



The Persephone Biannually

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Portrait of Mrs Ellen Sharples (1769-1849) painted by her daughter Rolinda Sharples in c.1830, a copy of the original by Alfred E. Toope (1884-1954). Ellen Sharples was a remarkable woman who helped to establish the Royal West of England Academy in Bristol by donating her own art collection.



OUR BOOKS FOR SPRING/SUMMER 2020

Persephone Book No. 136 is a 1933 novel which was written to alert the world to the dangers of fascism. When we first made efforts to republish it, the dangers of modern-day fascism were at the forefront of all our minds and we thought that the republication 85 years later of this great German novel would be eye-opening. Now the world has hugely changed. Yet although our preoccupations and expectations, the norms of daily life indeed, have been turned upside down in just a few weeks (we are writing this in mid-April 2020) yet the dangers of fascism, and in fact a dictator, have not gone away: they are just dormant.

In one sense *The Oppermanns* was written as purest propaganda, in another it is 'very far from being a work of propoganda' (writes Professor Richard Evans in his Foreword) but 'achieves its effect not least because it uses the various members of the family, their friends, and the people with whom they come into contact, to paint a realistic and convincing portrait of the variety of Germans' reactions to the rise and eventual triumph of the Nazis... Lion Feuchtwanger's human sympathies enabled him

to understand, and to make the reader understand, the motives even of the most despicable characters. He grasped, for example, the resentments that drove small craftsmen in Germany into the Nazi movement.'

The idea for the novel was initially that of the British prime minster Ramsay MacDonald. He knew Lion Feuchtwanger (who was already one of Germany's best-known writers) and wrote to him in April 1933: Lion was by now in exile in France, his books having been burnt by the Nazis. MacDonald suggested a film alerting the world to the Nazi threat and, in May, Lion and the young screen-writer Sidney Gilliat completed a script. Then the film was cancelled (cf. the piece about appeasement on p. 22 of this *PB*); Lion, however, decided to turn the script into a novel.

The *Oppermanns* describes an affluent Jewish family, and in particular three brothers, who run a successful chain of furniture shops, for eight months from the autumn of 1932 until June 1933. The reader watches in horror as a law-abiding, kindly, civilised Jewish family, a close-knit group of siblings, is gradually dispos-



A rug, which might have been designed by Otti Berger; purchased in Germany in 1933 and brought to England in 1936 by a German refugee.



'Sailors', a 1940-41 Calico Printers Association dress fabric, in a private collection.

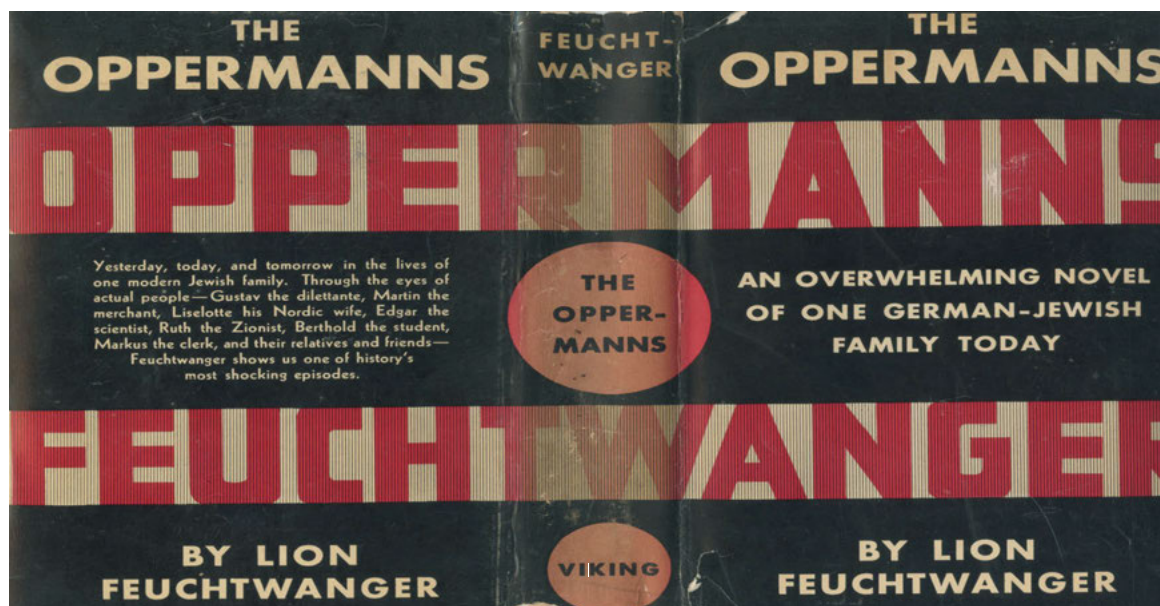
essed of all their certainties, of everything they had owned, of their life, of their happiness – just because they were Jewish. We watch as Jews are beaten in the street and thrown into concentration camps (yes, they existed in early 1933). And yet the world did nothing. Eventually one of the brothers, who had fled to France, decides to resist, and the bittersweet ending is faintly optimistic because, as Richard Evans writes: ‘Feuchtwanger could not know in 1933 that the resistance would crumble under the weight of Nazi terror, nor did he even suspect that the Nazis’ violence against the Jews would end in the deliberate murder of six million people in the Holocaust. No civilised person could imagine that genocide on this scale could take place in Europe in the twentieth century.’

It is hard to explain why a novel that ‘shows how the fundament-

als of freedom, order, decency and respect for truth were being rapidly eroded even before the Nazi seizure of power’ (Richard Evans) is nevertheless such a page-turner: we guarantee that anyone who starts reading this book will not be able to stop. This is what Anna Carey (who is reviewing the book for the *Irish Times*) told us: ‘My copy of *The Oppermanns* arrived on Friday and I’ve been totally engrossed in it ever since. The novel is just as vivid as I remembered, though I am genuinely disturbed, reading it 25 years after I studied it (when reading German at university), to see the explicit parallels between today’s political landscape and 1932/33 Berlin. The bit in Gustav’s party when we’re told that the headmaster believes that everything will be all right as long as one can prove one’s statements and his wife points out that “nowadays accuracy meant nothing” gave me a real jolt; as did the

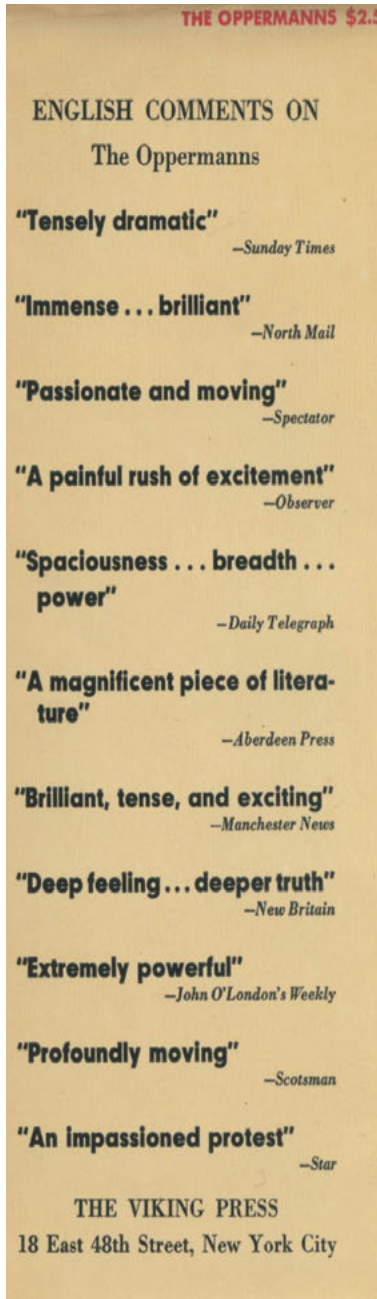
scenes where people roll their eyes at the prospect of the Nationalist “Leader” who hasn’t won a popular vote, which again is horribly reminiscent of recent times. It really struck me that when I first read *The Oppermanns* in 1995, I wouldn’t have seen any connection between scenes like that and the world around me, which is a grim reflection on how things have changed since then. I’m so, so glad you’re reissuing the book – if ever there was a time it needs to be read, it’s now.’

People often ask us how we find our books and the answer this time is: last June the journalist Nilanjana Roy mentioned ‘a lost classic’ in the *Financial Times*. She said: ‘Few novels strike such a stark note of warning, or capture with such accuracy the perilous years of the rise of a dictatorship.’ We had never heard of *The Oppermanns* then. But we hope that now all or



most of our readers will want to hear about it.

The English reviews of the book can be seen below. The American reviews were equally positive although more measured: apart from the *New York Times*,



which wrote: 'This novel is addressed to the German people, who will not be allowed to read it, urging them to open their eyes. And it is addressed to the world outside bearing the message, "Wake up! The 'barbarians are upon us!'" And people did wake up: 20,000 copies were sold in German (although not, of course, in Germany) and there were translations not only in English but in ten other languages. By September 1939, 250,000 copies had been sold. Since then there have been a couple of American editions but *The Oppermanns* has not been in print in the UK since before the war. We publish the original James Cleugh translation with much editing (Cleugh did after all translate the book in a tremendous hurry in September 1933). Apart from his Foreword Richard Evans has added sixteen pages of historical notes. He concludes: 'Ultimately Feuchtwanger's work transcends any political sympathies. It is all too relevant in the twenty-first century as a warning against complacency in the face of lies and abuse, and a call for vigilance in the defence of democracy against those who would destroy it. It is the first great masterpiece of anti-fascist literature, and deserves to be as widely read today as it was on its original publication.'

Our other Spring book is a collection of wartime stories: one of the reasons we decided that we would publish a novel about the lead up to the war, and a volume of short stories

about life on the home front during the war, is that in May there were going to be many commemorations of the end of the Second World War in Europe (75 years ago). These will now be massively scaled down. But Persephone readers can still pay tribute to the people who lost their lives and the people who lived through it and one of these was Sylvia Townsend Warner. Born in 1893, by the time war broke out she was an established novelist, and from 1936 onwards her short stories appeared mostly in *The New Yorker* (approaching 150 of them over the years, even more than Mollie Panter-Downes and Elizabeth Taylor, those other two British women writers who were promoted and revered by the *New Yorker* editors).

We have collected twenty-two stories dating from 1940 to 1946 and have republished them as *English Climate* (the title of one of the stories). Some were reprinted in two volumes, *A Garland of Straw* in 1943 and *The Museum of Cheats* in 1947, and one or two have appeared in anthologies since; but most Persephone readers will not have read the stories before and will find them something of a revelation. Lydia (Fellgett, who runs the shop when not on maternity leave) writes in her Persephone Preface: "These stories show a writer seeking to understand what life was like in Britain at war. She worked quickly, without the haze of nostalgia, and (unlike her novels, which moved between the

centuries) they were always contemporary, reflecting the texture of what was happening at that moment in time. Her wartime stories therefore epitomise what the historian Juliet Gardiner calls “fingertip history”: a telling of an age that is so close that you can still just about touch it.

‘Almost all the stories are set in the market towns and villages of Southern England’s countryside, with a few recurring characters providing snapshots of communities of women throughout the war. Occasionally a British reader senses a direct explanation of some quirk of specifically English culture for Warner’s American audience but, generally, the appeal they held for the *New Yorker* readership then carries over to the appeal they hold for a

twenty-first century Persephone reader today. Funny, brilliantly written, at times utterly heart-breaking, delightfully sharp, dry, intelligent and full of memorable characters: they are stories that strike the reader as somehow true as only the best fiction can.

‘Persephone readers may have already encountered some of Sylvia Townsend Warner’s work for, compared to most other Persephone authors, she is “famous”. She was a bestseller in her lifetime, author of, for example *Lolly Willowes* (1926) and *Mr Fortune’s Maggot* (1927), and a recognisable name on the literary prize shortlists, and something of an eccentric public intellectual. She has also been recuperated as a “woman writer”, a “historical writer”, a “lesbian writer”, a “fantasy writer” etc. for

forty years or so now. As with all other significant women writers of the twentieth century she has been compared to Virginia Woolf (shorthand for “good woman writer”) but, more often, her short stories in particular find her being compared to Jane Austen by readers and critics who understand them as amusing but essentially genteel sketches. There is an element of truth in this, yet it is far too reductive and misses the quite radical unconventionality of many of her mainly female characters. Warner had a Sitwellish fondness for barmy-sounding names which reflects this: Mrs Winter of Winter’s Harrow and her sister Mrs Bulteel of Mugdown St Magdalen to name but two. And, notably, the emphasis on marriage so present in Jane Austen’s writing is almost entirely absent in Warner’s.



Adolf Wissel's Kahleberg Farming Family (1939) was bought by Hüter. This was the ideal German family. No deviation was acceptable.

‘The stories in *English Climate* are very much a companion to the other war stories published by Persephone Books. Like Mollie Panter-Downes, for example, author of *Good Evening, Mrs Craven: the Wartime Stories* (PB 8), *Minnie’s Room* (PB 34) and *London War Notes* (PB 111), all of which were also originally published in the *New Yorker*, Townsend Warner’s “concentration on the personal and the particular is well suited to the magnifying lens of the short story form” (Preface to *Good Evening, Mrs Craven*). Both of these writers excelled at small, everyday experiences: a woman’s angry Hoovering when her pride is hurt; the terror of picking up a

cold at a Mothers’ Union Meeting; gossiping do-gooders in a knitting circle.

‘The stories, too, stand alongside many others of Persephone’s WW2 novels’ continues Lydia Fellgett. ‘Like Noel Streatfeild’s *Saplings* (PB 16) and Barbara Noble’s *Doreen* (PB 60), they are alert to the psychological impact of war on those at home, particularly children. Put simply, Warner knew that “lack of sleep, lack of fruit and vegetables, weighs heavily on children. . .” Her characters often display the eccentric heroism of Nora Ranskill (in *Miss Ranskill Comes Home*, PB 46) alongside the

moral difficulties encountered by the women in *To Bed with Grand Music* (PB 86). Almost all touch on the quiet violence of life lived during wartime in original ways. In one story, for example, a family funeral is interrupted by planes overhead and the mourners are forced to leap into the open grave with the coffin. It is perhaps this combination of eccentricity and formality that best characterises Warner’s work, as well as her life: she was in some ways fiercely conservative, for example she was always a believer in excellent manners. But then in her sexuality and her politics she was a true radical – living openly with a woman as a Communist when both of those things were unheard of to most of British society. Hers was therefore an exceptional life. And yet it was also full of all the everyday dullness of a middle-class woman’s existence in the middle of the twentieth century.’ In 1946 Sylvia wrote to a friend: ‘No one feels well or happy just now. No one in wartime can quite escape the illusion that when the war ends things will snap back to where they were and that one will be the same age one was when it began, and able to go on from where one left off. But the temple of Janus has two doors, and the door for war and the door for peace are equally marked in plain lettering, No Way Back.’

The photograph on the left is taken from the 1982 Sylvia Townsend Warner Letters edited by William Maxwell.



‘SHAME’ BY PHILIP PULLMAN

This article was published in the Guardian in December 2019; but it has a timeless relevance even now..

Drip by drip, this country has been poisoned. Let’s make Britain humane again. The plight of homeless people, and our reaction to it, are part of the hideous tangle this country has got into. There are so many strands leading into this appalling knot, that if we pull any one of them, the tangle gets worse.

So the question of why decent men and women find themselves able to walk past people begging in the street, or huddled up in doorways with only layers of cardboard to keep out the cold, is all mixed up with the flagrant deficiencies of Britain’s democracy, and the craven desire to suck up to the US that brought us the “war on drugs” among other idiocies, and the extraordinary grip that the public schools seem to have on the levers of power.

And then there are the facts that the ice caps are melting and our utilities are now in the hands of foreign corporations, and that teachers are treated with hostility and suspicion, and that Russia interferes with our politics, and that libraries are closing, and the transport system is an uncoordinated mess, and people are dying on trolleys in hospital corridors, and that senior politicians see fit to deny

that the government has anything to do with people being poor, and claim that the victims of Grenfell Tower died because they had no common senses. And universal credit. And the gig economy. And zero-hour contracts. And the flagrantly biased media. And Brexit. And on and on and on. All part of the same thing. Why do we tolerate it? Any of it.

We’ve become complacent about moral progress. We look at the great advances in science and medicine and sanitation in the past couple of centuries, and we congratulate ourselves that improvements in those fields have been accompanied by advances in moral understanding. These days we don’t gather to watch bears being tormented to death by dogs, or heretics having their intestines pulled out while they are still alive. We believe that Britain is a kindlier, more decent place than it used to be.

I think it may have been, once, for a generation or so, beginning with the Clement Attlee government and the creation of the National Health Service. The idea that there was such a thing as a postwar consensus has been defended by some historians and criticised by others, but I remember it: it

is embodied for me in the memory of Battersea Park, where I wandered as a boy and looked at sculptures by Henry Moore, and at the Pleasure Gardens created during the Festival of Britain, and where the park keepers might have told us off for climbing the trees but we somehow knew they were part of what kept the place safe and orderly. There was a common understanding of the value of civic decency. There really was such a thing, and many of us really believed in it. My parents and grandparents did; my teachers did.

And then it began to vanish, almost invisibly at first. Little by little, an acid rain began to dissolve the structures of thought and feeling that gave us healthcare and libraries and schools and council houses and public parks. By the 1980s, it was working its way deep into our politics and our lives. The public life of this nation has decayed into a state of moral squalor. Lies, cowardice and betrayal leak from the very pores of our political leaders; trust limps after them like the poor little dog following the murderer Bill Sikes in *Oliver Twist*, even though Sikes is going to kill him.

Nothing can grow in this poisoned wilderness except money. Shame, which needs the soil of conscience before it can take root, can’t flourish here; little shoots tentatively appear,

only to fade and droop and die in the corrupted air. Imagine Boris Johnson expressing shame. Imagine Donald Trump doing so. Why feel shame? Who needs shame? Shame is for losers.

In the doorways of great, stony-hearted buildings, in urine-stinking underpasses, under crumbling bridges, people who have nowhere else to go lie down to sleep. And we go past – I go past – and perhaps drop a few coins on a blanket or in a cardboard box, and then go home to our comfortable houses and watch the TV news, where we learn with a sinking heart about the latest opinion polls.

What can we do? Where do we start? Which thread in this abominable tangle of misery and stupidity and greed and wickedness should we try to pull first? And what hope could we have that it would start to untangle the rest?

The classical response to a Gordian knot like this would be to slash it through with a sword; and yes, that would work, briefly. Violent revolution as an expression of rage and despair does change the state of things for a while. The trouble is that it swiftly makes everything even worse. The only person to benefit from cutting the Gordian knot is the one with the sword.

So what do we do? Sink into a stupid and surly despair? Rise above it in a mindful bubble of self-enclosed bliss?

This question came home to me powerfully when I read the *Guardian's* series about the deaths of homeless people, because I realised that I had taught one of them. Sharon Mantz was 44 when she died, having suffered domestic abuse and mental health problems as well as drug and alcohol addiction. I taught for a while at the school she attended in Oxford, but to be honest I can't really remember her, no doubt because she was friendly and well behaved. And the city where I live, the society I'm part of, could do nothing to keep her alive.

We need individual acts of charity of course. But they're just drops of water when what we need is a flood. We need political change – by all means. Let's have a system that liberates us instead of choking the possibility of a decent life for everyone. But I'm coming more

and more to believe there's something in us that relishes wickedness and nourishes stupidity, something much deeper than political systems or economic theory.

For much of my lifetime, that something was kept in check by other equally ancient human impulses: kindness, empathy, cooperation. But the balance has swung the other way – perhaps not by much; perhaps by 52% to 48%, for example. It's time to help it swing back again. We have to develop, or perhaps evolve, a moral understanding that is wider and more clear-sighted than the one displayed by our current leaders. And we have to do it soon.

Below: Portrait of a Woman c. 1884-89 by Minnie Jane Hardman (1862-1952) in the Hardman collection, Reading University. Reading.



OUR READERS WRITE

‘*Little Boy Lost* was a book that made me smile, get very teary-eyed and have to blink a lot and then finally, shout at the book until my boyfriend told me to pipe down. It runs a full emotional gamut yet despite a premise that could seem predictable – a parent searching for his missing child – this is a novel which is anything but. Set in France very shortly after the end of the war, this is as much a cynical look at post-war Europe as it is a story of individual people. The descriptions of post-war France are truly grim – this is a land that has completely lost touch with its morality. Published in 1949, *Little Boy Lost* comes long before the myth of the Resistance began: it is a portrait of a country picking itself up with a bad hangover, shame-faced and unable to meet the eye of those who know exactly what it did when it thought nobody was watching. Marghanita Laski’s prose is phenomenal but it is her true ear for dialogue which takes her novel to a whole other level. *Little Boy Lost* is a haunting novel, not just because of the final pages which were emotionally testing to put it mildly, but also because of the wider point which Laski makes about the state of Europe after the war. Laski manages to make her portrait of the post-war world beautiful but it is painful nonetheless. I have never reached the final line of a novel with

more relief – a truly stunning book.’ *GirlwithherHeadinaBook*

‘*Emmeline* spans a period of about sixty years, though the majority of the story takes place in the 1840s and 50s. The reader’s anger for Emmeline builds gradually. Judith Rossner reveals the injustices and cruelties that existed for women and girls in a society that punished and judged those who had fallen foul of men’s selfish seductions. Emmeline is punished throughout her life for the crime of another: she hadn’t understood what danger she might be in, and later in life she makes a mistake that no one could possibly have foreseen. The unforgiving nature of the people close to her and the wider community is heart-breaking. It is an unforgettable story. *Emmeline* is a wonderful novel – Rossner recreates the suffocating world of the cotton mills and the spiteful, gossipy boarding houses filled with adolescent girls brilliantly. It is both Emmeline the lonely, vulnerable girl and Emmeline the older woman, alone and ostracised that I will remember for a long time.’ *Heaven Ali*

‘Some stories in *The Second Persephone Book of Short Stories* have been featured in Persephone’s own twice-yearly magazine, others have been more difficult to access. As always the distinctive grey cover of this

book distinguishes it as one of an excellent series; a well produced and attractive book which would be a wonderful gift. Some stories are tragic, but others are inspiring and even humorous. Many are clever, and have much to say about women’s lives at the time when they were written. The essence of this book is to give a short insight into a life, either over a long period or a very brief glimpse of an incident. Short stories can be an acquired taste, but they have the advantage of offering something for everyone’s taste in a book like this of diverse authors. This is the second book of short stories that Persephone has published, and either one is to be recommended as offering an impressive selection of tasters of women authors who had something to say in the twentieth century, or to demonstrate the power of fiction in lives affected by change and challenges.’ *Northern Reader*

‘Elizabeth von Arnim isn’t a writer I had come across before, although she has written around twenty books (of which *Expiation* was one of the few not still in print) and experienced a colourful romantic life that clearly influenced her writing. *Expiation* is a thoroughly enjoyable study of the social mores of the late 1920s. It’s a delightful look at the small-minded Brits who live in fear of the servants finding out who they really are. It’s the sort of novel

that hooks you in from the very first page and keeps you turning until, 362 pages later, you have breathlessly reached the end and barely paused to think' Madam J-Mo

'The narrative style of *High Wages* is classic Dorothy Whipple: seemingly light and frothy from the beginning, while gradually drawing the reader in through incisive social observation, humour and wit, and brilliantly rendered characters. I started to mark up potential references but soon realised that I might end up noting the whole book. On every page is a fascinating socio-economic comment, a hilarious exchange of dialogue and/or a passing reference which makes one think 'I really must get back to that/read up more about that'. As such, this is a novel packed full of interest on all kinds of levels. And as a bonus, the story is an absolute cracker! I loved reading this book and look forward to my continuing journey through the Whipple catalogue.' Leaping Life

'Eva in *The Home-Maker* hates her titular role which women are supposed to accept unquestioningly. Her unhappiness expresses itself in a determined perfectionism, and absolutely no interest in who her children are as individuals, only how they appear to others and reflect on her. When she goes out to work she became happier and less concerned with rigid perfectionism, and my feelings towards her did moderate somewhat. I

did feel some sympathy for this woman who had been forced by societal expectation into roles for which she was entirely unsuited. Also, Dorothy Canfield Fisher has a wonderful way of describing the children's psychology and emotions, showing deep understanding without being patronising. *The Home-Maker* is an extraordinary novel in that it has a lot to say but does so with a remarkably light touch. Fisher challenges gender roles and assumptions via fully realised characters and a simple but effective plot, so it doesn't feel preachy but still makes its point.' MadameBibliophileRecommends

'*They Were Sisters* is a domestic emotional drama centring on middle-class life in the 1930s. The afterword by Celia Brayfield really hit the nail on the head when she commented on the mastery of middle-classness. Undramatic, unsensational, and yet Dorothy Whipple so clearly evokes, and *engenders* acute emotional turbulence. There were points in all sections of the novel where I expected someone to hit someone, a hint of insidiousness to be brought to conclusion, to sexual assault, or romance to lead to total redemption. But nothing is so extreme in Whipple. She can leave things. Loose ends abound. Usually authors aren't very good at just leaving (un)well alone. But it is glorious. The strength of the emotional drama lies in Whipple's skill for inciting empathy for all her characters. Different, faulted and frustr-

ating, there is empathy for every sister, every one of their children, every husband, every servant.' Female Scribbler

'Light, charming, frothy, amusing ... *Guard Your Daughters* by Diana Tutton 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 the opening paragraph. 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. While they are amusing, witty, welcoming, the daughters are without sound judgment, having been failed by their parents. (Here we can nod to the inadequate parenting skills of Mr and Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*.) I found this to be a convincing and disturbing novel about the dangers that lurk in families.' Book Word

'Stella Martin Currey is a wonderful writer, one who is happy to laugh gently at herself but who is also able to dish out advice with a marvellous post-war firmness. Recipes are practical and unfussy. References to the family's war-time experiences crop up occasionally and it's clear that life is to be appreciated, even the "Most

Disliked Job” of each month. She talks directly to her reader with a warmly self-assured manner, which verges on the tone adopted by self-help tomes. And she does it in a way that you enjoy. I also liked her chosen Anthology extracts for each month. It’s clear that this is a writer who loves hanging texts together (there’s also sage advice on how to hang pictures around the home), presumably to send her reader off to read her selections in full. It is a middle-class voice very much of its time (*One Woman’s Year* was first published in 1953) and I loved it. This is another Persephone book I’m going to keep going back to, to dip into on a Sunday evening as a comfort read.’
Books and Wine Gums

‘**G**ood Evening, Mrs Craven is a mix of the comical and the tragic, of the optimistic and the hopeless. These short, sharp stories give us a window into what would have been the condition of hundreds of civilians as the Second World War swept by. The stories are arranged in chronological order, with each story being darker than the ones before. And all the stories are very, very English. There is not a touch of histrionics to be found anywhere; an entire nation is facing Armageddon, but the stiff upper lip only just quivers. The beauty of the writing is in the subtlety, in the thoughts between the lines and the haunting presence of war. Stories like these form an important part of the tradition

of passing down history through generations. To understand, empathise and learn, we need to look at our past.’ Vipula Gupta

‘**T**he unsettling atmosphere of *Harriet* is further enhanced when one realises that it is based on a true story. It is perhaps an early example of the contemporary desire to foreground victims rather than perpetrators. Rarely do I read a book that gets under my skin in the way that Elizabeth Jenkins’s *Harriet* did. The building sense of claustrophobia, the way the reader is unwittingly, and all too easily, drawn into the world of the protagonists, the sudden shock of its worst revelations... Some might criticise the book for the way in which – despite the victim’s name as the title – Harriet herself gradually disappears: perhaps it is just another instance of true crime placing the murderer(s) in the spotlight? What elevates the novel above such a simplistic reading, however, is the way in which Jenkins makes the reader crave for a glimpse of Harriet. We are so successfully drawn into the domestic spaces of the story that we feel we could run upstairs or peek around a doorframe to see where this woman – so vivid and engaging at the start of the book – has gone. We are encouraged to care deeply for Harriet without necessarily being aware of our feelings. *Harriet* is an expertly crafted book, whatever your taste in fiction: a must-read for fans of Victorian culture and crime, as

well as those drawn to the interwar novels that constitute much of the Persephone catalogue.’ Headpress.com

‘**T**he story in *Milton Place* is a kind of banal tragedy – beautiful woman loses two unsuitable wonderful men because of their ages. The villains (two daughters of the old man) are suitably villainous although they win in the end. For some reason, I glossed over effortlessly that the goodies were too good to be real. I also glossed over a lot of telling not showing. So why did I like it? Essentially the characters, even the villains, are interesting, and my belief in who they are drives the book from step to step. I couldn’t see how the next step could be born from the present step and I felt that the author’s telling me the forces and feelings which were going to lead me inevitably there were so well done that I could believe them whether told or shown. I was so drawn into the location – a mansion in Sussex with a complex garden – that I wanted not to notice that the young man spoke like a grown-up, that the heroine herself was picture perfect. Instead I wanted to know how this perfection would be shattered, who would blurt out the secret the audience knows but no one else.’
Dominick Jones

DE STEVENSON: HER LIFE

Edinburgh was my birthplace [wrote DE Stevenson in the 1950s] and I lived there until I was married in 1916. My father was the grandson of Robert Stevenson who designed the Bell Rock Lighthouse and also a great many other lighthouses and harbours and other notable engineering works. He was a first cousin of Robert Louis Stevenson and they often played together when they were boys.

My father was old-fashioned in his ideas so my sister and I were not sent to school but were brought up at home and educated by a governess. I was always very fond of reading and read everything I could get hold of including Scott, Dickens, Jane Austen and all sorts of boys' books by Jules Verne and Ballantyne and Henty. When I was eight years old I began to write stories and poems myself. It was most exciting to discover that I could. At first my family was amused and interested in my efforts but very soon they became bored beyond measure and told me it must stop. They said it was ruining my handwriting and wasting my time. I argued with them. What was handwriting for – if not to write? 'For writing letters when you're older,' they said. But I could not stop. My head was full of stories and they got lost if I did not write them down, so I found a place in the the box-room between two large black trunks with a sky-light overhead and I made a little nest where I would

not be disturbed. There I sat for hours – and wrote and wrote.

Our house was in a broad street in Edinburgh – 45 Melville Street – and at the top of the street was St Mary's Cathedral. The bells used to echo and re-echo down the man-made canyon. My sister and I used to sit on the window-seat in the nursery (which was at the top of the house) and look down at the people passing by and I told her stories about them.

Every summer we went to North Berwick for several months and here we were more free to do as we wanted, to go out by ourselves and play on the shore and meet other children. When we were at North Berwick we sometimes drove over to a big farm, close to the sea. We enjoyed these visits tremendously. There were rocks there too, and many ships were wrecked upon the jagged reefs until a lighthouse was erected upon the Bass Rock – designed by my father.

As we grew older we made more friends. We had bathing picnics and tennis parties and fancy dress dances, and of course we played golf. I was in the team of the North Berwick Ladies Gold Club and I played in the Scottish Ladies Championship at Muirfield and survived until the semi-finals. I was asked to play in the Scottish Team but by that time I was married and expecting my first baby so I was obliged to refuse the honour.

Every Spring my father and mother took us abroad, to France

or Switzerland or Italy. We had a French maid so we spoke French easily and fluently – if not very correctly – and it was very pleasant to be able to converse with the people we met. I liked Italy best, and especially Lake Como which seemed to me so beautiful as to be almost unreal. Paris came second in my affections, there was such a gay feeling in Paris; I see it always in sunshine and the crowds of brightly clad people strolling in the Boulevards or sitting in the cafés eating and drinking and chattering cheerfully. My sister and I were never allowed to go out alone, of course, nor would our parents take us to a play – as I have said before they were old-fashioned and strict in their ideas and considered a 'French Play' an unsuitable form of entertainment for their daughters – but in spite of these annoying prejudices we managed to have quite an amusing time and always enjoyed our visits to foreign countries.

In 1913 I 'came out' and had a gay winter in Edinburgh. There were brilliant 'Balls' in those far off days, the old Assembly Rooms glittered with lights and the long gilt mirrors reflected girls in beautiful frocks and men in uniforms or kilts. The older women sat round the ballroom attired in velvet or satin and diamonds watching the dancers – and especially watching their own offspring – with eyes like hawks, and talking scandal to one another. We danced waltzes and

Scottish Country Dances and Reels, the Reels were usually made up beforehand by the Scottish Regiment which was quartered at Edinburgh Castle. It was a coveted honour to be asked to dance in these Reels and one had to be on one's toes all the time. Woe betide the unfortunate girl who put a foot wrong or failed to set to her partner at exactly the right moment!

The First Great War put an end to all these gaieties – certainly nobody felt inclined to dance when every day the long lists of casualties were published – and the gay young men who had been one's partners were reported dead or missing or returned wounded from the ghastly battlefields.

In 1915 I married Major James Reid Peploe. His family was an Edinburgh family, as mine was. Curiously enough I knew his mother and father and his brothers but had never met him until he returned to Edinburgh from the war, wounded in the head. When he recovered we were married and then began the busiest time of my life. We moved about from place to place (as soldiers and their wives and families must do) and, what with the struggle to get houses and the arrival – at responsible intervals – of two sons and a daughter I had very little time for writing. I managed to write some short stories and some children's poems but it was not until we were settled for some years in Glasgow that I began my literary career in earnest.

Mrs Tim was my first successful

novel. In it I wrote an account of the life of an officer's wife and many of the incidents in the story are true – or only very slightly touched up. Unfortunately people in Glasgow were not very pleased with their portraits and became somewhat chilly in consequence. After that I wrote *Miss Bunclie's Book* which has been one of my most popular books. It sold in thousands and is still selling. It is about a woman who wrote a book about the village in which she lived and about the reactions of the community.

All the time my children were growing up I continued to write. And then came World War Two. Hitherto I had written to please myself, to amuse myself and others, but now I realised that I could do good work. In my war-time books such as *The Two Mrs Abbotts* I have pictured everyday life in Britain during the war and have tried to show how ordinary people step up to the frightfulness, and what they thought and did during those awful years of anxiety. One of my American readers wrote to me and said, 'You make us understand what it must be like to have a tiger in the backyard.' I appreciated that letter.

Wartime brought terrible anxieties to me, for my eldest son was in Malta during the worst of the siege of that island and then came home and landed in France on D-Day and went through the whole campaign with the Guards Armoured Division. He was wounded in ten places and was decorated with the Military Cross for outstanding bravery, My

daughter, an officer in the WRENS, was com-mended for her valuable work.

In addition to my writing I organised the collection of Sphagnum Moss for the Red Cross and together with others went out on the moors in all weathers, wading deep in bog, to collect the moss for surgical dressings.

After the long weary years of war came victory for the Allies, but my job of writing stories went on. Sometimes I have been accused of making my characters 'too nice'. I have been told that my stories are 'too pleasant' – but the fact is I write of people as I find them and I am fond of my fellow human beings. Perhaps I have been fortunate, but in all my wanderings I have met very few thoroughly unpleasant people – so I find it difficult to write about them.

From a c.1950 typescript found among DE Stevenson's papers.

Below: detail from Young Girl on the Grass, the Red Bodice (Mlle Isabelle Lambert) 1885 by Berthe Morisot.



THE PERSEPHONE 137

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 **Oriel Malet** A deeply empathetic novel about the real life of the Scottish child prodigy who lived from 1803–11; translated into French; a play on Radio Scotland.

18. Every Eye by **Isobel English** An unusual 1956 novel about a girl travelling to Spain, highly praised by Muriel Spark: a R4 'Afternoon Play' in 2004. Preface: Neville Braybrooke

19. They Knew Mr Knight by **Dorothy Whipple** A 1934 novel about a man driven to committing fraud and what happens to him and his family; a 1946 film. Afterwords: Terence Handley MacMath and Christopher 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 not sent, the letters provide a crucial counterpoint 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 granddaughter. Afterword: Charles Lock

96. Dinners for Beginners by Rachel and Margaret Ryan A 1934 cookery book for the novice cook explaining everything in exacting detail: eye-opening and useful.

97. Harriet by Elizabeth Jenkins A brilliant but disquieting 1934 novel about the 1877 murder of Harriet Staunton. Afterword: Rachel Cooke

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

99. Patience by John Coates A hilarious 1953 novel about a 'happily married' Catholic mother of three in St John's Wood who falls

'improperly in love'. Preface: Maureen Lipman

100. The Persephone Book of Short Stories Thirty stories, ten by 'our' authors, ten from the last decade's *Biannuals* and ten that are newly reprinted. A Persephone bestseller.

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

102. The Exiles Return by Elisabeth de Waal A novel, written in the late 1950s but never published. Five exiles return to Vienna after the war. A meditation on 'going back' and a love story. Preface: Edmund de Waal

103. The Squire by Enid Bagnold In 1938 a woman gives birth to her fifth child: a rare novel about the process of birth. Preface: Anne Sebba

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

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

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

107. Wilfred and Eileen by Jonathan Smith A 1976 novel, based on fact, set in the years 1913–15.

Wilfred, badly wounded in France, is rescued by his wife. A four-part television serial in 1981. Afterword: author

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

109. The Country Life Cookery Book by Ambrose Heath This 1937 cookbook, organised by month (and thus by excellent seasonal recipes) is illustrated by a dozen beautiful wood engravings by Eric Ravilious. Preface: Simon Hopkinson.

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

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

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

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

114. Gardeners' Choice by Evelyn Dunbar and Charles Mahoney Two artist friends collaborated over the text and drawings of this rare and

delightful 1937 gardening book.
Preface: Edward Bawden, Afterword:
Christopher Campbell-Howes

115. Maman, What Are We Called Now? by Jacqueline Mesnil-Amar

The author kept a diary in July and August 1944: an unparalleled insight into the last days of the Occupation in Paris. Photographs: Thérèse Bonney. Preface: Caroline Moorehead

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

117. The Godwits Fly by Robin Hyde A semi-autobiographical lyrically written 1938 novel by the major New Zealand writer. 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 Ravillious). 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, and 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,

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 deception 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, woodcuts: a fascinating 1953 pot pourri.

136. The Oppermanns by Lion Feuchtwanger Written to alert the world to the horrors of fascism, an unforgettable novel about a Jewish family in Berlin from 1932-33. Preface: Richard Evans

137. English Climate: Wartime Stories by Sylvia Townsend Warner Twenty-two short stories set from 1940-46, few previously reprinted. Preface: Lydia Fellgett

‘THE FAMILY REVIVED’

*This story by Sylvia Townsend Warner is in **English Climate: Wartime Stories**. It was in The New Yorker on 11 July 1942.*

‘Speaking for myself,’ said Mrs Bogle, ‘I believe that this fuel-rationing scheme has been planned.’

The Canadian pilot who was spending his leave with the Killdews (Sir Ludovick and Lady Killdew had relatives in Canada) looked up, startled. He was a polite young man, so polite that he was now attending Mrs Bogle’s Sunday Salvage Afternoon and slicing metal butts off old cartridge cases with the rest of us in our Dorsetshire cottage, but stirring behind his politeness, as a deer stirs in a thicket, was a regretful conviction that the English are given over to cynicism and levity, and here was further proof of it. The rest of us, who know Mrs Bogle better, understood that she was not speaking of Sir William Beveridge and the Secretary for Mines but of that somewhat jesuitical agency which she refers to as A Power for Good or Something Behind It All.

‘Because of family life,’ she continued. ‘For think how it will draw us together! The whole family sitting round the fire, just like the old days, you know, when roasted crabs hiss in the bowl.’

‘Sounds like cruelty to animals to me,’ remarked Miss Webb, the land girl, in an undertone.

In an undertone, Mrs Bogle replied, ‘No, Shakespeare.’

‘Considered in that light,’ said Mrs Larpent, ‘I call it belated. Of course, all plans are, except possibly layettes, and one’s usually behindhand with them. How can fuel rationing revive family life when none of us has any family left? I can’t believe that the hissing of a roasted crab, or the drowning of a parson’s saw, either, come to that –’

‘More Shakespeare,’ Mrs Bogle said, patting Miss Webb’s knee soothingly.

‘– is likely to lure Bill back from Iceland,’ Mrs Larpent continued, ‘and Susan from Dover, and Isabel from Delhi, and the cook and housemaid from their factory. On the evenings when George isn’t on ARP and I’m not washing up in the canteen, I suppose we shall sit by the fire in total silence. But we do that anyway.’ She whetted her knife on the carborundum and took up another cartridge case.

‘I’ve never been able to understand why one talks of sitting round a fire,’ observed Miss Pilgrim. ‘At the best, one can only sit hemispherically.’

Speaking together, the Canadian said, ‘Campfires,’ and George Larpent said, ‘A survival from the great hall of the Middle Ages, when the fire was in the middle of the room and the smoke went out by the roof.’

‘Really?’ Mrs Bogle tossed a handful of metal butts into the

tray for waste cardboard. ‘How interesting! And it does quite as well for an oil heater, doesn’t it?’

Delighted with this further revelation of Something Behind It All, she continued with vigour, ‘Besides, why need it be only one family? It might be two or three. Because, of course, what Mrs Larpent says is perfectly true. None of us can call our families our own just now. But if we took turns spending the evening together – those of us that have evenings – we’d be keeping up the tradition of family life, wouldn’t we? And think of the saving! Why don’t we plan out our fireside rota here and now?’

There was an evasive pause, broken by Miss Pilgrim saying, ‘People in the East burn cow dung, don’t they?’

‘We did ourselves last winter,’ said Lady Killdew. ‘It gives a splendid glow once it’s kindled.’

‘The glow,’ said her husband, ‘doesn’t last.’

‘Personally,’ said Mrs Larpent, ‘I have been thinking deeply about the Venetian custom of wearing a farthingale and having a little charcoal brazier underneath it and a devoted follower to puff the brazier.’

‘Oh, my dear,’ said Mrs Bogle, ‘I’m afraid you will be disappointed. It’s almost impossible to get charcoal.’

‘In the last war,’ said Miss Webb, ‘my mother one day was in a train, going from Ely to Scarborough, and it was winter,

and the train wasn't heated. And then a man got in, and after he'd settled down he produced two lengths of rubber gas piping. And he put the top ends into his mouth, and tucked the bottom ends into his boots, and began to breathe. After a bit he noticed my mother noticing him, and he took out the two bits of piping and explained that he suffered terribly from cold feet, but by breathing into his boots he kept them quite cozy. He was a commercial traveller.'

'Well, that was practical,' said the Canadian.

'Not in this war!' cried Mrs Bogle. 'Rubber, you know. Really, my plan is much the best. We must share our firesides. And I'm going to suggest that you all come to us every Monday and Thursday. We shall have our work, you know, and the wireless going, and perhaps Sir Ludovick would read aloud – one never seems to get much reading done in wartime. And we could talk over our various problems. There is always so much to talk about. Or would Tuesdays be better than Mondays? We could eat roast chestnuts, and –' Here she caught sight of Mr Bogle approaching the table. 'Oh, Hereward! You're just in time to hear what we are planning for next winter, such a delightful scheme for saving fuel. We're all going to . . .'

Meanwhile, Mr Bogle, a large man moving with extraordinary stealthiness and speed, had attained his objective and was saying to the Canadian, 'You're

the fellow I need. Just walk round the garden with me, will you? I want some advice about felling a few trees.'

'I don't know much about trees,' said the Canadian. 'My family lived in an apartment house.' But he rose obediently, for he was a very polite young man.

'Trees, Hereward?' Mrs Bogle said. 'Surely you're not going to cut down any of my dear trees? Not the old crab apple – so mossy! Not the Spanish chestnut, for we are just planning how we shall roast chestnuts when we are all sitting together reviving the family!'

'Must grow more food,' said Mr Bogle. 'Besides, logs may come in handy.'

'But Hereward, both the kitchen stove and the sitting room grate are too small for logs. We discovered that last winter, and you know how tired

you got of carving them smaller.'

'The study grate isn't,' said he, and speedily, stealthily retired, taking the Canadian with him.

Mrs Bogle flushed, and the sudden colour and the round-eyed, wondering stare that watched the fading-away of another illusion made her look momentarily young again. And each one of us, I suppose, condemned the churlish Bogle and hoped that nice young Canadian, the soul of chivalry, might be kicking him outside in the shrubbery. There was a hush, but necessarily it had to be brief, and before Mrs Bogle's predatory good intentions could revive, Lady Killdew said to Mrs Larpent, 'Lucy, dear, there's one thing we must talk over before we go home. When are we having our Drive for Bones?'

'Rest Centre and Communal Feeding', anon, WRVS archive.



THE ROOTS OF APPEASEMENT

Feuchtwanger wrote *The Oppermanns* 'in a white heat' because he wanted to send an urgent message to an international audience that Hitler's Germany was dangerous and out-of-control. It was published in London in November 1933: yet for another five years, up to and beyond the notorious Munich agreement, Britain pursued a policy of accommodating Germany, allowing it to re-arm and ultimately to provoke WW2. Why was this?

Feuchtwanger was not the first to report on Nazi atrocities. From March 1933 onwards the British press carried alarming stories of violence in German towns and cities, especially that aimed at German Jews. Thus on 3rd March, immediately after the Reichstag fire, *The Spectator*, right-of-centre and relatively Germanophile, denounced Nazi street violence, and followed this up with strong editorials in April and May.

But at the same time the overriding priority for the British public was to avoid another war. Between 1929 and 1932 a series of books came out which portrayed the horrors of the Great War (Robert Graves, Vera Brittain) as well as conveying the message that it had been an unnecessary and grim mistake, for which all the Great Powers bore some responsibility (eg Lloyd George's *War Memoirs*).

Ever since 1919, informed British public opinion had felt the punishment imposed on the defeated Germany by the Treaty of Versailles (admission of war-guilt, loss of territory, disarmament, large reparations) was counterproductive, and was sowing the seeds of another war. The most outstanding example of this was J M Keynes's *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* but this only articulated the serious doubts that members of the government, up to and including the then Prime Minister, Lloyd George, had had about the Treaty. The Treaty was seen as vindictive, and largely imposed by the French, who were determined that Germany should never regain the ability to launch another war. Hence almost all British politicians, whether of the Left or Right, wanted some revision of the Treaty in Germany's favour. The longer this failed to happen, the more German anger at the Treaty was received sympathetically; Hitler's rise was widely seen as a consequence of this.

British policy was driven by trying to achieve general disarmament. The East Fulham by-election of October 1933 was won by a candidate standing on a pacifist platform and was seen to endorse this. However, some British diplomats were very worried about Hitler from the beginning: the new British ambassador to Berlin, Sir Eric

Phipps, wrote in November 1933: 'We cannot regard him solely as the author of *Mein Kampf*, for in such case we should logically be bound to the policy of a "preventive war".'

In early 1934 a series of articles in *The Spectator* sought to assess what was happening in Germany. Hitler had evolved from being 'a leader of a movement' to being 'leader of a people' and the storm troopers, the SA, and the SS represented 'the best elements of the Third Reich'. The fifteen years of postwar class divisions were now being superseded by more positive feelings of class-unity. Nazi anti-Semitism was regretted, but assumed to be a primitive and passing fad, from which a more successful Germany would move on.

The roots of 'appeasement' long predated Hitler. Avoiding war was central to British policy for many years. In the 1934 film of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* the 'Prince of Wales' laments that 'If a country goes mad it has the right to commit every horror within its own walls.' Those, like Feuchtwanger, who warned that Nazi horrors were a danger to Britain were prophetic and right, but they were outnumbered by those who hoped that addressing Germany's grievances would enable peace to be maintained.

CROMPTON THE NOVELIST

This piece by Dr Sara Lodge is adapted from a talk first given at a Persephone Lunch in the shop.

In a newspaper article of 1958, Pamela Kitchener reported her interview with Richmal Crompton, a ‘self-effacing spinster with cornflower-blue eyes’ who ‘is little known personally’. How did Crompton feel, Kitchener asked, about William Brown, the hero of her *Just William* stories?

Crompton replied: ‘I used to be quite fond of him. But now I mostly think he’s a loathsome child...’ She added a shade wistfully, ‘You see, I still saw myself as a serious writer, but all they wanted was just William.’

Richmal Crompton saw herself as ‘a serious writer’. But it is difficult to find a serious review of any of the forty-one novels, or nine story collections, she wrote for adults. A rare critic, reviewing *Family Roundabout* (now Persephone Book No. 24) summarised briskly: ‘the author as a skilled executant plays adroitly on the keys of sentiment, pathos and, occasionally, gentle satire’. Emotive, gentle, light music. The sort of fiction written by spinsters with cornflower-blue eyes.

I beg to differ. I think Crompton’s eye, as a writer, is ice-blue, critical, analytical, often

angry. Her dialogue – rather than gentle – is wonderfully barbed. As a writer for adults her intelligence shines particularly brightly in three fictional areas: frustrated women; neglected children; and bad writers.

Family Roundabout begins by introducing us to Millicent Fowler, the widowed matriarch of the Fowler family, who is thinking back to the time when she arrived with her husband as a young bride, thirty years ago: ‘He had been ten years her senior, and she had fallen in love with him at their first meeting, realising even then how unlike she was to the wife he wanted. He wanted, she knew, a ‘little woman’, clinging, adoring, self-effacing, ready to accept and defer to his judgement – a replica, in short, of his mother. And deliberately, determinedly, she had set to work to make herself that woman, becoming, for love of him, stupid and docile, hiding her intelligence as though it were some secret vice... Her name was Millicent, but Henry, who liked diminutives, had called her Milly. She always thought of the quick-witted, quick-tempered girl who still existed somewhere as Millicent and Henry’s wife as Milly. “Now Millicent...” she would say to herself warningly, as she bit back some trenchant comment, some shrewd rejoinder.’

Crompton presents a telling conflict here. Mrs Fowler is a reader of Victorian comedy, a grower of roses, rather indolent in her running of family life. She has spent a lifetime playing the diminutive role of silly Milly: a ‘little woman’, self-effacing, sentimental, dependent. But inside her, Millicent has never gone away: the shrewd and trenchant critic who never lacks a tart rejoinder. Millicent is militant. But Millicent is repressed. Mrs Fowler channels Millicent’s anger into ‘her own methods of resistance – methods of gentle obstinacy and stupidity – which had so far served her well’.

Crompton’s novels may be domestic, but they are emphatically not romances. Their chief business does not lie with delivering couples, through various difficulties, into each other’s arms. Rather, she is interested in how personalities are shaped in the crucible of family life and how they turn out, often into volatile compounds. She is best at dialogue: crisp, with a sharp wit that recalls Saki’s short stories and would have made her a marvellous writer for radio. For example, in *Frost at Morning*, an alcoholic but glamorous mother called Babs remarks: “I’ll buy some clothes...I must have some new clothes. You can’t make a fresh start in old clothes. I must have some clothes that don’t know about me. This suit, for instance” – she glanced down at the black

tailored suit she had on – “has seen me at my worst. I feel slightly embarrassed by it. It probably feels slightly embarrassed by me. We hold painful memories for each other...I have a yellow evening dress that used to egg me on, and a powder blue one that always tried to hold me back. It’s never forgiven me for making a public exhibition of it and it never will.”

It is typical of Babs’ irresponsibility to outsource disapproval of her actions to her dresses. But at least she has a sense of humour. Babs eventually disposes of her disreputable self by a gentle form of suicide, taking too many sleeping pills. The reader guesses she does so in order to give her daughter permission to leave.

In *Family Roundabout*, women of the younger generation find it difficult to gain individual fulfilment. Helen Fowler has the most satisfactory life because she is unreflective, complacent and willing to embrace the position of conventional matriarch. She marries Max, the eldest son of the *nouveaux-riche* family, the Willoughbys, who own the Bellington paper mill. Her mother-in-law, Mrs Willoughby, is a boss: the name is resonant – will obey.

Mrs Fowler’s other daughters suffer greatly. Anice marries a bookseller, Martin, who earns very little money and she is hard-bitten by jealousy of her sister’s material comforts. Judy Fowler, the youngest daughter, marries a

romance novelist, Arnold Palmer, a much older man by whose relentless ego she is ground into depression. Judy marries him as ‘a way of escape’. She seeks the rose garden of culture but, alas, finds only an ageing rake.

Crompton is withering about romance writers in her novels. Palmer writes sensational potboilers called *Dead Embers* and *Phantom Flames*. He is a deeply unpleasant character, who encourages the young girls who write him fan letters and exploits their naïve adulation. Judy Fowler notes that ‘all Arnold’s heroes are thinly disguised versions of Arnold. I live with the original, so naturally they fail to thrill me.’ Crompton makes a typically tart comment here on bad fiction that lures women into bad relationships.

She is clear, as well, about how and where adult suffering usually begins: in the nursery. Her fictional children are very different from the carefree, uninhibited children of popular advertisement. They suffer intensely. And one of the saddest aspects of their suffering is that adults so often refuse to acknowledge it. When they are not being ignored, children are frequently used by their parents in Crompton’s novels: as hostages in their domestic wars; as fashion accessories; as rungs on the social ladder; as helpmeets; even as characters for their fiction. Often, the daughter who is disliked by her mother because she is unattractive, plump or bookish

becomes a reverse-magnet, frightening away love because of her desperate thirst for affection. The pretty daughter who is blonde, ringleted, and lisps girlishly, however, becomes a perpetual infant, emotionally manipulative and exhausting to all. Reading these adult tales may make you feel differently about Violet Elizabeth Bott in *Just William* and imagine what kind of adult she might become.

Crompton does not give us a solution to the difficulties of being a middle-class woman in the early twentieth century, navigating the limited career options available. As Mrs Fowler says, ‘But then, have any of us got what we wanted from life?’ However, she does suggest that women deserve access to higher education, and that they are inexorably shaped by their girlhood and by how their mothers behave. Her novels examine the tortuous relationship between women and power. And they pack more of a punch than critics have been willing to own.



THE ‘OTTI BERGER RUG’

The endpaper used for *The Oppermanns* has an unusual history. The winter before last there was an exhibiton at Tate Modern of the work of Anni Albers. Naturally we went, partly because we had used one of her textiles as the endpaper for *On the Other Side* by Mathilde Wolff-Monckeberg. Towards the end of the exhibition there was a glass case with fragments of weaving by some of Albers’ contemporaries. I peered at these through the glass and thought, hang on. We have something just like that at home – in the bottom of the dirty linen basket. For forty years we had chucked dirty socks onto a rug that had been put there because actually I had never madly liked its rather sombre brown. But now I went home and retrieved it.

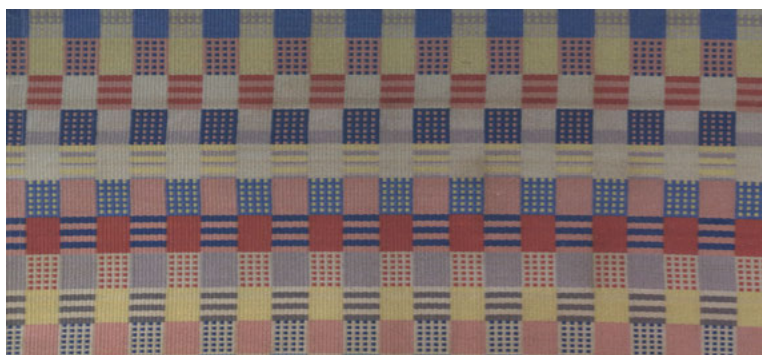
The rug had belonged to my grandfather Richard, who had left Germany in 1936 and gone to live in Oxford. I remembered it being used as a light covering when he had his rest after lunch. He died in 1952 and really all I remember about

him is the rug and his lace-up boots. Why I acquired the rug I have no idea. But there it was.

So when, a few months ago, we were given permission to reprint *The Oppermanns*, I realised it would make the perfect endpaper – if it was genuine. Thus one Tuesday afternoon (they give free advice on the first Tuesday of every month) we went to the V & A. The curator, rather horrified about the dirty linen basket, said there was no way of knowing but had we thought that it could be Otti Berger? We had not! We knew about her of course because we had used one of her textiles in our edition of Etty Hillesum in 1999. (The textile, in four colourways, was manufactured in Holland from 1933-37 and could well have been bought by Etty.) Then, last year, there was an article about Otti Berger in the (always excellent, it’s well worth subscribing) *Decorative Arts Society Journal*, with the textile reproduced below, a 1929 children’s bed-cover by Otti, on the cover. The

article explained why the moth had not devoured the rug over forty years: ‘In June 1932, while still at the Bauhaus, Otti Berger applied for patent rights for her invention of a water-resistant double-woven textile combining layers of artificial horsehair with wool, cotton, or artificial silk.’ Because it was not pure wool, it was not only hard wearing, it was moth resistant!

Otti Berger’s life came to a tragic end. In 1936, the same year as my grandfather Richard, she went to London. Here she lived with the photographer Lucia Moholy at 39 Mecklenburgh Square, the square round the corner from Lamb’s Conduit Street, five residents of which are the subject of Francesca Wade’s recent book *Square Haunting*. However, Otti struggled to find work and friends in London (a horrible sentence to write since there were so many people who would have wanted to help her; but loneliness was the fate of the Jewish refugee, cf. *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*). In 1938 she returned to her family in Zmajevac, in what is nowadays Croatia, and in 1944 she was deported to Auschwitz, where she was murdered. Even Lion Feuchtwanger could not have anticipated her fate or that of six million other Jews. But it makes the ‘Otti Berger rug’ a particularly fitting endpaper for his great novel. *Nicola Beauman*



HOSTAGES TO FORTUNE

Jo Eames writes:

A few months ago I chanced upon a novel set in Deddington in Oxfordshire from 1915-33. Some people in the village must know of it, but no one had mentioned it to me in the 20 years I have lived there.

The book is *Hostages To Fortune* by Elizabeth Cambridge, a pseudonym: was it frowned upon for a doctor's wife to write novels in the 1930s? For that's who she was – Mrs Barbara Hodges, wife of Dr Hodges, whose home and practice were in a house then called The Blocks, now Featherton House.

It is an autobiographical novel about a family established towards the end of WW1. The writing is clear and beautiful, opening with the birth of Catherine's eldest daughter, a scene we rarely witness first-hand in fiction, surprisingly perhaps when it is pivotal to so many lives. Here, it sets the author's agenda, which is to give us a rare and moving longitudinal study of motherhood. The innate differences in personality between the three children are finely-drawn, as is the hard-wired (and timeless) maternal anxiety over how to help each child thrive.

But for a Deddingtonian, the book holds another interest. How have we changed? And how have we not?

Our first glimpse of Deddington is in the winter of 1917. 'Against a close-packed sky of grey cloud...a church tower

stood up like a hill. Square, massive, broad-shouldered, the great bulk of ironstone dominated the cottages round the market place. It stood under its crown of pinnacles like a king.' No change there.

The husband, William, is the son of a previous village doctor. Deddington is familiar and comforting after the horrors of the Royal Army Medical Corps on the Western Front, from which he has just been invalided home. Catherine, though, is from the West Country and struggles to fit in. Slowly, she comes to a sense of the Deddington character: 'The village had a local reputation for independence and self-sufficiency, and had been stigmatised in the past as backward and drunken, a reproach no longer deserved. William, in his boyhood, had once counted 15 public houses. Catherine found the people likeable, once you knew them. They were loyal to their families, thrifty and swift to repay a kindness...The people had a hard, sardonic humour, apt to find the one word which would bite most deeply into the memory, a sane humour, natural to the rational, slow-moving tempo of the village.' Has anything changed?

Yes, actually. 'Children abounded. On Saturdays the market place was rowdy with shrill voices and tackety boots. There was a special season for peg-tops, dreaded by motorists.

Juvenile cricket occupied the square opposite Catherine's house in the summer. In the winter they made slides down the northerly road in front of the police station, or went tobogganing on home-made sleds.'

Sadly, apart from sledging, seasonal games have died out and gangs of children no longer maraud through the village. This change started long before the advent of 'screens'. The author describes cramped cottages with scarcely room for a woman to work, so that children, and many more of them then, were of necessity swept out to play all day. But perhaps the biggest change happened in the 1920s: 'The white roads, cambered for horse traffic, and worn into wheel tracks on each side had vanished altogether. The wide, black, tyre-polished roads, filmed with oil, were changing the face of the country. Trees Catherine and William had grown to love and look for were cut down... cars came through all day long, and all of them left something, more or less unsavoury, on the wayside grass...One by one the woods to which Catherine had taken her children were scattered with litter, sprouted notice boards and went out of bounds.'

As we face the challenge of undoing the damage caused by our reliance on the internal combustion engine and our lazy pollution of the natural world, *Hostages To Fortune* is a poignant account of a lost world.

AUSTRALIA & MRS DALLOWAY

Jane Hyde, who lives in Sydney, writes:

In 1824, Virginia Woolf's paternal grandfather, James Stephen, permanent secretary at the Colonial Office, rescued his uncle John Stephen, a lawyer, from pending bankruptcy in St Kitts by posting him to New South Wales where he was appointed judge of the NSW Supreme Court. John's son Sir Alfred Stephen went further, becoming the colony's Chief Justice, Lieutenant Governor and the father of eighteen children by two wives. His second and seventh sons founded the eminent Sydney law firm Stephen Jacques and Stephen, now part of global behemoth King & Wood Mallesons. In 1896 the seventh son took his family to England. He was the same age as Virginia's father, Sir Leslie Stephen, and his youngest son, Noel, was the same age as Virginia, fourteen. There was nothing Bloomsbury about the Australian branch of the Stephens. If they had artistic sensibilities, they left no trace. Despite this, Noel Stephen would play a vital role in Virginia's supreme literary accomplishment, *Mrs Dalloway*.

Her novel is about two conditions its author knew intimately: the broken heart and the broken mind. Clarissa Dalloway, adored by Peter Walsh, loses her heart in a flash to the electrically attractive Sally Seton

whose kiss, thirty years after it was bestowed, is still 'the most exquisite moment of her whole life....' She refuses Peter, whose tearful ardour does not compare, and marries Richard, 'a thoroughly good sort', by default, and makes a materially comfortable, sexless life for herself – although she does have one daughter, Elizabeth – as a political wife and hostess of grand parties. For Peter, 'it was impossible that he should suffer again as Clarissa had made him suffer' when he encounters her thirty years later at her grand summer party. But neither knows suffering like Septimus Warren Smith, veteran of the Great War, a man fulfilled in love but whose broken mind proves lethal.

The novel is sublimely modern in tone and style, reflecting a revelation that came to Woolf in 1908 in Italy in which 'some kind of whole made of shivering fragments' captures 'the flight of the mind.' Set in a singular part of London on a single day and progressing to an ordained and discordant climax, a party and a death, it also unifies time, place and action in the classic tradition.

Virginia Woolf's sense of place was acute. *Mrs Dalloway* is set in the very particular part of London where she took pleasure in walking after she and her husband moved back to the capital in 1924. And she had, too, an acute appreciation of time. When she was thirteen, she

lost her mother Julia all of a sudden to influenza. Her half-sister Stella Duckworth stepped up, helped by her friend Kitty Lushington. In addition to this catastrophic change to her world, Virginia had to cope with her oblivious father, Sir Leslie Stephen, absorbed in his own grief, her sexually abusive 27 year-old half-brother George Duckworth, and the regular presence in the house of another of Stella's friends, Madge Symonds, on whom Virginia developed a passionate crush. The day of her mother's death became an ineradicable point in time, the day when trauma came to stay. *Mrs Dalloway* takes place in May 1923 and was published in May 1925, thirty years to the month after Julia's death. Woolf's next novel, *To the Lighthouse*, was published two years later on the exact date of Julia's death, 5th May.

Woolf's characters drive the narrative and in the English Whig tradition – Woolf's heritage to her bones – they reflect the belief that the civilised individual is the acme of civilisation itself. Intensely wrought evocations of highly individualised characters came easily to Woolf for they flourished in her own milieu, described by Leonard Woolf as 'the upper levels of the professional middle class and county families, interpenetrated to a certain extent by the aristocracy' from which Bloomsbury diverted as a sort of

branch for renegades in around 1904. It was a milieu free of subalterns. This was a term co-opted from the military to refer to people deemed by the brass to be second lower rank by reason of their race, class, gender and so forth. Bloomsbury was concerned about oppressed classes and peoples but it did not engage personally with subaltern individuals to the point of welcoming them as peers and friends, unless, like Leonard Woolf, they were exceptionally bright and had the imprimatur of Cambridge or who, like Katherine Mansfield, a colonial, were so hugely talented that even Virginia was in awe. Lawrence and Joyce had vivid models for characters across the spectrum because their lives had social compass. Woolf was not so fortunate. Her world was subaltern-free, unless one counts cooks and maids. She never went to school.

Virginia's models for her characters in *Mrs Dalloway* are well documented but for the purpose of this piece it is as well to note that only a couple were subalterns, with the rest drawn from Woolf's world and based on people she knew well. Clarissa was Kitty Lushington, Stella's helpmate as stand-in mother. '[Clarissa is] almost Kitty verbatim', she wrote to her sister. Like the Stephens, the Lushingtons had deep roots in Whig liberalism. Kitty broke ranks by marrying the editor of the Tory journal *The National Review*. Famous for her London parties, in 1922 she fell over the banisters to her

death while hosting a party at her grand house in Cromwell Road. Virginia speculated suicide. What a plunge! Clarissa remarks, at the beginning of the novel, as if in premonition of the Kitty-like fate Woolf had considered for her but which she deflected to the war veteran Septimus Warren Smith. (Clarissa's expression, what a lark! was also one of Kitty's.)

Madge Symonds pops up as Sally Seton, the girl of the unforgettable kiss, who reappears at Clarissa's party as the coarse Lady Rossiter, wife of a cotton magnate and mother of five sons. Richard Dalloway is a composite of the sort of man – decent, bluff, reliable, with scant imagination and no flair – who Woolf loathed because women like Madge Symonds and Stella Duckworth inexplicably married them. In Peter Walsh, a man of imagination, there is something of Leonard Woolf. Then there are the subalterns. In Doris Kilman, Elizabeth Dalloway's fan and mentor, Woolf did have a model, a woman peripheral to her world and who, in her reinvention, is less a character than a grotesque in a raincoat, an object for Clarissa to loathe. Septimus Warren Smith, the street-wandering counterpoint to Clarissa in class and suffering, had a thousand models, thanks to the Great War, but the only veterans and victims Woolf knew personally were of her kind (she once swam naked with Rupert Brooke) – although there was of course Noel Stephens, her distant cousin from Australia.

The Australian Stephens remained in constant touch with the British Stephens. Virginia must have met or at least heard about the family that arrived to stay in 1896 and what they were up to first, because the similarity of the name Septimus Warren Smith to that of Noel's father, Septimus Alfred Stephen, is too striking to be a coincidence; and second, because Noel's service in the Great War left him with an intractable case of shell shock. It is at first puzzling that Woolf should transform him into an Englishman of the lower middle class in *Mrs Dalloway* but when one reflects that colonials were figures of rascality and mirth in the Mother Country of those days, the task of creating a believably tragic character based on a deracinated Australian would have been a challenge, even for Virginia.

As to Noel Stephen: in the 1930s he was returned to Australia by his three Anglicised siblings, like a reverse remittance man, to the care of his brother Sir Colin Stephen, race-horse owner, polo player, board member, and senior partner at Stephen, Jacques and Stephen. He died in 1937, inmate of the Kenmore Asylum in Goulburn, dumping ground for many a Sydney family embarrassed by unhinged relatives. He was privately cremated. Sir Colin Stephen, who died the same year, was mourned publicly at a huge funeral at St Andrew's Cathedral.

We still hope to have the Mrs Dalloway walk on June 17th at 11.

'GRIEF' DOROTHY WHIPPLE

After his death they went away together: his mother and the girl he was to have married. Before the accident, while Rupert was alive, Clare had not much liked Rupert's mother and had felt that Rupert's mother did not much like her. But now they clung together. They could bear no company but each other's.

They arrived, at random, at a little hotel in the country.

'Will this do?' Clare asked drawing up the car.

'As well as anywhere, I suppose,' said Mrs Parker.

They asked to be given bedrooms side by side.

'Let me be near you,' begged Clare.

They unpacked their sad black clothes and on each dressing-table each placed a framed photograph of Rupert, smiling for ever over his folded arms.

When Clare came down from her unpacking, she felt everything was too bright. The sun that poured in at the window, the chintz in the hotel lounge, the lilac and laburnum and pink and white May in the garden and above all, the shallow, shining river that ran before the door, too bright; too bright to be borne.

There were people in the lounge, laughing and drinking tea. They looked queer, she thought; so careless. She shrank away from them. She felt isolated, shut up in some inner silence, and when she saw Mrs

Parker coming down the stairs, she hurried towards her with relief. Mrs Parker took her arm and with a glance of dislike at the occupants of the lounge, said:

'We'll go into the garden.'

They wandered, the middle-aged woman and the young girl, slowly, aimlessly, about the paths.

They talked of Rupert mostly as a son. Apart from her own reluctance to talk of him as her lover to his mother, she felt Mrs Parker did not want to consider him in that way.

Light and warmth withdrew from the garden. Wraiths of mist rose from the river and curled about their skirts.

'We'd better go in, I suppose,' said Mrs Parker.

They went into the hotel dining room and shook their heads at the proffered dishes. The waiters withdrew, respectful of their grief, and the few people at the other tables looked at them compassionately.

They went early to bed, but Clare wished they had not. She could not sleep. She had not been able to sleep since the accident, but here in the hotel sleeplessness was more unbearable than ever. In the first hours of the morning she stole out into the corridor to look for a light under Mrs Parker's door as a lost mariner looks for the hoped-for harbour lights at sea. Mrs Parker's light was burning and, with relief, Clare knocked

and went in.

'Can't you sleep either?' she asked.

'Of course I can't,' said Mrs Parker. 'But then I don't expect to.'

'No,' said Clare, accepting it. 'But the nights are so long.'

'We'd better get some knitting to do,' said Mrs Parker.

The next day they motored to the nearest town and laid in a quantity of black wool, needles and patterns, and in the evening after dinner they cast on stitches for jumpers. Clare went to bed feeling a little armed against the torment of the night.

Their beds were on either side of an adjoining wall and from time to time Mrs Parker knocked on the wall, softly so as not to waken anyone else, but distinctly enough to be heard by Clare. Clare, feeling comforted, knocked in answer. And thus they knitted and knocked, keeping vigil over their grief for Rupert and in the morning the jumpers were longer.

'You did do a lot, dear,' said Mrs Parker, smiling faint approval.

'Not so much as you,' said Clare.

'Well, perhaps I'm a faster knitter,' said Mrs Parker.

They spent their days and nights in this way; avoiding people, walking together in the garden, sitting on a seat by the river, talking of Rupert, Mrs Parker's son, and knitting and knocking through the night.

The first jumpers were finished and the second begun.

As Clare sat in the hotel lounge, casting on, she was startled to find herself wishing she might introduce a little white about the neck, because unrelieved black did not suit her. She struck the thought away from her at once, as if it had been a serpent. Fancy thinking of her appearance when Rupert was dead! She was horrified.

But the serpent showed its head again. By the time she came to wear this jumper, she would be in half-mourning and entitled to wear a little white. She struck again and this time she killed the serpent outright.

Hot with shame, she cast on the stitches for an all-black jumper as before.

The summer visitors began to arrive at the hotel. Mrs Parker resented them, but Clare could not help feeling that it was quite pleasant to see them about. Mrs Parker would not speak to them; she only glanced at them with distaste from time to time as she sat in her corner of the lounge, knitting.

When she was alone, Clare said 'Good morning' and 'Good evening' and 'Isn't it a lovely day?' But if she was with Mrs Parker she only smiled at them.

In the country air and the increasing warmth of the sun, Clare began to revive in spite of herself. Colour came back to her cheeks; youth and health triumphed over her black clothes. She was ashamed and hoped Mrs Parker would not notice, although Mrs Parker

seemed to notice everything.

Clare was also dismayed to find herself hungry. She had to restrain her appetite at meals and refuse what Mrs Parker refused. It was very difficult, and if she managed to get tea by herself while Mrs Parker was lying down, she ate a great deal so as to be more seemly in Mrs Parker's company at dinner.

But her greatest trouble became the effort she had to make to keep herself awake at night to knit and answer Mrs Parker's knocks on the wall. Clare was tortured now, not by a desire to sleep, but by a desire to keep awake. Mrs Parker's last knock came towards half-past one in the morning and it was terrible now to keep awake until that time. Knitting, where it used to soothe, now went further and made her dreadfully drowsy. She would have given it up for something more likely to keep sleep at bay, such as the reading of thrillers; but she could not, because of having to show her jumper to Mrs Parker in the morning.

When she next went into the town to get more wool, she bought a little alarm clock to put under her pillow. She set it to wake her at one o'clock so that she could wait for and answer Mrs Parker's knock. When that was done, she set the clock again to make her wake early so that she could make up arrears in her knitting. By half-past six, she was up in bed, knitting as fast as she could to keep up with Mrs Parker, to keep up with grief.

All the same, it seemed to her

that Mrs Parker, in the mornings, examined her jumper with suspicion.

'Is it a difficult pattern?' she inquired. 'You don't seem to be getting on as fast as before.'

'No, I don't, do I?' said Clare.

One evening some visitors waylaid her as she was on her way to join Mrs. Parker, already installed in her corner. The visitors insisted that Clare should go down to the river with them and she spent quite a long time there, laughing and talking. When she returned she felt guilty. 'Those people seem very nice,' she ventured. Mrs Parker did not take up the subject, but in a little while she sighed and said: 'My poor Rupert.' Clare hung her head over her black jumper.

That very night, the thing she had long dreaded came to pass. The alarm failed to wake her at half-past one. She slept through the night, was late for breakfast, and had no addition, not a single row, to show to her jumper.

'I thought you said you couldn't sleep,' Mrs Parker challenged her accusingly. Clare blushed. 'I don't know how it was,' she stammered, 'But I – I had quite a good night last night.'

Mrs Parker gave her a long, cold look.

'I think it's time we went home,' she said. So later in the day, they went.

'Grief' appeared in The Editor Regrets (stories which a magazine editor had rejected) in 1937 and has not been reprinted since.

FINALLY

‘*The Fortnight in September* by RC Sherriff is just about the most uplifting, life-affirming novel I can think of right now’ [wrote Kazuo Ishiguro in the *Observer*’s Lockdown Culture: Novelists pick books to inspire, uplift and offer escape]. ‘Published in 1931, this is an exquisitely subtle account of an ordinary lower-middle class family from south London, preparing for, travelling to, then enjoying their modest summer holiday in Bognor Regis. At one level totally undramatic, Sherriff magically re-calibrates our norms of what is and isn’t wonderfully exciting till we become utterly tuned in to the rise and fall of this family’s emotions. Sherriff never patronises, nor does he attempt to exalt these people beyond what they are. He respects them for all the right reasons – for their instinctive decency towards one another and to those they encounter, and for the unselfconscious – perhaps unconscious – way they function as a happy family, despite their individual insecurities and frustrations. The Great English Seaside Holiday in its heyday, and the beautiful dignity to be found in everyday living, have rarely been captured more delicately.’

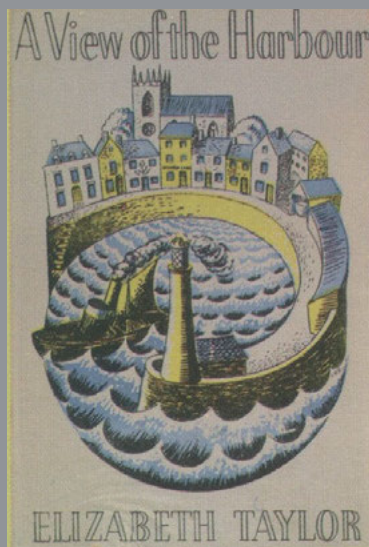
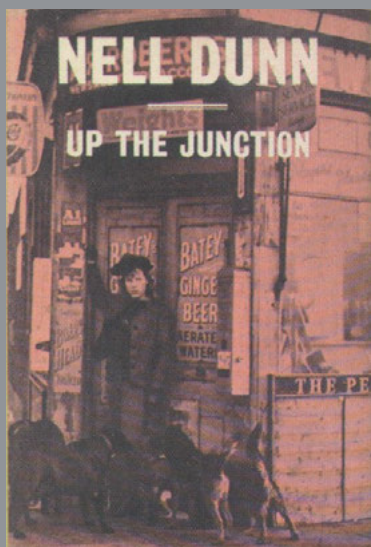
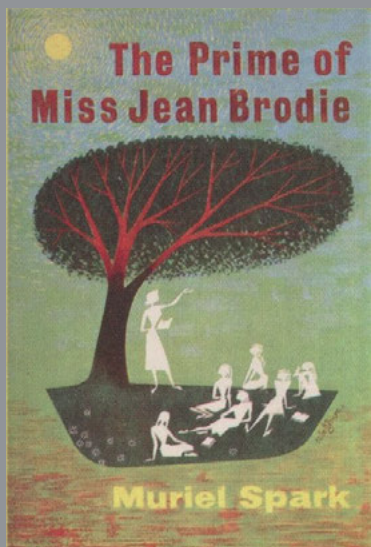
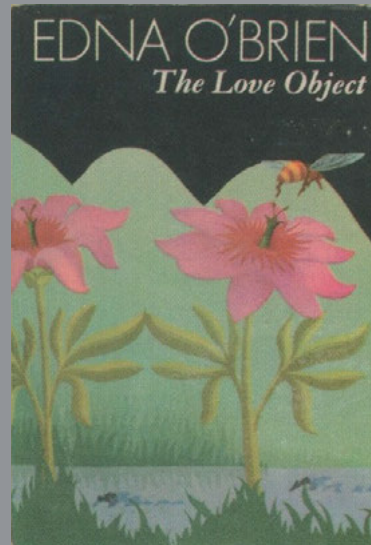
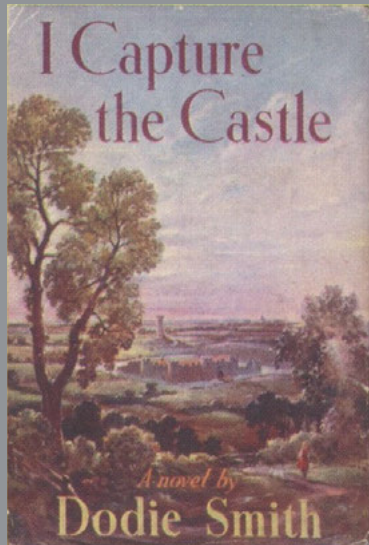
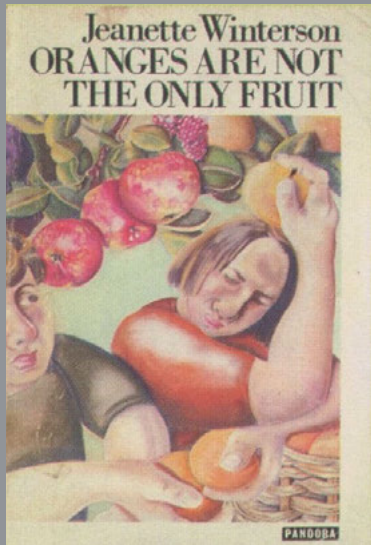
[And those who can cope with a catastrophe novel at the moment should read RC Sherriff’s *The Hopkins Manuscript* PB No. 57 about the moon crashing into the earth.]

Professor Charles Lock wrote to us about *Expiation*: ‘What an amazing novel to have discovered, surely Elizabeth von Arnim’s most serious and substantial. I thought the opening wonderfully held the reader to the explanation “She will know why”. Followed by a series of interviews that made me cringe with recognition of self and others: I was reminded of Trollope’s *Last Chronicle*, his finest work, and notably of Bishop Proudie and his wife. In many ways *Expiation* is reminiscent of Dorothy Whipple, especially in the family and its gathering round the matriarch. And I admired what is beyond Whipple’s craft: the parodic sending up of the coincidences that make each of the scenes into a scene: “to be present at the best family crisis anybody could possibly wish for”.’

Life is in one sense so eventful and in another so uneventful that it is hard to know how to conclude this *Biannually*. If, as hoped, you receive it around May 21st, please get an update from the *Post* and *Letter*. But as of now (mid-April) we *hope* to publish the two new books on May 21st; we *hope* that we can send them out to people who order them; we *hope* that we might return to a normal life in the shop after June 1st. But of course the Post Office has to return to normal service, so does our distributor (which stores our books) etc. It’s all to play for; and btw no events are planned except we *hope* to do the *Mrs Dalloway* walk in June.

‘The Book Signing’ below is a collage, the work of Mollie Elstob (1918-2006). Overleaf: first editions of novels by women writers sold by Shapero Rare Books.





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