made up of only 'two things: love and consequences.' In particular, *Expiation* is 'a delightful, instructive study in the consequences of that kind of love... called sin.' As the *TLS* said, it was 'as deft, as witty' as anything this author had ever done.



Elizabeth Von Arnim in 1916



'Elsie' 1929, by Hilda Carline (1889-1950) © Brighton & Hove Museums & Galleries

‘Beneath the meek little suburban wife’ writes Valerie Grove about Milly, ‘seethes a formidable feminist. In the same year as *Expiation*, Virginia Woolf published *A Room of One’s Own*.’ It is this book which is now, ninety years on, Persephone Book No. 134. However, in contrast to *Expiation*, *A Room* is in print in several editions and indeed is available as a free e-book. So why do we feel the need for a Persephone edition? The answer is, quite simply, pride: we take such pleasure in our collection of (now) 135 books, as a group rather than a mere stream of disparate titles, that it had become increasingly absurd not to include one of the great documents of twentieth-century feminist history amongst them. It is true that many of our readers will already have read *A Room*, indeed we hope that this is the case. But we also hope that many of them will want to own the Persephone edition and to reread it; and that they will want to give it to someone who has not yet read it. Virginia Woolf herself, wondering what people would make of the book, assumed they would say (patronisingly) ‘Mrs Woolf is so accomplished a writer, that all she says makes easy reading... this very feminine logic... a book to be put in the hands of girls.’

Well, this has been so for ninety years, and if a Persephone reader knows a girl who has not read it, then they should remedy this error at once. For *A Room* is not only one of the

key texts of feminism, it also makes easy reading (and was possibly written in the very beautiful room – in Virginia Woolf’s cottage in the country – seen on this page). As the academic, and former Persephone employee, Clara Jones, points out in her Persephone Preface, the fact that it is a book to be put in the hands of girls has proved one of its greatest strengths: ‘It is fitting that an essay so preoccupied with what women pass down and what women inherit should have been one of the founding texts of feminine literary criticism, inspiring generations of women readers, writers and critics.’ (Crucially, *A Room* is structured as a discussion. It starts off as if in mid conversation – ‘But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction’ – and this was

deliberately done in order to draw in the listener/reader.)

Virginia Woolf had published *Mrs Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando* by 1929: ‘That she chose to follow her most popular work to date with a polemical essay exploring not only women’s creativity but the broader conditions of their lives – their limited access to formal education, their continued financial dependence on men, their position in family structures – was a bold one’ (Clara Jones). But a successful one. *A Room* sold extremely well and was immediately reprinted. (Our edition is a facsimile of the very first edition.)

The other reason for reprinting *A Room*, apart from simply wanting it to join our list, is that we see it as an

essential companion to a collection of twentieth-century novels. Famously, the central premise of the essay is that ‘a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.’ Not only is this central to *A Room*, it is also central to the history of twentieth-century women’s writing. For, it is true, something that comes up time after time when women’s fiction is being discussed is that it is so middle-class. But there was a reason for this: a woman needed to *buy* time to write, and this was something that – unfortunately – only the better-off could do.

Finally, *A Room* is a political book. Clara Jones concludes: ‘The poetry and pragmatism of Woolf’s central claim about the room and the money have taken on renewed urgency today.



The ubiquity of debt for a generation of young people who pay large university tuition fees, are charged prohibitive rents and paid low wages, combined with the fact that all but the luckiest (or best connected) with literary ambitions will begin their apprenticeship by working for free, make Woolf's trinity of space, privacy and financial security as worth striving for as ever.'

The third of our books this autumn is *One Woman's Year* (1953) by Stella Martin Currey. This beautifully designed book is unusual in being a mixture of commonplace, diary, short story, recipes – and woodcuts. The book is dedicated to Tirzah Garwood (then Ravilious and later Swanzy) but the woodcuts are not by her because she had died two years before. They were done by a friend, Malcolm Ford (who, like Stella Martin Currey's husband,

taught at Colchester Royal Grammar School).

These are the contents for January: there is a quotation, as there is before every month, from the *British Merlin* (1677), an Almanac known nowadays as *Rider's British Merlin*. It starts 'This is the Season for good husbands to lop and prune superfluous Branches and Fruit trees' and ends: 'The best physick is warm diet, warm Cloaths, good Fires, and a merry, honest Wife.' Then there is a ten-page essay on 'Books for the Family'. Of course it is now a bit out of date, but the mention of Pamela Brown, Eve Garnett and Belloc's Cautionary Verses (among dozens of good suggestions) can never be dismissed. After this is a funny piece about a visit to the hairdresser. Next there are a few pages about a burst pipe, a cake recipe, a description of A Visit to the Tower of London, an extract from *Jane Eyre* and finally an extract from our own *Tea with Mr Rochester*.

November again has an extract from the *British Merlin* ('Set Crab Tree stocks to graft on'), eight pages on the art of embroidery ('One of the loveliest and most lovable rooms I have ever seen had copies of old flower paintings and they were all embroidered in delicate stitches on very fine yellow silk... Another fascinating adventure in embroidery is to copy an old map'). Then there are suggestions for a Guy Fawkes Party ('sausage rolls, gingerbread men,



conspirator biscuits and toffee'), a quite detailed piece on 'deciding whether you can eat the mushrooms which grow in the garden', a recipe for the said biscuits (you cut them to look like conspirators), a short piece on visiting an art gallery with children (pick out the animals eg. the little dog in *The Arnolfini Portrait*, the dragon in *St George and the Dragon*), an extract from *Elizabeth and her German Garden* by our very own Elizabeth von Arnim, and finally an extract from *Emma*.

This gives a good impression of *One Woman's Year*. It is very much of its time, certainly; and it is not as funny as *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, PB No. 105, nor is it meant to be; but it is written by someone of great wit and intelligence. Stella Martin Currey was a novelist, short story writer and playwright, the daughter of a Methodist minister. She was born in South Africa in 1907. The family returned to England in 1913, Stella went to school and when she was 19 began an apprenticeship at the *Bristol Times & Mirror*. She was given a column of her own a year later and was made zoo correspondent. For a woman this was very rare. When the paper was closed down she wrote a novel, *Paperchase End*, about this disaster (500 people suddenly lost their jobs). The academic Sarah Lonsdale called it 'a very modern novel in that it discusses the working lives of young professional women, living independently of family, paying

the rent and running up huge grocery bills they don't know how they are going to pay. It is a very early example of the working woman's novel which became a talking point in the 1950s and '60s.' In 1932 Stella married the poet and schoolmaster R N Currey and continued to publish novels and short stories, as well as plays. Towards the end of her life she wrote a biography of her father, J P Martin, the author of the *Uncle* books.

But it was her novelist's eye and ear that made *One Woman's Year* such a gem. Inbetween the sometimes period details are many extremely useful pieces on dressing-up boxes, phrases to be used in thank-you letters, an extract from *The Young Visitors*, or which flowers to have in vases for every month of the year. One cannot imagine anyone who would not find this book both useful and endearing.



‘THE MATERNAL INSTINCT’

‘But, of course, he’s lovely, Cynthia,’ Fanny said. Cynthia looked across her son’s drowsy head at her old school friend and smiled.

Perhaps it was the smile that infuriated Fanny; but Cynthia had not meant to be superior. She was only thinking of the fire-lit nursery and the shadows darkening the green garden beyond the windows; of Robin’s sweet confident weight upon her knee, and her husband’s income, and the security, the comfort, the steadying sense of responsibility, and of life fulfilling itself.

And here was Fanny, come after ten years, to witness her apotheosis. Dear, odd Fanny, who had always admired her so absurdly. In the days when Cynthia too was poor and irresponsible they used to go about together, to cinemas and galleries, and parties in draughty studios, whenever Cynthia had a free night from the Art School, and Fanny actually had no political meeting which she felt she ought to attend. And now here they were together again, and Cynthia was grown up and a wife and mother, while Fanny was still the same rootless, excitable, immature young woman. All women, Cynthia decided, really were children until they had children of their own.

So she looked across at Fanny and she smiled.

‘Anthony must have done pretty well,’ Fanny remarked clumsily.

‘Oh, yes. I suppose he has. Though, of course, what with taxes and things, it doesn’t come to much. And there’s his old father to keep. He’s always a marvellously good son.’ Four thousand a year was really not such a tremendous lot. Not with super-tax.

Cynthia was rightly proud of her husband. When he had been demobilised his sole assets were a small gratuity, two decorations, a scar across his face, a dependent invalid father, a young wife, and a knowledge of flying. From these he had made all this. His courage and enterprise gave Cynthia a poor opinion of those ex-soldiers who were always complaining that they had never found a proper job since the war – like that young man who was to have married Fanny. Anthony had never found a job; he had invented one.

‘You went to South America, didn’t you?’ Fanny asked.

‘Yes,’ said Cynthia, bored. She had told the story so often. ‘After the war Anthony hadn’t a bean, but he took an old plane out to Buenos Ayres as agent for the manufacturers and flew it all over the continent, booking orders. He used to visit little tin-pot states, and put the wind up them saying how many planes their rivals had bought, and how awkward it would be for them if they started bombing. They fell for it like anything. It was fun at first, but a bit boring afterwards,

and we were awfully glad to come home and settle down. Weren’t we, my blessing?’ She buried her face in the baby’s lovely neck, that smelled of buns and talcum powder, and warm flannel.

‘Do you mean military aircraft?’ asked Fanny harshly.

‘Any old craft we could sell. Fanny, as nurse is out, will you help me to bath him? Every woman ought to know about babies, says I.’

‘I suppose you know about this Chaco business?’

‘This what?’

‘This fighting between Bolivia and Paraguay.’

‘Not I. I don’t read the papers. I’ve got something better to do, haven’t I, my precious? I leave all that to Tony – except a glance at the gossip paragraphs. Really, when you have a child –’

‘This ought to interest you.’ Fanny had flushed bright red and was licking her dry lips. Funny, unmarried woman were, Cynthia thought. Was she trying to change the conversation because she was shy at seeing Robin undressed? Full of inhibitions, probably, poor thing.

‘Bolivia and Paraguay – I expect you know them – have been fighting intermittently in the Chaco district for about four years now. There’s no real reason why they should go on. They accepted arbitration once. They’re both wildly in debt. But they go on buying armaments. The other day in parliament

someone asked the President of the Board of Trade about our own exports, and it seems that we've sent out in the past twelve months over five million cartridges to Paraguay, and over a hundred machine guns, some tanks, and ammunition of all sorts to Bolivia. It's paying somebody to keep them at it.'

'I dare say. Do you mind passing me that basket? Now, look at him, Fanny!'

'Cynthia, the statement didn't mention aeroplanes, but then it only went back a year. They have got aeroplanes.'

'Now for the hot water. Just a second, Fanny. Somebody ought to invent a self-filling bath for babies. I think babies are really shamefully neglected by inventors.'

As Fanny made no gesture to help, Cynthia thrust Robin into her arms and fetched the water herself.

'Last August,' persisted Fanny, 'the Paraguayan Minister in Paris protested that Bolivian planes were bombarding not just forts in Chaco but Mennonite colonies. Villages, you know, with defenceless civilians – old people and babies.'

'Really?' Cynthia was inspecting a tiny rough patch behind Robin's ear.

'Do you remember that air raid during the war, Cynthia? When we saw the house just after the roof had fallen in on three children and that wretched mother, who'd just run down the path to bring the dog in, had to be held back by the neighbours because she struggled to go in to

them, while the walls were still crumbling in?'

'Don't be so ghoulish. It's horrid to gloat over horrors in front of Robin.'

'I suppose that these women in Chaco love their children. And the Minister said that hospitals had been raided too, five times. Cynthia, how can you bear it? Those aeroplanes may be the very ones your husband induced them to buy by rousing suspicion against their neighbours. Those people are only peasants...They wouldn't want to organise air-raids unless someone taught them to do it...How can you bear it for your lovely Robin to be nursed on blood? That's what it is. All this' – she waved her hand around the nursery with a wild gesture – 'paid for by that.'

'Well, really, Fanny. I do think you might try to control yourself a little. What morbid, disgusting

nonsense. 'Nursed on blood' indeed! If you knew these villages you'd see they were only savages. Anthony's one of the few people who really have done well for the world. He's encouraged trade and given employment and done pioneer service. Robin will grow up to be very proud of him.'

But Cynthia did not lose her temper. She made allowances. Some frustrated spinsters were really not fit, she knew, for civilised society. She must find Fanny a nice husband. She drew the bath nearer towards her and took Robin from Fanny's arms and sat for a moment, her son upon her knee, wrapped in the comforting consciousness of love and virtue, a serene and noble figure of maternal dignity.

This short story by Winifred Holtby is taken from her collection Truth is Not Sober (1934).



The effigy of a female student on a bicycle is suspended above protesters against the graduation of women outside the University Church, Cambridge, 1897.

OUR BLOGGERS WRITE

‘Only the very hardest of hearts could fail to be moved by this beautifully wrought and utterly poignant account of a life damaged by war and by circumstance. *The Happy Tree* is the story of Helen, who looks back at her earlier life when she is in her forties. Her childhood was, in many ways, idyllic. She and her cousins’ life in the country was happy and secure; they had the freedom to roam through gardens, meadows and woods; and there was one particular tree that they always returned to, naming it ‘The Happy Tree’. She accepts a proposal from Walter, a serious-minded academic, and when war broke out had to watch her cousins and friends go off to fight while Walter stayed at home, because he was medically unfit, and carried out work that was important to the war effort. She struggled with childcare and with housework, with no help, because even had finances allowed, there were no domestic servants to be had. Totally unequipped for the life she had to live, she struggled with the consequences of the wrong decisions she had made, and as news of casualties and deaths arrived she grieved for the people she had loved and for the world that she had loved and that she knew could never be the same again. The writing in this book is so honest and so insightful that Helen’s feelings and experiences were palpable,

and though there were times when I felt so sad for her that it was difficult to read, I couldn’t look away. Her story speaks profoundly for the generation of women who lived through the Great War, and it does more besides. It made me think how our family situation can affect us for the whole of our lives. It made me realise that no matter what our circumstances, our lives can be thrown off course by things that we can’t control, leaving hopes and dreams shattered, and leaving lives adrift. It made me realise that it is so important to speak and communicate honestly. All this in the story of one life, told in a voice that always rings true.’
Beyond Eden Rock

‘*The Diary of a Provincial Lady* is a well-known book, even a classic, and deserving praise for many aspects of its subtle comedy, insight into a woman’s life and relentless good humour in the face of trying events. The unnamed narrator is always caught in the midst of activity; this is not the artistic musing of an idle writer shut away from life, but the almost-notes of a busy woman, continually caught up in the family and domestic crisis which strikes a familiar note even in the 21st century. This is a book of its time, first published in 1930, but which can still amuse today, especially in the illustrated edition

produced by Persephone in 2014. While it is far from poverty, money is often tight in this small family, which after all includes a governess, a cook and a maid. However, this book was written at a time when having at least one servant was normal for even the lower-middle class; in the days before labour-saving devices in the kitchen and vacuum cleaners for the rest of the house, help with cooking and cleaning was perhaps a reasonable expectation. Certainly the carefully noted expenses, overdraft and even pawning of a family ring give the impression of a woman having to manage her money. Not that this prevents her from spending money on carefully described clothes and having things altered. This was a time when social convention demanded specific clothes for evening functions and a hat for everyday wear. We recently discussed this book at a book group and found much to talk about. This book is a funny and enjoyable read, and while possibly an acquired taste, gives a fascinating picture of life in the interwar years.’ Northern Reader

‘*Maman, What are we Called Now?*, first published in French in 1957, was re-issued by Persephone in 2015. In July 1944 in Paris, when Jacqueline began her diary, the allies had landed in June – there was the

feeling the nightmare could end. Then, her beloved André disappeared. She began her diary to record her hopes and fears as well as her memories. Alongside these are her descriptions of Paris in these last tense weeks of occupation. The couple and their 9-year-old daughter had been living under assumed identities, André working as a liaison officer for London. I can only imagine the fear that went along with living in such a way, forged papers that would barely stand up to scrutiny, relying on the loyalties of others. But during these weeks Jacqueline is still surrounded by friends, those sympathetic to the cause of the resistance and who from time to time get to hear snippets of important information about who has been taken where. After the diary we have several pages of photographs from the American photographer Thérèse Bonney, taken in Paris in 1943. They are powerful images. The second part of the book contains a series of short essays and reminiscences by Jacqueline written in 1945-6. In these she asks some fairly difficult, but understandable, questions. Time and again she comes back to children and what they really knew or understood and what the impact upon them might have been. By this time, she was feeling very angry about the people around her – those people who once she would have associated with in those heady pre-war days. These were the people who collaborated with the

Germans, or who apathetically carried on with their nice lives. She asks questions about the future and the past. Both parts of this book are beautifully written, powerfully poignant and endlessly quotable.’ HeavenAli

‘**The Call** refers to the call to action experienced by Ursula Winfield. A call to shun and relinquish everything she held dear, in order to enable the progress of the women’s suffrage movement. However, as the novel progresses, we discover that this call to action is experienced by other people and for other causes – be they women’s suffrage, the call to do one’s duty in the war, or the call of a more personal nature – that of all-consuming love. Ursula is an unusual young woman. Rather than join the fashionable set, she remains locked up in the chemistry laboratory she has painstakingly set up in the attic of 57 Lowndes Square – the family home. At the time, echoes of the women’s suffrage movement are to be heard all over Britain. The movement, headed by a group known as the WSPU (Women’s Social and Political Union) were a militant organisation that used demonstrations, marches, actions leading to incarceration and, in certain cases, hunger-strikes. Ursula finds herself interested in, and drawn to, the women who form the backbone of the party, but for the most part she remains disapproving of their militant methods. Yet she finds herself drawn to the cause of the

WSPU. **The Call** is an extraordinary story that sweeps the entirety of this very interesting but trying time in the history of men and women and their relative status in society. It is about militancy and pacifism and in the course of the novel we witness how the lines between these opposing ideals can get blurred to a certain extent. Do read **The Call** if you get a chance. It is a story about an incredible group of women, who went to extraordinary ends to achieve women’s suffrage.’ BagFullofBooks

‘**The Priory** is something of an Upstairs-Downstairs story, revolving around the residents of Saunby, a crumbling old estate in the middle of England in the years leading up to the Second World War. It is a very engaging novel, one that explores the complexities of family relationships and the choices we make when faced with significant change. For readers who enjoy a decent amount of plot, there are lots of interesting developments throughout the narrative as these families adjust and reshape themselves over time. Dorothy Whipple introduces various elements along the way, including compromising indiscretions, unwanted pregnancies, manipulative actions and painful separations. The narrative strands are thought-provoking and absorbing. The lack of options for women is a major theme throughout, particularly when marriage proves to be

elusive – or worse, a failure. One of the most impressive aspects of the novel is the depth of characterisation Whipple brings to the story. The way that characters change and develop throughout the narrative is one of the most engaging aspects of the book. As the novel draws to a close, the threat of WW2 looms on the horizon. While the ultimate ending might feel too neat and tidy for some readers' tastes, I was happy to go with it. This is good old-fashioned storytelling at its most enjoyable.' JacquiWine's Journal

Regular readers of this blog will know I am a big fan of Persephone Books. There is something reassuring and informative about well-written historical novels. They are comforting guides to the relatively recent past, they help to inform us about who we are and where we came from and, more often than not, they fill in gaps in our social history. One of the most recent titles is *Milton Place* by Elisabeth de Waal, whose previous book *The Exiles Return* was reissued by Persephone in 2013. It seems astonishing that the two books were written by the same woman, as I found them so wildly contrasting and certainly enjoyed *Milton Place* much more. Both books are concerned with the idea of the alien: the newcomer, the outsider, the interloper, the misplaced person. Both books are about their protagonists dealing with the horrific fallout of war. But *The Exiles Return* was

a tough read and not one I particularly enjoyed. So I was surprised to love *Milton Place* so much. It is a book that you look forward to picking up again in the evening, you root for the characters and at times I found myself skimming paragraphs ahead anxious about what I feared might happen and just unable to wait another minute or two to see if I was right. It is astonishing that *Milton Place* was never published in Elisabeth's lifetime and that it has only seen the light of publication now thanks to her son passing the manuscript to Persephone. It would make a wonderful film. I would go so far as to suggest that *Milton Place* is as close as you can get to reading a Dorothy Whipple (sigh, Dorothy Whipple) without actually reading a Dorothy Whipple itself. Put simply, please read *Milton Place*. It is a joy of a book and you will be captivated from the first page.' Madam J-Mo

Light, charming, frothy, amusing ... *Guard Your Daughters* is all these, but it is also a novel with a dark undertow. The five daughters of the Harvey family are amusing, witty and creative, but there are clues from the first page that something is awry. This is a dysfunctional middle-class family living in genteel poverty imposed by the father, it turns out, in a rural area away from London. Rationing is still in force, and there are signs that the family lived at one time in more comfort, with a car,

a telephone, a maintained tennis court and servants. 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 father is a very successful novelist, who writes minutely plotted detective fiction. So where has the money gone? Their mother is known to be nervy, needing special care (and soup) and frequently withdraws to her bed. Their father has only one rule in the house: do not upset your mother. 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. But the girls have been inculcated with the belief that they are special, in particular in their attractiveness to men. The cocktail party is an excruciating scene, as the matronly hostess wears the same dress as Thisbe and the sisters make gaffe after *faux pas* in ignorance. The girls have great loyalty to each other, lending each other clothes, piling into the bathroom to chatter at the end of the day. The scenes accumulate, becoming more disturbing until the shocking dénouement. While they are amusing, witty, welcoming, the daughters 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

FORTNIGHT & NEW HOUSE

Here are several comments about our books, some of them contemporaneous with the book's original publication and one written recently.

This is what the novelist G B Stern wrote in 1931: 'To read *The Fortnight in September* is comparable to listening to a violin played with unconscious mastery. In *Journey's End* Mr R C Sherriff achieved universality by the simple means of not concerning himself with it; and in *The Fortnight in September* he repeats the same magic formula. Mr Stevens and his wife and their three children, Dick and Mary and Ernie, are lovingly realised as individuals, sharp with tiny human griefs and pleasures, emotions and temptations, financial troubles and ecstatic triumphs of the spirit. Therefore, because they are delightfully, sometimes tragically, real and not swollen symbols of mankind, they seemed to me, by the time, most reluctantly, I reached the end of the book, to be every-clerk-and-his-family in the world who had ever looked forward to their seaside holiday of one fortnight in a year of toil. Mr Sherriff's humour is sly and sudden, and catches you before you are aware of it. His observation is so delicate and true that he quickens your own memories to race alongside of his, till you hardly know whether you yourself or the Stevens family are

arriving at Bognor Station. Only a really fine artist can achieve this.'

And here are five reviewers writing about *The New House* (1936). The *Observer* reviewer, Gerald Gould, called it 'the best book on my list...Wise, subtle, captivating, and in every sentence true.' *The Times's* verdict on the book was 'profound and compassionate', the (then) *Manchester Guardian* said it was 'delightfully told and invested with a deep human interest', the *Morning Post* wrote: 'See how beautifully the figures come to life, not only individually, but also as a group'

and finally the *Sunday Times* thought it 'intimate and delightful...A charming book which will increase the number of Miss Cooper's admirers.'

Finally, this is what Emily Rhodes wrote in a recent *Country Life*: '*Milton Place* is the second of Elisabeth de Waal's beautifully composed, keenly observed novels to be published posthumously. The author skilfully brings together a nuanced understanding of human relationships, the English class system, contemporary politics, provincial life and the residual trauma of the war into a neatly plotted, deeply absorbing novel.'



Christopher Wood, *La Plage, Hotel Ty-Mad, France (detail)*, 1930, oil on board

THE PERSEPHONE 135

1. William – an Englishman by Cicely Hamilton Prize-winning 1919 novel about the effect of WW1 on a socialist clerk and a suffragette. Preface: Nicola Beaman

2. Mariana by Monica Dickens This funny, romantic first novel, which came out in 1940, describes a young girl's life in the 1930s. Preface: Harriet Lane **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 Beaman

14. Farewell Leicester Square by Betty Miller Novel (by Jonathan Miller's mother) about a Jewish film-director and 'the discreet discrimination of the bourgeoisie' (*Guardian*). Preface: Jane Miller

15. Tell It to a Stranger by Elizabeth Berridge 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 Oriol 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 Beaman

20. A Woman's Place by Ruth Adam A survey of women's lives from 1900–75, very readably written by a novelist-historian: an overview full of insights. Preface: Yvonne Roberts

21. Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day by Winifred Watson A delightful 1938 novel about a governess and a night-club singer. Read on R4 by Maureen Lipman; now a film with Frances McDormand and Amy Adams. Preface: Henrietta Twycross-Martin. **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 Beauman
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 from East London to the country during the war. Her mother regrets it and 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-war 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 Fellgett
- 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 *Biannualies* 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. 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 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.
- 133. Expiation** by **Elizabeth von Arnim** Inexplicably omitted from the Von Arnim oeuvre until now, a 1929 novel about marriage and lies which lays claim to be her best. Preface: Valerie Grove
- 134. A Room of One's Own** by **Virginia Woolf** Based on the path-breaking 1929 lectures given at Cambridge. Preface: Clara Jones
- 135. One Woman's Year** by **Stella Martin Currey** Recipes, poems, observations, essays, woodcuts: a fascinating 1953 pot pourri.

EARTH AND HIGH HEAVEN

Eighty years ago an ocean liner named the St Louis left Germany with more than 900 Jews aboard seeking refuge from the Nazis. It crossed the Atlantic, first hoping to find sanctuary in Cuba. When the passengers were not allowed to disembark there, the vessel turned towards Miami where it was rebuffed by the US Coast Guard.

The last hope was Canada. But as the St Louis approached Halifax harbour, its asylum request was denied. The ship and its passengers returned to Europe, where some 250 of them would later perish in the Holocaust. Nearly eight decades later, in the autumn of 2018, the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, rose in the Canadian House of Commons to apologise for this shameful action.

Behind this incident lies a stark historical truth: between 1933 and 1945, Canada admitted the fewest Jews of any Allied nation. To be sure, there were citizens who did urge Canada to grant asylum to the St Louis passengers. And many were already conscious of a wider horror – a growing canker of anti-semitism that extended far beyond the rejection of a boatload of refugees from Hitler’s Germany.

One of them was 25-year-old Gwethalyn Graham, a product of Toronto’s privileged elite and an impassioned crusader against social injustice. In 1938 she sought to awaken Canadians to

what was happening. She wrote in a magazine article: ‘The Nazis jeer at us, say we make a great show of equality of race and creed, and criticise them for not wanting their Jews, while in actual fact, we don’t want them either. There is just enough truth in these accusations to make any honest Canadian uncomfortable.’

That year saw the publication of Graham’s first book, *Swiss Sonata* (1938), a ‘stunningly incisive allegory’ in which staff and students at a finishing school are a microcosm of the fierce international currents swirling through Europe. The novel was blacklisted by the Nazis. Soon after its publication, Graham’s journalism took on a new urgency as war approached and by 1940 the seed would be planted for the novel that was to change her life, attack Canadian self-regard and complacency – and tragically paralyse her own creative impulse.

That was the year Graham fell in love with a Jewish-Canadian lawyer in Toronto, only to encounter a family roadblock. Her father was implacably opposed to such a marriage – even though his was a supposedly enlightened liberal household that in the past had extended a helping hand to Jewish refugees and had welcomed the likes of Sylvia Pankhurst to its celebrity-studded ‘at homes’ every weekend. It was, by all accounts, a titanic battle between the

infatuated Gwethalyn and her father, a prominent solicitor firmly aware of his position in Toronto’s legal culture, many of whose leaders had still to come to terms with the very idea of Jewish lawyers in their midst.

It is possible that he believed he had the best interests of his feisty daughter at heart, that he was acutely conscious that she had already made one disastrous marriage and therefore did not want her to enter another one that he considered even more unsuitable. In the end he prevailed. But he became the model for the anti-semitic Charles Drake in her explosive second novel, *Earth and High Heaven*, published in 1944 and now Persephone Book No. 122.

Graham used the trauma of her own aborted love affair as the basis for this new book. In the novel a 28-year-old Montreal journalist named Erica Drake falls in love with a Jewish lawyer named Marc Reiser and finds her father doing all he can to destroy their relationship. Fictional licence allowed Graham to provide a more hopeful ending for her beleaguered heroine, and also to reset it in the French-speaking province of Quebec – in wartime Montreal, the city to which she had fled because of family discord. She placed the Drake household in Westmount, a neighbourhood that exemplified English-Canadian entitlement. And with a razor-sharp precision she

exposed the veins of anti-semitism that threaded their way, sometimes openly sometimes overtly, through this culture.

The reception accorded the book was astonishing: published simultaneously in wartime Britain and the United States, it eventually sold 1.5 million copies. Never before had a work of Canadian fiction stayed on American bestseller lists for a year. There were 18 foreign-language translations. Graham suddenly found herself an international success story.

But how strongly did the novel's relentless indictment of anti-semitism really resonate with the hundreds of thousands of readers who embraced it? And why did it lead to a creative fadeout that blighted Graham's career right through to her death in 1965? It has been suggested that the book was a success for 'all the wrong reasons' – that it won over a 'sentimental audience' ready in those war years to embrace the story's 'banal' romance, one that, for too many readers, 'obscured the remarkable literary skills and complex profile of social, political, ethnic and feminist issues that the novel displayed' (the critic Elspeth Cameron in 1997).

The author herself was all too aware of this irony because of the aborted effort to turn *Earth And High Heaven* into a film. Several writers worked on the screenplay but Sam Goldwyn, although Jewish, was mainly interested in the love story, and this put him at odds with the screenwriters

who wanted to honour the novel's exposure of anti-semitism. As the arguments over script development dragged on, *Earth and High Heaven* lost its advantage: the 1947 publication of Laura Z Hobson's *Gentleman's Agreement*, another novel about anti-semitism, attracted the attention of 20th Century Fox, which snapped it up and turned it into an Oscar-winning film starring Gregory Peck. Graham's hopes were dashed.

And what about the rest of her life? Sadly, the success soured. 'There was something tragic about her – promise unfulfilled,' her nephew would later tell her biographer. She was ahead of her time – not just for her rejection of the upper-middle-class codes under which she had been brought up, but for her work as a trail-blazing novelist and political journalist. Increasingly, however, there were the bad times – alcoholism and depression, the collapse of her second marriage, futile visits to psychiatrists, a humiliating poverty that at one point had her marking examination papers to earn a few dollars.

At the centre of her torment was what Elspeth Cameron rightly terms a 'creative paralysis'. It was happening at a time when women writers were beginning to flourish in post-war Canada – world-class figures like Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, Gabrielle Roy and Ethel Wilson (whose superb *Hetty Dorval* is Persephone Book No. 58). But Graham, the movement's pacesetter because of *Earth And*

High Heaven, was never able to complete another novel. 'She was flabbergasted by the big success of her novel,' American literary agent Monica McCall commented after her death. 'It overwhelmed her and she panicked that she could never repeat it.' Yet her fears had surfaced even as *Earth and High Heaven* was astride the bestseller lists. When she accepted the Governor General's Award she admitted that she was 'worried to death' about the new novel she was expected to write.

In the 1960s she was moving out of a period of darkness and writing television scripts. More significantly, she became friends with Solange Chaput-Rolland, a Quebec politician who was a fellow member of a large delegation of women who travelled to Ottawa on a 'peace train' in protest against nuclear arms. The two collaborated on *Dear Enemies*, an important 1963 book in which they exchanged letters and points of view on Quebec's Quiet Revolution and a separatist movement that was threatening to destroy Canada.

In the wake of the success of this book, Graham revealed she was working on a new novel about the relationship between French and English Canada. But then came another bout of depression and alcoholism and, eventually, illness. There would be no final novel. Gwethalyn Graham died on 25 November 1965. She was only 52.

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‘PATROLLING THE GUTTER’

‘I suppose we had better start,’ faltered the tall woman in purple.

‘I can’t think of a reasonable excuse for delaying any longer,’ sighed the girl in green.

‘Come along!’ said a third, making a great show of the courage she did not feel.

Nobody came along. Under some pretext or another we still lingered, though there were ten of us and the space in our Suffragette shop was uncomfortably limited. Most people, the even tenor of whose lives had not been ruffled by the call of a great cause, might have thought the day an unpropitious one to choose for patrolling the gutter, even for the sake of advertising a meeting of rebel women in the Albert Hall. A strong south-west wind, a real London drizzle overhead and thick mud underfoot, could hardly be held to offer striking attractions to a band of naturally timorous ladies, girt about with sandwich-boards, preparing to issue forth in procession into the conventional streets of Kensington. If we had been less timorous we should probably have postponed the expedition; but the last fear that rebel women ever learn to overcome is the fear of being thought afraid, so this was an alternative that did not suggest itself to anybody.

‘I never realised before what it meant to be a belted knight, but I do now,’ remarked our literary member, trying in vain to free

her hands from their cardboard bonds in order to straighten a crooked hat. ‘If anything or any body were to unhorse us and make us bite the dust – isn’t that what belted knights were always doing to one another in the Middle Ages? – we should have to lie on our backs, as they did, till someone came and picked us up.’

‘I feel like a pantomime super, myself,’ observed somebody else, twirling round in order to get a full-length back view of herself in the glass. ‘I shall never get accustomed to the make-up,’ she added ruefully, as she once more swept the greater part of our stock of pamphlets from the counter to the floor, and had to stand helpless and repentant while the shop secretary picked them up, not for the first time in the course of these trial manoeuvres.

‘If you don’t start soon, there will be nothing saleable left in the place,’ said the shop secretary pointedly.

‘Well, what are you waiting for?’ demanded the girl in green, trying to infuse a little real impatience into her tone.

‘Courage,’ confessed the woman in purple, gloomily.

‘Oh, nonsense!’ said our literary member, without, however, moving any nearer to the door. ‘Think of George Herbert: *God gave thy soul brave wings; put not those feathers/ Into a bed to sleep out all ill weathers.*’

We all tried to think of George Herbert, but without marked success.

‘I can’t think of anything but the ill weather waiting for us outside and all the people I know in Kensington,’ said the tall woman, voicing bluntly and concisely what the rest of us were feeling.

‘Do you think the people we know would ever recognise us in these things?’ asked some one in a moment of real inspiration; and under the influence of this new and cheering suggestion we formed up hastily in single file and really made a start.

The secretary of another local branch, who had dropped in to seek recruits for a similar poster parade in her district, observed significantly as we filed past her that it was most important to be as well dressed as possible in her neighbourhood. Neither this, nor the first comment that reached our ears as we plunged into the street, added particularly to our good opinion of ourselves.

‘Well, I must say you ladies don’t think of appearances, that you don’t!’ was the comment of the street. At a less sensitive moment we might have derived comfort from the tone of admiration in which this was uttered. As it was, an outrageous remark that followed did far more to raise our drooping spirits. This one was made by a girl, wearing a flaming hat and blouse that not one of us would

have had the courage to put on before going for a walk, even if supported by so magnificent a youth as the one on whose arm she leaned as she criticised.

‘Brazen, ain’t they?’ she said.

After that, it was easy to laugh and go ahead in a world that could always be counted upon to feed the most unsatisfied sense of humour. Otherwise, for the first half-hour or so, I doubt if we should have felt acutely conscious of anything but the traffic. Glorious as it may seem to the imaginative to suffer for a cause, one finds it difficult, when carrying sandwich-boards in its service, to detach from this distant and problematic reward the more immediate prospect of being run down from behind by a skidding motor-omnibus. In time, no doubt, it would be possible to acquire the easy swagger of the real sandwich man, though the real sandwich man would under no circumstances be submitted, as we were, to a definite onslaught from every impudent tradesman’s boy who whizzed past us on a tricycle. As it was, no one could have said that our pace bore the slightest resemblance to the leisurely saunter of the professional patroller of the gutter. In spite of conscientious efforts on our part to maintain the regulation distance from one another, none of us could resist the impulse to catch up the next woman in front; and as our leader, the tall woman in purple, desired nothing more than to cover the prescribed route and return to the shelter of home as

quickly as possible, only he who ran could have read the announcement printed on our boards, as we raced breathlessly along the edge of the pavement. At the same time, we found, nobody had the slightest difficulty in reading the identity of those who carried the boards.

‘Suffer-a-gettes! Look at ‘em!’ roared an omnibus driver.

‘Well, why not?’ responded a gallant cabman from the shelter we were approaching. ‘Why shouldn’t Mrs. Pank’urst ‘ave a vote, same as you an’ me? Ain’t she got as much sense in her ‘ead as what I ‘ave.’ He modulated his belligerent shout to a dulcet undertone as we came alongside. ‘The whole of the four-wheel trade is with you, ladies,’ he told us confidentially.

A block in the traffic caused us all to close up for a moment, and we compared notes hurriedly.

‘Not so bad as we expected, is it?’ said our literary comrade, who was one of those to overhear the friendly remark made by the representative of the four-wheel trade.

The girl in green reserved her opinion. ‘It makes one feel desperately sorry for the poor men who have to do this sort of thing, not for a cause, but for a living,’ she said feelingly.

The girl in green was by nature sentimental. Having once sold a suffrage paper in the street for half a day, she found herself incapable ever afterwards of resisting the appeal of the street hawker, with the result that her flat became a depôt for patent toasting-forks, bone

collar-studs, and quivering, iridescent beetles. Her latest conviction that a human link existed between her and all sandwich-men received, however, a slight shock as soon as we encountered one of these. Melting with compassion, she tried in a single look to express all she felt for his hard lot, but was met by a still more eloquent expression of pity from his eye – the one that did not wink – and became henceforth a little dubious about that particular human link. We tried, but without much success, to rekindle her faith in human links generally, by pointing out that his scorn was probably aroused by the unprofessional appearance of her sandwich-boards, one of which was slipping its ribbon moorings as she went by.

Perhaps the most startling conversion we made in the course of our parade was that of the baby. Up to that moment it had been a plain and placid, contented baby, banging its Teddy bear happily against the side of the perambulator. When it saw our procession coming along, with flying colours and flapping boards, it dropped the Teddy bear on the pavement and emitted an amazing remark that sounded to all of us, except our literary member, like ‘Ga-ga-ga-ga!’ Our literary member, being imaginative, declared that what the baby really said was – ‘Hooray! Votes for Women!’— and the baby’s nurse, who had to soil her white cotton gloves by picking the Teddy bear out of

the mud, seemed inclined to agree with her.

On the whole, the insults were too funny and pathetic to hurt much. There was the lady who told us very distinctly what she thought of us, and then dropped her skirts in the mud, a real feminine sacrifice, to take one of our handbills, because her hard heart was melted by the absent-minded smile of our literary member, who mistook her for a supporter. There was the clergyman who stood with his hat in his hand the whole time our procession was going by; there was the sentimentalist who, after telling each one of us in turn to go home and mind the baby, said in a tone of concentrated despair to the last of us – ‘What would you do if you had twins?’

And, of course, there was the messenger-boy who stood just out of reach and yelled – ‘Want yer rights? Then you won’t git ’em! Sooner give ’em to tomcats, I would!’

By the time we arrived in sight of home, even the woman in purple had become hardened to the perils and vicissitudes of the road and smiled quite easily at the postman who stood at the corner of the street. But when we found ourselves inside the shop, in full view of the shop looking-glass, it required all our newly won insensibility to stifle an inward consciousness that the glories of a militant campaign still remained rather spiritual than actual. Our hair was damp and straight, our cardboard armour limp and bent; our skirts

were caked with mud, and our boots strongly resembled those that one sometimes sees sticking out of river sand at low tide. For once, our literary comrade refrained from asking us to turn to George Herbert or anybody else for poetic consolation.

On the other hand, the postman’s criticism became wildly, disproportionately cheering.

‘Votes for women!’ he shouted after us with a sneer, as we slowly passed indoors out of his sight. ‘Votes for a few rich women, that’s all you’re after!’

Under the circumstances, it was very pleasant to be mistaken for representatives of the rich and cultured classes.

Short story from Rebel Women (1910) by Evelyn Sharp



Drawn especially for Persephone Books by Todd Harvey

LES PRINCESSES DE SCIENCE

Colette Yver was born in 1874, the daughter of a civil servant. Her first novel, written when she was only 18, was for a Catholic publishing house in Rouen, as part of a series of moral tales for young women. Many of her subsequent novels were first serialised in cheaply-produced women's magazines, which had become increasingly popular at a time when the introduction of compulsory elementary education had created a growing female readership. The fact that her novel *Les Princesses de Science* won the Prix Femina in 1907, went into over a hundred editions, and was still in print in the early 1950s, shows how keenly she was in touch with the spirit of the times – and yet her books are almost completely forgotten today.

In French law, married women were subservient to their husbands. They did not obtain the vote until 1944, and it was still later that they could hold a bank account in their own name. And yet women were allowed to qualify as doctors long before it was permitted in England (which is why Elizabeth Garrett Anderson travelled to Paris to study at the Sorbonne, where she received her medical degree in 1870). Once qualified, how would these women reconcile their profession with the traditional demands of family life? This is the central question of Yver's novel, and she loses no time in introducing it.

In the very first pages, the young doctor Thérèse accepts Fernand's proposal of marriage. They are sitting awkwardly in her little hospital laboratory – rather as Tony proposes to Ursula as she demonstrates a chemical experiment in Edith Zangwill's wonderful *The Call* (PB No. 129). There the resemblance ends, for in Ursula's case the proposal has a merry outcome ('We are both as black as sweeps. I believe you have been sitting on one of the carbons'), whereas Fernand destroys Thérèse's expectations almost at once:

"Won't you regret abandoning your studies and renouncing all hope of the brilliant career which you pursued so ardently?"

"But I don't have to give up medicine to marry you!"

"Yet that is what I meant, Thérèse."

Mademoiselle Herlinge became very pale.

"Give up medicine!"

"Yes, Thérèse", he repeated quietly. "I want you entirely for myself."

Thérèse is outraged. She has the same medical qualifications as Fernand; she would not dream of asking him to give up his vocation; her idea of marriage is of an equal union between man and wife, while he feels that anything which takes a wife away from her rightful place in the home is wrong. After all, 'women are frailer and more delicate than men'.

Their story is intertwined with

that of three other women doctors (doctresses!), each of whom finds her own way to reconcile professional ambition and private happiness. At this time of change in French society, Yver draws us into the wider life of the hospital and of the city, introducing points of view both old and new. As a Catholic and a conservative, she could be expected to defend Fernand's belief in the angel in the home, but as an independent-minded writer, earning her own living, she advances a strong case for the 'new woman'. Her characters argue for themselves; two older male doctors undermine their case against women's 'smaller brains' by their own dubious practices, a benevolent surgeon admires Thérèse's skill and ambition but laments the fact that her first year of marriage doesn't result in pregnancy, another 'doctress' appears to neglect her children... Our sympathies are tugged this way and that, sometimes in indignation at the attitudes of the time, sometimes in amusement at their inadequacy. All four women doctors are shown to be stronger and more practical than their male partners, and yet may decide to defer to the men for the sake of harmony in the home. Some commentators have accused Thérèse of being cold and proud. 'Cold' may be a nuance of translation, since 'froid' may also be interpreted as 'cool'.

A cool head is certainly an asset to a doctor, and as for pride – that may be true in the first part of the novel, but a far more complex picture emerges as her character is affected by circumstances.

Yver's most affectionate portrayal is of Dina, the Russian immigrée whose poverty and struggle to succeed endear her to the reader. She is rescued by marriage to a fellow doctor, and takes delight in caring for their house and child, while still using her professional skills to help him in his work. All the arguments are so skilfully woven into the novel that it is not a series of polemics, but an engrossing and compelling narrative. Much pleasure lies in Yver's descriptions of Paris, in which sounds, smells, effects of light, food, clothing, interiors all unite to convey a vivid sense of time and place. Each of her wide cast of characters is strongly realised, however briefly they may appear, and however light her touch, so that we long to know what will happen to them once the book has ended.

We know now that the world was soon to change. Surely, when war broke out in 1914, the value of those female doctors would be recognised, if only as replacements for the male doctors who had been conscripted? Women did indeed replace men in almost every sphere, but once the war was over, they were expected to relinquish their posts to the men who had survived, and to concentrate on bearing children to repopulate

the country after the enormous loss of life.

The world went on turning, and by 1929, when Yver published *Femmes d'Aujourd'hui*, her book of essays on new 'feminine' careers, pioneering women were succeeding in almost every profession. Even so, in Paris and the Seine department only a quarter of the 'doctresses' who had qualified in the previous twenty years were still in practice. What had happened to the others? Yver concludes that marriage is the culprit, and blames the typical French husband for his pride in being the sole breadwinner, and for his insistence on having his wife constantly available to cater for his every need.

This is Yver's rebuttal, many years in advance, of Simone de Beauvoir's scathing dismissal of her as an anti-feminist writer, confronting her heroines with misfortunes that they would not have suffered had they stayed meekly at home. De Beauvoir's uncompromising statement that no woman should have the choice to stay at home only serves to demonstrate her particular prejudice. Yver, wiser and more understanding, believed that society was gradually shifting towards an acceptance that men and women could live together on terms of equality – though perhaps not in her own lifetime.

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© Désiré Lenoy 1840-1908 Still Life Fruit and Flowers 1866

LASKI: DON'T PUT WOMEN WRITERS IN A GHETTO

My response to causes [*wrote Marghanita Laski in 1981*] is usually tepid, and my pulse does not beat with the women's movement. This is, as I see it, no condemnation of them or of me. We no more choose our causes than we choose the people we fall in love with. I mention my lack of involvement only because some people may think this unfit me to judge Virago Modern Classics. By my lights it does not.

The point must be made because the series has moral and didactic purposes as well as literary ones. This, in itself, is not unusual in the reprint series of our century, and one context in which it is useful to consider Virago Modern Classics is that of two other series similar in having good intentions as well as, of necessity, seeking profitability: Everyman, where no perceptible attitudes were inculcated, and though it was clearly hoped that good would be done, what kind of good it was to be was the reader's business; and Penguin, which at first matched the times with whatever writing they felt could help in coming to terms with a world in disaster and, in a wider sense than Everyman, it did indeed 'go with us and be our guide'. But Penguin's heyday of idealism passed as did Everyman's before it, and both, now, merely reprint series like many another. Today, to meet a

newer if narrower idealism of these times, we have the Virago Modern Classics.

The publishing house of Virago was formed in 1976, when the women's movement in Britain was some six years old. Its Managing Editor Carmen Calill has told us in an article in the *TLS* that it was founded in order to publish books which 'focusing on the lives, history and literature of women, would provide some balance to the dominant views of human experience'. The first publications were non-fictional: informative books, old and new, on aspects of women's lives. Now, with fiction, Virago moves to 'the one area in which the contribution of women has always been outstanding.' Calill wishes to dispose of the belief that women novelists are confined to some 'ghetto of the imagination', even though the 'female tradition of novel writing' must be of their own 'social and cultural experience'.

Occasional critics – Calill quotes Anthony Burgess and Francis King – sometimes suggest that women who write of more than a woman's world are unusual, but statements so easily refuted are hardly worth refuting. One can fairly say that some men write best of a man's world (eg. Kipling) and some women of worlds of women (eg.

Antonia White). One can also say that some writers, both men and women, write equally well and sometimes badly of both sexes: Thackeray and George Eliot can stand for these. The one thing neither sex can ever do convincingly is to write in the first person of the other.

The decision, then, of a publishing house staffed and advised by women to devote itself to the republishing of good novels only if they are of special female interest and/or sensibility must strike the general reader as a sadly not gladly limiting choice. Men as well as women found in Virago's non-fiction books that 'the recording of female experience inevitably illuminates all important human experience' and we may take it Calill believes this to be as true of the novels. But surely the honest recording of all experience illuminates all experience? Moreover, in the area of fiction, where women's contribution has, admittedly, been as outstanding as men's, the balance to the 'dominant views of human experience' has already been provided, for all these novels have been published before.

The intention of the Virago Classics is however, wider than just the revelation of a specifically female sensibility through good novels. Calill quotes Marx

on 'the political and social truths' in 'the graphic and eloquent pages of English fiction writers', and, while recognising some of F R Leavis's limitations, praises him for claiming that 'novels *matter*, that they tell us truths about our civilisation, that they are forces for change.'

It is true that novels matter, in various ways, to some people. It is true that novels can be forces for change, though it is not necessarily the better novels that make the greater changes – not unless we adopt the Tolstoyan view that the novels that make the greatest changes (for good) *are* good novels, and are prepared to acclaim *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as, probably still, the very best novel of all. To say that novels tell us truths is incorrect. To do so is not of their nature or within their capacity. What novels can do is to present a pattern of life's inchoateness that the reader finds emotionally acceptable. What such selective republishing as Virago's may well be able to do is to establish and confirm a widely acceptable folk lore.

There are other things that novels can do. One, in addition to, sometimes to the detriment of, story-telling, is to strive towards the condition of art: the kind of novel that today is generally called 'literary'. Almost all the novels that Virago reprints are of this kind, and they are almost all novels whose writers have tried to word a personal vision. Where work of this kind is concerned, no matter how far it succeeds or fails, I believe – and here is my own

cause – the use of it for purposes other than its own (for social or political purposes) is wrong.

Here must be the crux of the disagreement. I suppose that ever since belief first used art, there have been those who believed that so to be used was art's proper function, and those who believed that in all circumstances, however good the cause, however trivial the effects, this is a wrong thing to do.

Not that disagreement with the proof need prevent appreciation of the pudding. Almost all Virago's reprints are of novels it is good to have in print. And generally, within and not making special allowances for their chosen brief, Virago's choice of novels is admirable. I take this as consoling evidence that, whatever the rationalisation, trained critical sensibilities will tend to reach consensus on quality.

It should be clear that to assert that one cannot and should not use the women's movement as backing for assessments of literary novels is to make no judgment of the women's movement beyond its inappropriateness as a criterion for judging literary fiction. The case here is entirely different from that presented by Virago's non-fiction books, for these are not published as art, but with the overt and specific intentions of teaching and propagandising. The right comparison would be with, for example, the Left Book Club. My own unliterary and unasked-for judgment of this part of Virago's work is that it is good, and probably effective.

So, on the whole, if one ignores the intent, is the Classics operation. But I cannot, and Virago would not wish readers to ignore the intent, so I have to protest it on behalf of at least some women writers. The literary novel is a field of art in which only fools would say that women's achievements is less than men's, a field in which there need be only critical reasons for distinguishing men's and women's contribution to it. I take a ghetto to be a people-cage into which some of us are thrust because of similarities less important than full humanness. Only my enemies, it has been said, can make me a Jew or black, or, so far as the writing of novels goes, a woman. There is no ghetto of the imagination here unless one is deliberately created. I fear that to be thrust into such a ghetto may be just what Virago is doing to a section of the community of writers.

There could be worse to fear. The melodramatic so often happens that its potentiality should not be ignored. Let us suppose that, and in part through the influence of Virago, the 'dominant views of human experience' have been reversed; and that in this new climate, such views as Virago's hold a dominant position. From the belief that art can be enlisted for causes, it has usually been only a short step, when the enforcing power is there, to the practice of allowing exposure only to that art believed to foster the desired ideals. *Marghanita Laski in Quarto, July 1981*

KATHLEEN AND TISSOT

This painting was recently sold at Sotheby's. The fascinating catalogue entry reminds readers that the difference between a novel and a painting is not very great (hence the *Persephone Post* every day).

The figure of the woman depicts the great love of Tissot's life. Kathleen Newton was born in 1854 in India, to Irish parents. When she was 16 her father arranged for her to be married and she was sent back to India. On the voyage she endured the unwanted attention of a Captain Palliser, and in 1871, aged 17, having given birth to an illegitimate daughter, moved in with her sister in St John's Wood. It is said that she met James Tissot, who lived nearby, one day when out posting a letter, probably in 1875. He had moved to St John's Wood following his involvement in the Paris Commune of 1871 and established a flourishing career as a painter of elegant contemporary life. Kathleen moved in to his house at 17 (now 44) Grove End Road and in 1876 her son Cecil was born – it is likely that Tissot was his father. Her face appeared in virtually every one of his paintings of this period. But the love affair had a tragic ending. Kathleen became ill, probably with tuberculosis, and in 1882 when she was 28 she took her own life, apparently to save Tissot the agony of seeing

her decline. Devastated, he spent four days sitting beside her coffin, abandoning London for Paris on the day after her funeral because he could no longer endure the emptiness of his home. The gossips in London stopped whispering about Kathleen, and in Paris few would have known about Tissot's lost love. The house was bought by the painter Alma-Tadema.

The setting of *Room Overlooking the Harbour* was probably the first-floor seafront room of the Castle Hotel at Goldsmid Place (now Harbour

Parade) in Ramsgate. The painting was included in a 1933 exhibition of Tissot's work. Almost nothing was then known about the woman who gazed out from many of the paintings in the show. However, a man in his late fifties walked up to one of the pictures and exclaimed, 'That was my mother', before turning and leaving – it is thought that this was Cecil Ashburnham, son of Kathleen and Tissot. 'His works lend themselves to storytelling,' writes the *ODNB*, 'and gestures, settings, partly cropped figures or details hint at hidden tales.'



Detail from 'Room Overlooking the Harbour' by James Tissot © in a private collection

THE FILM OF *THE HOMEMAKER*

The film of *The Homemaker* was shown at the Pordenone Silent Film Festival last autumn. Kevin Brownlow wrote in the programme: The director of this picture, King Baggot, was responsible for two of the worst silent pictures I've ever seen. How can the same man possibly have made one of the best? *The Homemaker* seems to me a forgotten classic. When I saw it I quickly realised I was watching King Baggot directing like King Vidor. How did this happen?

Baggot was active in amateur theatricals and was one of the

earliest stage personalities to move permanently into pictures. He began directing in 1915 and wrote and directed many of the films he played in. He owed his film career to Universal, who turned out inexpensive pictures on an assembly line but also 'Jewels' such as Clarence Brown's *Smouldering Fires* and Baggot's *The Homemaker*, both made in 1925. These were given extra time and money and unusual care and affection.

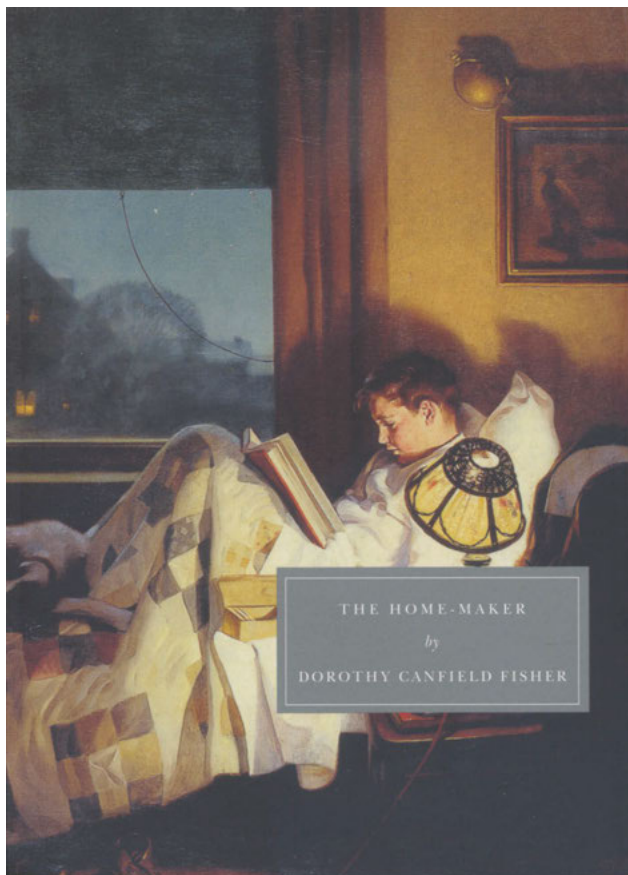
The 1924 novel by Dorothy Canfield Fisher was an exceptional book, and Mary

O'Hara's adaptation stays close to the original, but it was still possible – just possible – for a film company to ruin a fine book. There is, however, an intelligence apparent throughout this picture which does credit to all those who worked on it.

Of the critics, the *New York Times* objected to the leading character's weakness. But *Screenland* called the film 'terrific' and *Photoplay* 'intelligent, sternly realistic'. However, *Variety* thought there was 'too much delving into child psychology when the picture definitely gets on the wrong track.'

Richard Koszarski, an expert on Universal, wrote that *The Homemaker* was one of the few dramatic works of the 1920s to argue unequivocally for the abandonment of stereotyped sex roles and to criticise the structure that prescribes such behaviour.

When sound arrived, Universal gave orders for most of its 35mm silent negatives and prints to be destroyed – I have seen a letter which listed the titles to be saved. *The Homemaker* was not among them. In an unintended tribute to the output of the silent era, *Variety* said: 'There are moments when *The Homemaker* almost reaches the heights of greatness. Unfortunately the general impression... is only that of one more average feature picture.' I suggest we all keep looking for more of those average feature pictures.



FINALLY

As this is written in mid-September Brexit remains an unknown quantity and, like every other small business in the UK, we remain in a state of quiet despair. Persephone itself has been very lucky because in April there was a wonderful article about us in the *New York Times* and this brought many new readers, who cancelled out the disaster of the Brexit downturn. But what of the future? Although we still don't know, we have made one major change: in the past if someone ordered one of our books in a bookshop, then the order used to come to us and we packed up the books ourselves. But now we have taken on our own (excellent) distributor, Central Books, and they send out the books for us: not the mail order books of course, we still do this, but the books for bookshops. The price has had to go up (they are now £15 in bookshops) but so many prices have gone up because of Brexit that people seem innured. (And they remain £13 from us, £11 if you buy three.) Otherwise we have made no decisions. We still feel that if we leave the EU we shall be so heartbroken that we shall not want to go on. But who knows? Maybe, just maybe, we won't leave. It's all to play for.

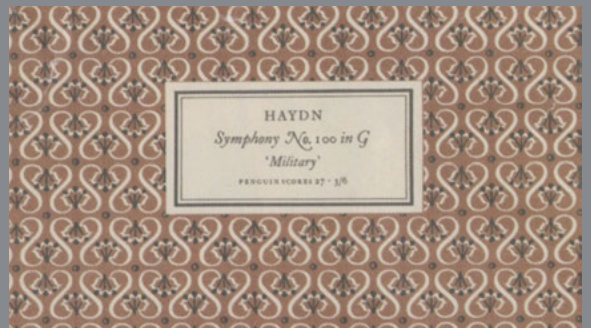
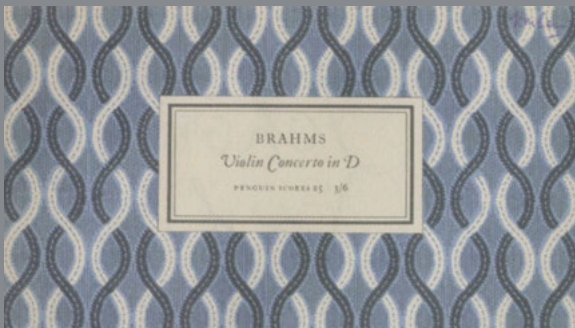
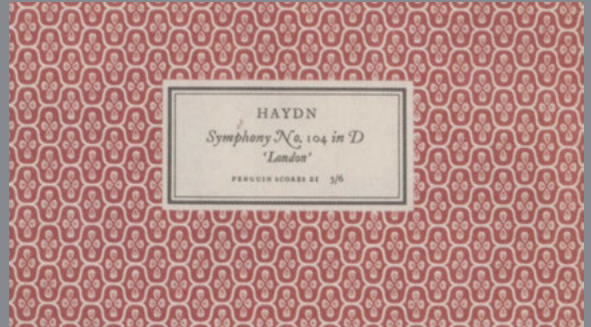
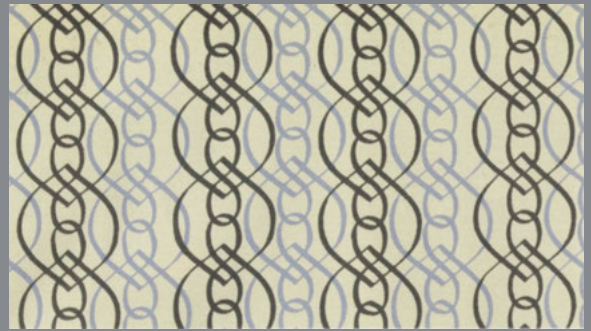
Now we have 135 books the *Catalogue* is the size of a book: we charge £5 for it. But to compensate the (free) *Biannually* has gone up to 32 pages.

But the most important news is that Lydia, who runs the shop with such efficiency, charm and warmth, is having a baby! It is due in January and she will not be in the shop at all between Christmas and Easter and after that only part-time. For this reason we are simply having three events over the winter. On **Tuesday 19th November** Dr Sara Lodge, Senior Lecturer in English at St Andrews will give a lunchtime talk about Richmal Crompton. On **Wednesday December 11th** we shall have the

usual (free) *Open Day* with mulled wine, mince pies and free gift wrapping. And on **Thursday March 5th** at 6.30 Rachel Reeves MP will celebrate International Women's Day and the publication in paperback of her book *Women of Westminster: The MPs who Changed Politics*. Wine and cheese straws will be served. The November and March events cost £10, please book by ringing the office. [Below, an old favourite: *Wet Winter Evening and a Book Lover in Bloomsbury*. The actual spot is Sicilian Avenue.]



WET WINTER EVENING AND A BOOK LOVER IN BLOOMSBURY
The first turning to the left in Southampton Row is quaint Sicilian Avenue, which forms the base of a triangle whose other sides are Southampton Row and Vernon Place, a continuation of Hart Street, Bloomsbury. A certain classical effect is suggested by an architrave at either end and some fluted pillars covered in stained tiling. The lamp under the blind of the little bookshop throws a yellow glow on the faded backs of many books, and half-opened volumes which show, here and there, a countenance or a landscape portrayed in the fashion of other days.



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

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