



The Persephone Biannually

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Spencer Frederick Gore 1878-1914
Interior c. 1905-14



OUR BOOKS FOR SPRING/SUMMER 2023

E (Edward) M (Morgan) Forster, author of PB No. 146 ***Two Cheers for Democracy: a Selection*** (drawn from the edition published in 1951), was, in the opinion of the writer of this ***Biannually***, the greatest novelist of the twentieth century. He was the author of five novels published in his lifetime and a sixth (*Maurice*) published posthumously. Naturally, many Persephone readers would rate other novelists, Virginia Woolf perhaps or James Joyce, more highly, and if one included European writers then Proust would be the outstanding novelist. But for us it's Forster.

His novels were written between 1905 (*Where Angels Fear to Tread*) and 1924 (*A Passage to India*), which is the year he was 45. For the second half of his life, the next 45 years, he wrote two biographies, a libretto, short stories, book reviews, literary criticism – and essays. These pieces were often about writers he admired, but many of them were about moral values, about what he believed. (So those Persephone readers who write telling us to keep off politics, please stop reading now.)

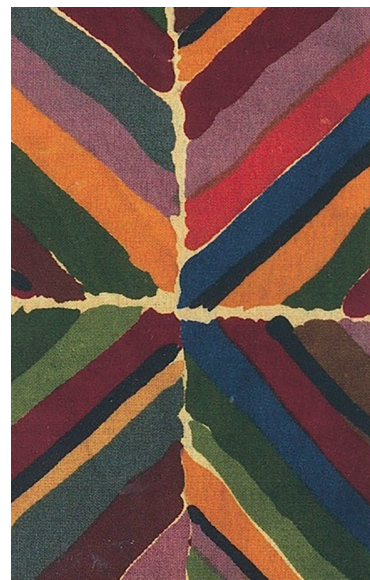
Forster, for us, is all about values, about civilised values.

And it is no exaggeration to say that *Howards End* (1910) anticipated Brexit 110 years before the advent of that tragedy, the words on the frontispiece, 'Only Connect', referring to the Wilcoxes (who would have been Leavers) and the Schlegels (Remainers) 'connecting'. *A Passage to India*, too, was about the disaster of Empire and anticipated the agony of its dismantling: the failure of the conquerors and the conquered to connect. When Forster wrote, 'though we cannot expect to love one another, we must learn to put up with one another', he wished vehemently and desperately that the British and the Indians would at least put up with one another. But the pessimistic ending of *A Passage to India* defines his opinion that this would be unlikely to happen.

We were so pleased when the writer of the preface to ***Two Cheers***, Henry Mance of the *Financial Times*, wrote: 'More than seven decades after the essays were written, they chime with me – indeed, they console me.' And he goes on: 'His writing echoes partly because it is prescient. How wonderful to read his dismissal of "the ridiculous doctrine of racial purity" and his statement that "Europe is mongrel for ever, and so is America".'



'Coppice', a cotton furnishing fabric designed by Mary White (1930-2020) for Heal's in the early 1950s. In a private collection. Forster owned a small wood called Piney Copse; he left it to the National Trust.



'Kazak', a Collier Campbell furnishing fabric designed in 1973 and manufactured in 1977. An armchair covered in 'Kazak' is sometimes in the Persephone window.

Forster calls out the evil of anti-Semitism, and, on the question of whether Britain would be overtaken by it, writes: “I don’t think we’ll go savage – but we will go silly.” Yes! That is what has happened in our own time.’

But when Henry Mance refers to calling out the evil of anti-Semitism, this is how Forster does it: he tells us that he was at two schools, in the first it was humiliating to have a sister and in the second to have a mother. ‘Those preparatory schools prepared me for life better than I realised, for having passed through two imbecile societies, a sister-conscious and a mother-conscious, I am now invited to enter a third. I am asked to consider whether the people I meet and talk about are or are not Jews... What revolting tosh! Neither science nor religion nor common sense has one word to say in its favour.’ When one looks up the list of first publication dates and sees that this essay, called ‘Jew-Consciousness’, was first published in January 1939, it becomes even more moving.

‘**T**hese essays, so informed with intelligent humanity, make one wonder what the virtues are which our age needs most... Tolerance, good temper and sympathy – these are what we need,’ wrote the reviewer in the *Observer* in 1951. He (Edwin Muir) added sadly, ‘but tolerance, good temper and concentration

camp do not go together.’ Yet he began a new paragraph and wrote: ‘To give an idea of the extraordinary charm of these essays is impossible. It seems to reside in a curious inconstancy or inconsistency. Mr Forster begins his operation upon us by bringing a tolerant and fair judgment to everything he touches, a balance; then the balance overturns, he is seized with a deeper apprehension, and throws everything over, for here is the real truth.’ That is why Forster’s style is so seductive and so unusual: he is thinking aloud and is not afraid to be distracted.

And through it all he treats the reader as his equal.

As well as having a uniquely marvellous prose style, and being funny and empathetic and perceptive, Forster was a humanist. He defined this as having ‘curiosity, a free mind, belief in good taste, and belief in the human race.’ Because he was something of a national treasure (not that this phrase was used then), when he broadcast on the radio people listened and noticed. Thus many of the 1939 and 1940 pieces were first read on the BBC Home Service and



had a great influence. His most famous utterance was: ‘If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country’, and what a provocative utterance it was! Yet it is simply an exaggerated echo of Isabella Thorpe’s remark in *Northanger Abbey*: ‘There is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends. I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is not my nature.’ So when Forster mentions why democracy deserves two cheers not three, he adds: ‘Only Love the Beloved Republic deserves that.’

Several of the essays are written in response to ‘a low dishonest decade’ (Auden in the poem on this page) yet they are curiously un-dated, if not topical – as though humanity never changes. So we read in ‘What I Believe’ (1938): ‘Democracy has another merit. It allows criticism, and if there is not public criticism there are bound to be hushed-up scandals. That is why I believe in Parliament. Parliament is often sneered at because it is a Talking Shop. I believe in it because it is a talking shop... Occasionally a well-meaning public official starts losing his head in the cause of efficiency, and thinks himself God Almighty. Such officials are particularly frequent in the Home Office. Well, there will be questions about them in Parliament sooner or later, and then they will have to mind their

steps.’ It is fairly unbelievable that the Home Office has been a by-word for thinking itself God Almighty for, now, 85 years. And counting.

The originally 69 essays in *Two Cheers for Democracy* – we have cut them down to 25 – date from 1925 to 1951 (an earlier volume of essays, *Abinger Harvest*, appeared in 1936). Hence the word Selection in the subtitle: we have made our own selection because we felt that some of the essays are not particularly interesting nowadays. Our intention is to get Persephone readers to read ‘Culture and Freedom’ or ‘What I Believe’ – and not to get bogged down in essays on *Julius Caesar* or William Arnold or Forrest Reid.

Henry Mance concludes: ‘One of my favourite phrases in *Two Cheers* is that we “have, in this age of unrest, to ferry much old stuff across the river”. Whatever horrors, whatever mistakes we encounter, we don’t just draw a line and write off the past. We are only here for a short while. We have a cultural responsibility. Forster concluded of Woolf: “It is as a novelist that she will be judged. But the rest of her work must be remembered.” The same is, of course, true of Forster himself. His essays speak to us because they invite us to be ourselves. We must ferry them across the river.’

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of
the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour
of death
Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Exiled Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;
Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven
away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.

*Extract from ‘September 1 1939’ by
WH Auden, reproduced by kind
permission of Curtis Brown Ltd.*

People often ask how we choose our books and this one we found because the Welsh writer Siân James died, the *Guardian* ran an obituary of her, and we liked the sound of her work. So we read all twelve novels and *One Afternoon* (1975), her first, was our favourite. We partly admire it because it is something unusual for us – a love story. Yes, yes, lots of our books are about love (*Someone at a Distance*, *Patience*, *Heat Lightning* are in a Forsterian/Dorothy Canfield Fisher sense all about love) but we have never managed an actual love story, a book which could be a Mills and Boon in plot yet is far, far more than that. We are reminded of our dear friend Eva Ibbotson, whose books we recommend all the time and who told us about her mother Anna Gmeyner’s novel *Manja*, PB No. 39, saying that she wrote for ‘highly intelligent women who have the flu.’

This certainly applies to Siân James’s novel *One Afternoon*, for in one sense it is a comfortable, easy read (flu). But this is where the intelligence comes in: the writing is phenomenal – perceptive and clever, marvellous about children, and path-breaking (when the heroine’s lover leaves her and she is pregnant, she has no qualms about bringing up a new baby as well as the three children she already has by her first husband). Our proof-reader wrote:

‘A woman’s determined belief in the societal changes of the decade, the moral directness, and the domestic detail – I kept excitedly writing “1970s!” in the margins – all lightly held in a romance. Unusual, and I enjoyed it very much.’

And there are incidental beauties about the book. For example, Siân James’s husband was the actor Emrys James (1928-89) who spent much of his career at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford, not far from where they lived, so that RSC company members often came over at weekends; with the result that there are some terrific pen portraits of actors.

However, these are details. Mostly the book is terrific about children, about love and about life.

Siân James (née Davis) was 45 when she published her first novel. Born in Coed-y-bryn in Ceredigion in 1930, she went to the University of Wales at Aberystwyth; she very much considered herself a Welsh writer even though for much of her life she lived in Worcestershire, where she and her husband brought up four children. Between 1975 and 2005, she published a dozen novels, short stories and a memoir. And she won *The Yorkshire Post Book Award* for a first book.



Susan Hill wrote in *The Times* in May 1975: ‘Siân James’s first novel *One Afternoon* is... a quiet, gentle book, full of insight and truth, and she writes with grace, as to the manner born, restraining any impulses to Celtic overflow admirably (Mrs James is Welsh and her uncle was an Arch Druid). Her heroine is not particularly unusual, nor her story remarkable. Young women like Anna, intelligent and educated, sensitive and aware up to a certain point and no further, have narrated many novels in recent years. She... is altogether unprepared, for Charlie, a spirited, footloose, unpredictable actor with whom she falls recklessly in love. Her emotions catch up with her unawares. She never knew herself, and the book is about her late awakening and the process of self-discovery. It is about passion, but not simply that; about the many varieties and degrees of human love, filial, maternal, spiritual, sexual, friendly. It is, above all, about that pre-eminently difficult achievement, *self-love*. I learnt a great deal from this lovingly created, carefully worked-out book, and greatly admired the control, elegance and occasional moments of real beauty of Siân

James’s prose. The two last, short paragraphs moved me to tears.’

The preface to *One Afternoon* is by Emma Schofield, the editor of the *Welsh Arts Review*. She writes: ‘*One Afternoon* may be a love story, but it is also a story of love that has all the odds stacked against it, of a relationship which is complex and bound up



Four Seasons design for Cornhill Magazine, May 1932 by Eric Ravilious.

in the rapidly changing social landscape of the time... James is insightful in her depiction not only of the passion which exists between Anna and Charlie, but in her presentation of the way in which Anna commits herself physically and emotionally. Early

on, she compares her first night with Charlie to the sensations she experienced in childbirth, describing how her body was “caught up again in powerful and splendid rhythms until its deliverance.” There is an energy and rawness to the writing here which is remarkable both in its honesty and within its social context... Thus the reality of social and political issues

is everywhere in her fiction ... In fact, what ultimately makes *One Afternoon* truly radical is this resolute belief that societal change can, and should, happen.’ Emma Schofield concludes by commending the ‘bravery of the author in writing the book and the skill with which she is able to write so subtly, yet so politically.’

So we hope Persephone readers will be intrigued by our two books this spring both being political and yet having little to do with ‘politics’. This is what we want a Persephone book to be: intensely readable

and unputdownable but about many, many things, telling the reader about life, getting them thinking, pointing out things of which they had perhaps not been aware; and, in the end, being far, far more than the sum of its parts.

OUR READERS WRITE

‘**T**he *Fortnight in September* is a book of simple pleasure that allows us to revel in the undramatic and the tingle of discovering tiny treasures. R C Sherriff’s 1936 novel *Greengates* is similarly deceptively simple and perhaps even better. The narrative revolves around the retirement from the City of a certain Mr Baldwin, and Sherriff is certainly adept at capturing something of the conflicting feelings of relief and frustration that retirement can bring. More than this though the book is about the modernisation of 1930s England, the encroachment of the Town on the Country through the expansion of road networks and ribbon development... From the insularity of Mr Baldwin’s initial retirement, the cast expands as he and his wife leave their traditional terrace and Move Up In The World to their newly built house. Naturally, the metaphorical garden is not all roses and it is amongst the characters in the New Estate that we find at least one thoroughly unpleasant man whose Colonial views, language and behaviour will be repellent to any intelligent reader in the 21st century. It is to Persephone Books’ great credit however that there is no attempt to edit this out, and indeed there is not even a ‘disclaimer’ of the type that the British Library have taken to printing in the frontispiece to their ‘Crime Classic’ series. It strikes me, as perhaps it does

the folks at Persephone, that anyone reading these books is going to be informed enough to understand something of the original context and that if they are not then perhaps they may approach such things as Learning Opportunities...’
unpopular.wordpress.com

‘I enjoyed *The Deepening Stream* enormously. There are images that I think will stay with me for a while, Dorothy Canfield Fisher’s writing is very visual – almost cinematic. Set in the years before and during WWI in the US and France, Matey Gilbert and her two siblings are scarred by their parents’ fractious marriage. Matey is saved by the love of her dog Sumner. Against all odds, perhaps, she marries very happily. She and her husband Adrian are deeply distressed at the reports coming out of France as the war gets underway. They feel totally unequal to carrying on with their comfortable lives at home, and taking their two young children with them they set sail for France... Matey is a force of nature throughout the war, helping those no longer able to help themselves, she is indefatigable in her determination to save people (and especially children) from the poverty, trauma and starvation that the war has brought to so many ordinary, previously comfortable French citizens. The novel is a brilliant example

of WWI literature to sit alongside such books as *Testament of Youth*.’
Heaven Ali

‘**W**hat a remarkable novel-in-four parts *The Deepening Stream* is. I think a small girl’s view of her parents and siblings is unusual, developing into a suspicion of her brother’s values and eventually meditations on Quakerism and family. It is difficult to keep up the intensity of the first part, but sections of the WWI part are extraordinary. For me there wasn’t a paragraph too many in its 603 pages.’
NR, Cambridge

‘I finished reading *The Other Day* with much sadness that there will be no more works by Dorothy Whipple coming my way, along with much pleasure at having all her novels and biographies on my shelf and being able to re-read them whenever I like (which is quite often). My mother often remarked that *High Wages* was her favourite novel and that Dorothy Whipple was her favourite author but that copies of her books seemed to have vanished. I was thrilled when I discovered Persephone, and even more thrilled to find that you publish *High Wages*, which I love as much as my mother did. Thank you so much for making Dorothy Whipple’s work available.’
AF, Mold, N Wales

‘MEWOW, MEWOW’

George Ardrey, who had just been released from the hospital after an operation that had aroused some mild technical interest in medical circles, was sitting in the sunshine in the little garden behind his house. He was feeling languid and transparent, only feebly attached to the living world, and his greeting to his seven-year-old daughter, Sally, was limited to a rather tremulous wave.

‘Dear Daddy!’ she cried and ran from the doorway to his deck chair and, stooping prettily, kissed his pale cheek. ‘Goodness, I love you so!’

‘You and your winning ways,’ he said, rumpling her yellow hair. ‘Only seven. I hate to think what you’ll be like in another ten years.’

Pulling a cushion from one of the other chairs, she sat down at his feet and opened a tattered book with a bright oilcloth cover.

‘Do you want to hear how I can read now?’ she asked. ‘I read almost all the time these days, when people are so good as to not keep bothering me.’

‘Do you?’ he said admiringly. ‘All right, go ahead.’

She smoothed the book out on her knees.

‘“The Three Little Kittens”’ she said. ‘That’s the name of this story.’

‘Oh,’ he said, ‘that old thing.’

‘Please, Daddy,’ she said. ‘I’m reading.’

He begged her pardon and she bent over her book, following the

text with her finger.

*Three little kittens,
They lost their mittens,
So they began to cry.
‘Mewow, mewow, mewow.’*

‘In my day we used to call that “meyow”’ he told her, thinking what a sunny child she was, and how pretty and suitable was her devotion to him in his convalescence.

‘No,’ she said coldly. ‘M-i-a-o-u. “Mewow.” That’s what I call it.’

‘All right,’ he said. ‘New men, new methods.

I expect it’s “meow” as much as anything else. You go right ahead.’

She seemed, however, to have lost her interest in literature.

‘Our pussy has been behaving perfectly disgustingly lately,’ she remarked, frowning. ‘Not William. The new little pussy. I expect you hardly know her, because we only got her a couple of months ago, while you were away.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘I’ve seen her hanging around, but I don’t really know her. What you think is the matter with her?’

‘Well,’ she said, ‘she seems to keep thinking she has to climb up over that fence and marry somebody. I expect she’s dotty or something.’

‘She must be,’ he agreed.

‘It’s perfectly disgusting,’ she said. ‘She keeps going round arching herself up and making some kind of noises.’

‘Mewow?’ he suggested.

‘No,’ she said. ‘These are hardly cat noises at all. It’s more like some kind of shouting.’ It was clear that she found this description inadequate and she shook her head. ‘Anyway, it’s perfectly disgusting. I don’t see how I’m going to stand much more of it.’

‘I don’t suppose you can,’ he said sympathetically. ‘Perhaps it would be better just to let her get married. That ought to stop all this shouting.’

‘Daddy,’ she cried, ‘don’t be silly! She can’t just marry *any* old cat. Goodness, she cost a lot of money.’

‘Oh,’ he said. ‘Well, maybe she could marry William. He ought to be good enough for her. He cost a lot of money too, once.’

His daughter was, he perceived immediately, rather better informed than he had expected.

‘I asked Mummy about that,’ she said, ‘and she says William is too old to be much interested in getting married and anyway he had some kind of operation once, so he can’t have any children. I don’t think I quite understand about that, Daddy.’

‘It’s William’s problem,’ he said. ‘Don’t bother your pretty head. Go on, read some more.’

She didn’t, however, go back to the book. Watching her extraordinarily expressive face, he was almost prepared for her next remark.

‘Daddy,’ she began, ‘when you had *your* operation –’

‘No,’ he told her firmly. It wasn’t like William’s at all. I can have all the children I want. Dozens of them.’

‘Oh,’ she said, though whether with relief or disappointment he found it hard to tell. She was silent for a moment, considering him, and when she spoke again, her voice seemed to hold nothing but the tenderest concern.

‘Goodness,’ she said, ‘you’re terribly thin, aren’t you, Daddy? I wouldn’t be surprised if you’re the thinnest person I ever met in my life.’

‘Well, I was pretty ill,’ he said. ‘It was quite a serious operation, you know, Sally.’

‘I know,’ she said. ‘They even had to operate for one of your ribs.’

He was a little surprised, since he had agreed with his wife that it might be wiser to suppress this clinical detail. Children, they felt, were often tempted to amplify the picturesque.

‘Who told you that, Sally?’ he asked.

‘Nobody exactly *told* me,’ she said. ‘I just heard.’

‘Just heard?’

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘We were in the Park and I heard Miss Rumsey talking about it to some other lady.’

Miss Rumsey was a friend of his wife’s, who occasionally volunteered to take charge of Sally after school in the afternoon. Though convenient in this respect, she was, in his

low opinion, one of the really exasperating women in the world – a creature of grotesque refinement and boundless malice. Her own feeling for him, he was aware, was scarcely more complimentary.

‘Oh,’ he said. ‘Well, yes, that’s right. They did have to take out one of my ribs. You needn’t

worry. though. I’ve got plenty left. I’m not going to cave in or anything.’

‘No, Daddy,’ she said, but her mind was clearly on something beyond this ghastly possibility.

‘Daddy,’ she said at length, ‘is it true what Miss Rumsey said about why they didn’t think they’d better let you have your rib back?’



‘Goodness,’ she said, ‘you’re terribly thin, aren’t you, Daddy?’

By Ronald Searle (1920-2011) who had only been back from being a POW in Singapore for two years (and was just starting to draw St Trinian’s)

There was, he felt sure, some meaning in this arrangement of words, as, if you just put your mind on it, there was in most of his daughter's conversation. For the moment, however, it eluded him.

'I'm sorry,' he said, 'but that one is too much for me. Try it again. They didn't think they'd better what?'

'I'm only telling you what Miss Rumsey *said*,' she told him a little impatiently.

'I know. But let's try and get it a little simpler.'

'Yes, Daddy. Well, she told this other lady she heard you wanted it back, like a souvenir...'

'Why, that's —' he began, but stopped. It might be best, he decided, to learn how base Miss Rumsey was really capable of being. 'Go on, Sally.'

'Like for a souvenir,' she repeated. 'I expect to put in a bottle or something.' She shook her head. 'I should think that would look awfully silly,' she said. 'Just an old bone.'

'It certainly would. Is that all Miss Rumsey said?'

'Oh, no,' she assured him. 'She told this other lady that the doctors wouldn't let you have it because —' She paused and looked at him doubtfully. 'I don't really *believe* this part, Daddy. I'm only telling you what Miss Rumsey said.'

'Well,' he said. 'What *did* she say?'

'She said they didn't think you'd better have it because —'

she stopped again, but clearly there was no help for it, and she plunged on rather desperately — 'well, because they were afraid you'd start trying to turn it into a lady. Probably a blonde lady, Miss Rumsey said.'

His silence seemed to disconcert her slightly and she gave what was generally described as her society laugh.

'Of course that's perfectly

absurd,' she said airily, and then, since her father still seemed preoccupied, she gave her attention once more to the oilcloth book. 'Goodness,' she said, 'I better get on with this story. I certainly didn't come out here to tire you out with all that old Park gossip.'

By the New Yorker writer Wolcott Gibbs published April 1949 in Woman and Beauty



Amy Levy 1861-89

TWO CAMBRIDGE NOVELISTS

Amy Levy (left) was born in London in 1861 into a middle-class Jewish family [writes *Joseph Hankinson* on the *Oxford University Faculty of English* website]. From an early age she showed a phenomenal talent for writing of all kinds, publishing poems and writing essays in her early teens. She was the second Jewish woman to study at Cambridge University, and among the first women students at Newnham College.

In 1888 she published *Reuben Sachs*, Persephone Book No. 23. It provokes a questioning of what it might mean to ‘relate’ to other people who share a background or family; it makes us consider the ways in which other people, ‘outsiders’ of sorts, might integrate into communities; it makes us consider also the differences between the family one is born into (the blood-line of successive generations), and the family one creates when one marries (the alliance between two ‘blood-lines’). On one level it is a response to what Levy felt to be the unreasonable and fetishistic romanticisation of Jews in novels like George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876). This made *Reuben Sachs* somewhat controversial at the time of publication: Levy’s contemporaries thought the caricaturing of a few of the Jewish characters was taken too far, and several reviews suggested that some of the satire verged on anti-Semitism. Yet, as a Jew herself, Amy Levy used fiction,

and this novel in particular, to ask powerful questions about what it might mean to belong to a community in the first place. If this part of the novel angered her contemporaries, it can provide us today with a fresh and challenging perspective on the problems and possibilities of different kinds of identity.

Despite the controversy, the novel had many admirers. For Oscar Wilde, *Reuben Sachs* was, ‘in some sort, a classic’. He praised the ‘directness’ of the novel, the ‘absence of any single superfluous word’, and it’s easy to see why. Paragraphs are often made up of one or two clear and uncomplicated sentences: ‘He flung out into the night’; ‘Esther sat a little apart, watching the lovers.’ These sentences often identify little more than a subject, object, and verb, and make the reading experience feel quick and compact. This is a novel preoccupied with questions about community, belonging, associations, and exile. Choices of syntax and paragraphing carefully express these themes through the compact and yet disjointed telling of the story. To notice how even the smallest parts of this novel relate to its broadest questions is to begin to appreciate Amy Levy’s intensely original achievement.

And *Ann Kennedy Smith* writes on her *Cambridge Ladies’ Dining Society* blog: ‘When Amy Levy went up to Cambridge in

1879 she was not yet 18. Ellen Wordsworth Crofts, the college’s first resident lecturer in English Literature and History, who had studied at Newnham from 1874-77, was 23. Amy Levy was a hardworking student and an ambitious young poet, and the two women found a common bond in their shared love of literature. Ellen Crofts was the great-niece of the poet William Wordsworth, while another uncle, Henry Sidgwick, was a Cambridge philosopher; she was working on a book about Elizabethan and 17th-century lyric poetry when she met Amy, who had published an accomplished essay on Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* when she was 13.

Although she enjoyed her work, Amy Levy was often lonely at Cambridge. In the close community of Newnham she felt all too conscious of her Jewish difference, and found it difficult to join in the other young women’s late-night cocoa parties and outings. Ellen was sympathetic and serious-minded and one of the few people that Amy could turn to as a friend. Writing about Ellen in 1903, her contemporary Blanche Smith recalled how ‘she from the first recognised genius in a student who, extremely unpopular, was shunned by co-mates and dons alike until Ellen made a friend of her, and so helped to draw out talents that the literary world have since acknowledged.’

In 1881 Amy Levy left Cambridge without taking her final exams. Perhaps this was because she wanted to devote more time to her writing; she perhaps did not want to take the mathematics paper necessary to sit for the Tripos, which women students won the right to do in May 1881; it is also possible that she was undergoing a phase of serious depression. But Ellen and Amy's friendship continued after Amy left Cambridge, and they might have met in Switzerland in the summer of 1883, when both women were on holiday there. Ellen had just become engaged to be married to the botanist Francis Darwin and gave up her Newnham lectureship and her ambitions to be a serious literary scholar. Their daughter Frances (later Cornford) was born three years later.

In the summer of 1888 Ellen told her sister-in-law Ida Darwin that her former student Amy Levy was coming to visit. 'She has written a novel, in which the heroine is partly me,' she told Ida. 'I have not read it yet, but I don't expect much: her stories and novels are rather saddening.' Why did Amy have Ellen Darwin in mind when she wrote about Judith Quixano in *Reuben Sachs*? Possibly Ellen shared what Levy describes as Judith's 'deep, serious gaze of the wonderful eyes'; certainly she had her passionate nature and almost austere truthfulness. That summer Amy Levy was

on the cusp of great success as a writer. But although she describes a close and loving London community, who take in impoverished Judith Quixano and treat her as one of their own, Levy's mordant attack on Jewish materialist values and critique of the late-Victorian marriage market meant that her book was widely criticised. Her satirical humour in the style of Zola or Daudet was not understood, nor was her attempt to parody George Eliot (in *Daniel Deronda* the Jewish family's baby 'carries on her teething intelligently').

At first she managed to shrug off the negative reviews. She threw herself into her writing, and took part in literary events, including organising gatherings at the newly founded University Women's Club in London. She was one of the guests at the first ever Women Writers' Dinner, held at the Criterion Restaurant in May 1889 and attended by prominent other 'New Women' writers Mona Caird and Olive Schreiner. At the end of July 1889 she met the poet W B Yeats. 'She was talkative, good-looking in a way,' he recalled, 'and full of the restlessness of the unhappy.' He was one of the few to be perceptive about Levy's true mental state. Her work provided a distraction from her lifelong struggle with depression, but her promising literary career was not enough to protect her from despair and in September 1889 she took her own life.

A few months later, in January 1890, Ellen Darwin reviewed Levy's posthumously published poetry collection, *A London Plane Tree and Other Verse* (1889) in the *Cambridge Review*. She described her friend's 'eager vital temperament', and her constant, heroic struggle with 'the shadow of a great mental depression'. Levy's poetry's range might be narrow, Darwin admits (with the characteristic honesty Levy admired), but she describes its power as 'the personal struggle for life and joy continually beaten back', and compares the poetry to Emily Brontë's. 'It is as different as their natures were different, but it has this one thing in common – it was written with the heart's blood.'

Three years after Amy Levy's death the 20 year-old Flora Mayor went up to Cambridge. Her masterpiece would be *The Rector's Daughter*, Persephone Book No. 140, published in 1924 [writes *Ann Kennedy Smith*, again on her *Cambridge Ladies' Dining Society* blog]. A short, quietly humorous and deeply perceptive novel, it was widely praised by contemporary critics, who traced its lineage to the writers whom Mayor loved: Jane Austen, George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell. 'It is like a bitter *Cranford*,' wrote Sylvia Lynd. The public loved it too, and Boots Library had to restrict its lending rules due to the novel's overwhelming

popularity. In 1925 it was shortlisted for the Prix Femina-Vie Heureuse, an annual literary prize in the interwar years for a work ‘calculated to reveal to French readers the true spirit and character of England’. E M Forster’s *A Passage to India* won it that year, but Mayor’s consolation prize was an admiring letter Forster wrote to her that begins: ‘This is Dedmayne, plus better scenery’ (he was staying at his unmarried aunt’s house on the Isle of Wight at the time). ‘Mary begins as ridiculous and ends as dignified,’ he told her, ‘this seems to me a very great achievement.’

In 1941, amidst the London Blitz, the novelist Rosamond Lehmann paid tribute to Mary Jocelyn as ‘my favourite character in contemporary fiction’, and in 1967 Leonard Woolf described the novel as ‘remarkable’ in the fourth volume of his autobiography, *Downhill All the Way*. Encouraged by this, Flora’s niece Teresa (Lady Rothschild) asked her brother Andreas Mayor to approach Penguin Books, and *The Rector’s Daughter* appeared as a Penguin Modern Classic in 1973. It became a Virago Modern Classic in 1987 and has recently been reissued by Persephone Books with a new preface by Flora’s great-niece, Victoria Gray. It seems somehow right that it was her nephew and niece, remembering their writer aunt, who helped to bring her extraordinary, understated novel out from the shadows.

When *The Rector’s Daughter* was published in 1924, it was during a period of massive change in society [noted Robert Firth in *New Critique*]. The ruinous consequences of WWI had radically destabilised established ideas and traditions. Modernist literature of the period responded to what was a profound epistemological break... The novel provides an alternative perspective on the Lost Generation (those who grew up during and immediately after WWI). Mary’s life is presented as empty, her outlook bleak and pessimistic. However, she belongs to another kind of lost generation, still guided by outmoded Victorian expectations. Mary’s quest, like Jane Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet, is love and marriage – yet this is rendered unobtainable in a post-WWI society. The novel enacts the fault line between the monolithic 19th century – its grand narrativity and subjectivity – and the modernist crisis of meaning through the character of Mary. The way in which love is held in reach of her before being cruelly withdrawn at the final moment forever, is as much a testament to the doubt and pessimism in post-WWI society, and as gorgeous and heartbreaking a monument to loss, as Gatsby’s tragic love for Daisy in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, published a year after Mayor’s novel.

The exploration of the gulf between Victorian and early

twentieth-century society is thus a prime concern of the novel. This gulf also reveals itself in the tension between the novel’s formal style and content. Present are the characteristic themes of post-WWI literature: isolation, separation, the position of women conveyed to the reader by the omniscient, though effaced narrative voice of the 19th-century novel, and there is a strain between the ostensibly modernist content and an outmoded style which combine in the form of a symptomatic reluctance to a full realisation of the post-war age in which the characters find themselves. The incongruity and discontinuity which informs much modernist writing is expertly played out...

The Rector’s Daughter deserves to be considered a classic because it provides a distinct perspective upon the prevailing subjects of concern within post-WWI society and literature. The novel redefines the ‘Lost Generation’. The subtly crafted modernisms of isolation, doubt and disillusionment are rendered through both character and narrative form by situating both at a subjective and historical fault line marking the border between discontinuity and classic realist dénouement; closure and unity in the form of marriage and unrequited love haunt the text, but remain fleeting and evasive in post-WWI society.

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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, Afterword: Elaine Showalter **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 E M Delafield By the author of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, PB No. 105, in this 1919 novel a girl who fails to marry goes in to a convent. 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 Oriet 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'. 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 nightclub singer. Read on R4 by Maureen Lipman; now a film with Frances McDormand and Amy Adams. Preface: Henrietta Twycross-Martin.

A Persephone audiobook read by Frances McDormand. 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 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 T S 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 Prioory 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 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 R C Sherriff A 1939 novel ‘by Mr Hopkins’ about what happens when, in 1946, the moon crashes into the earth. 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. Afterword: Julia Briggs
60. **Doreen** by Barbara Noble A 1946 novel about a child sent 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 *The Hopkins Manuscript*, PB No. 57, about a family on holiday in Bognor in 1931; a quiet masterpiece. Read on Radio 4. 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 running her house without help; the war is in the background and foreground. Afterword: Penelope Fitzgerald

- 73. The Young Pretenders by Edith Henrietta Fowler** An 1895 novel for adults and children about Babs, living with her uncle and aunt, who 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 are a 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, published in 1983, about 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 PB 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 WW1. 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* (PB No. 81): Miss Buncle 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 read six of the stories as a *Persephone Audiobook*.
- 93. The Sack of Bath by Adam Fergusson** A 1973 polemic, with 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** 1932 novel by our most popular author about a family and, in particular, the happy relationship between a grandmother and 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** This 'Miss Buncl' 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 4-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 Cookbook Book* by Ambrose Heath** A 1937 cookbook, organised by month (and thus by excellent seasonal recipes) illustrated with a dozen beautiful wood engravings by Eric Ravilious. Preface: Simon Hopkinson.
- 110. *Because of the Lockwoods* by Dorothy Whipple** A 1949 novel: the Hunters are patronised by the wealthy Lockwoods but 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 Bowden, 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. 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 about a girl's rather fraught childhood by this 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, with wood engravings by the author, and photographs (eg. of Tirzah's husband Eric Ravilious). Preface: Anne Ullmann
- 120. *Madame Solario* by Gladys Huntington** This superb 1956 novel in the Henry James/Edith Wharton tradition is set on Lake Como in 1906; published anonymously and with undertones of incest, it was a *succès de scandale*. Afterword: Alison Adburgham
- 121. *Effi Briest* by Theodor Fontane**
An 1895 classic of European literature by the great German novelist, 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 and reprehensible 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, extremely readable novel, her first (1927), 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' ie. to be a suffragette. 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 Another volume (to follow our hugely successful first volume, PB No. 100) of thirty stories by women writers.

133. Expiation by Elizabeth von Arnim Curiously excluded from the von Arnim oeuvre, a 1929 novel by the author of *Vera* about marriage and deception – surely her best book. 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 delightful 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 1932-3. Foreword: Richard J Evans

137. English Climate: Wartime Stories by Sylvia Townsend Warner Twenty-two short stories set from 1940 to 1946, few previously reprinted. Preface: Lydia Fellgett

138. The New Magdalen by Wilkie Collins An 1873 'sensation novel' by the great C19th novelist about a 'fallen woman' and society's attitude to her. Preface: James Bobin

139. Random Commentary by Dorothy Whipple A 'writer's diary' (cf. Virginia Woolf's diary PB No. 98)

covering the years 1925-45, selected by the author herself from her notebooks in 1965.

140. The Rector's Daughter by F M Mayor A 'beloved classic, first published in 1924, about the daughter of the rectory and an unrequited love affair. Preface: Victoria Gray

141. The Deepening Stream by Dorothy Canfield Fisher A classic of American literature about Matey's unhappy childhood, deeply happy marriage, and her life in France during WW1. Preface: Sadie Stein

142. As It Was and World Without End by Helen Thomas Two volumes of memoirs, first published in 1926 and 1931, about the author's life with the poet Edward Thomas. Afterword: Isabel Raphael

143. A Well Full of Leaves by Elizabeth Myers A 1943 novel, poetic and beautiful, about four children damaged by their abusive parents and how they confront their destinies. Afterword: a 1957 memoir of the author by Eleanor Farjeon

144. The Other Day by Dorothy Whipple A delightful 1936 memoir of her childhood by Persephone's bestselling author.

145. The Waters under the Earth by John Moore A 1965 'condition of England' novel set in the 1950s about the 'end of the age of deference' and the approach of the 1960s, symbolised by the encroachment of a motorway. Preface: Amanda Craig

146. Two Cheers for Democracy: a Selection by E M Forster Literary and political essays written from 1925 -51: 25 selected from the original 69. Preface: Henry Mance

147. One Afternoon by Siân James An unusual and difficult genre, a love story, but this 1975 novel manages it with delicacy, wit and social insight. Preface: Emma Schofield

JANE AUSTEN: BATH/CLIFTON

Jane Austen is a background presence in the Persephone shop and office: the Thorpes in *Northanger Abbey* lodge in Edgar Buildings, and since number 8 was clearly a lodging house at one stage (it has two kitchen ranges in the basement, meaning that the cook catered for a large number of people) we like to think ours was the house they lodged in. But despite the tour guides chattering away about her, Jane Austen did not love Bath. The writer *Maggie Lane*, author of several books about Jane Austen including *A Charming Place: Bath in the Life and Times of Jane Austen*, gave an excellent talk to the Jane Austen Society some years ago on why this was so.

When Jane Austen paid short visits to the city during the 1790s she seems to have liked it well enough for a holiday – enough to sympathise with all the freshness and eagerness of Catherine Morland’s response, and to allow her heroine to exclaim, without condemning her for frivolity, ‘Oh, who can ever be tired of Bath?’

However, in a letter to Cassandra in June 1808 she said: ‘It is two years tomorrow since we left Bath for Clifton, with what happy feelings of escape!’ But why had her dislike of the city become so intense? It is not easy for those of us who love the city today to understand. To most of us, surely, and to thousands of visitors every year, some of whom

make a pilgrimage expressly on Jane Austen’s account, Bath is the physical embodiment of all that was most charming in Georgian society. Today it bewitches the senses, and makes some of us, at least, long to be whisked back in time to a lost age of aesthetic perfection and harmony between the natural and the man-made world. In Bath more than anywhere else in England today, with the exception of the private country estates of the period, it is easy to visualise Jane Austen’s characters living and moving, and to understand the social circumstances and moral values that shaped their lives.

Several reasons have been put forward to explain Jane’s antipathy, all of them having, I think, some validity. Firstly, the climate seems not to have agreed with her; like her own Anne Elliot, she ‘dreaded the possible heats of September in all the white glare of Bath’. And if Bath wasn’t hot, it was often wet.

Then, in Bath, where the early town houses had only rear yards used by the servants for coal, washing, stabling and so forth, Jane very much missed having a garden, missed the creativity of gardening, the attachment to a beloved plot of land, and the minute observation of the changing seasons.

But more than any other reason, perhaps, it was the artificiality of social relations in a city with a constantly changing population which distressed

Jane – what she called ‘all the littlenesses’ of a town: the small talk, the card parties, the formal morning calls – the sheer waste of an intelligent woman’s time. Jane’s warmest approbation was reserved for a stable and interdependent neighbourhood, like Highbury (in *Emma*) at its best, where everybody had a fixed place, with duties towards others that bestowed a measure of significance on human life. If such a community also allowed the individual sufficient liberty and leisure to develop his full moral and intellectual potential, it offered the ideal well-balanced society, one that all her heroines enter and help to lead and secure by way of their marriages.

In contrast, Jane distrusted the motives that brought people to Bath: evading home responsibilities, attempting to appear important on a small income, seeking a ready-made fortune in a marriage partner, or frittering their time away in the selfish pursuit of pleasure. Almost all the worthless characters in Jane Austen’s novels have either been brought up in a town, and so acquired a wrong set of values, or else they gravitate towards a town, where their crimes and follies find greater scope. Every novel yields its examples: from Willoughby to the Crawfords, from Isabella Thorpe to Mr Elliot. All towns are suspect; Bath, with its rakish reputation from earlier in the century, and its later character of desperate

gentility, sickeningly so.

After the death of Jane's father in 1805, she and her mother and sister stayed on in Bath for a further eighteen months, occupying in turn no fewer than three different sets of lodgings. Perhaps they moved in quest of ever cheaper accommodation; they were at any rate now reduced to a few rooms only, not being able to afford a whole house to themselves. And the insecurity and inferiority of this period must have given the *coup de grâce* to Jane's feelings for Bath.

Thus it is that Jane has left two distinct portraits of the city: the smiling impressions of youth in *Northanger Abbey*, written in her early twenties, when she had known Bath only as a carefree visitor; and the grave assessment of her maturity in *Persuasion*, written when she was forty, having endured and emerged from a period of enforced residence there.

The differences in treatment between the Bath passages of the two novels are striking. It is notable, for example, that Catherine is given opportunities to walk or drive beyond the city confines, just as Jane Austen delighted in doing herself, when she rambled to Charlcombe, Weston and Widcombe, or allowed herself to be driven to the height of Lansdown. There is no such relief granted Anne Elliot. The farthest she is permitted to roam is to Westgate Buildings, and she does

not accomplish that without attracting the abuse of those she lives with. Anne's question to herself as she enters Bath is 'When shall I leave you again?'; she truly feels a prisoner, just as Jane Austen had felt, with her talk of 'escape'.

Then again, the Bath portions of both *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* are set in January and February, but they are markedly different in their treatment of the weather. There is a sparkling, fresh air quality about many of the Bath chapters in *Northanger Abbey*, notably in the walk to Beechen Cliff and examination of the city spread clearly at Catherine's feet. By contrast, there is not one gleam of sunshine in the Bath of *Persuasion*. All is greyness, drizzle and mist.

It is the same with the portrayal of crowds of people. Catherine never really suffers from the oppressiveness of the crowds. In *Persuasion*, however, there is the sense of people everywhere – not merely mindlessly socialising, though that is bad enough, but spying on each other (Mr Elliot and Mrs Clay unable to meet without someone seeing them), leering at each other (Sir Walter counting the number of tolerable looking women in the streets), discussing one another (Anne's private affairs being gossiped about in Molland's, the tea shop) and generally going about their noisy business, be they draymen, muffin men, nursemaids or sauntering politicians.

So we can begin to understand why Jane Austen preferred Clifton. First of all, it was developed after Bath and by the time it came to be laid out there had been a subtle shift of values, in this case towards the emphasis on privacy and domesticity, which were to be much worshipped in Victorian times. Clifton suited the refined sensibilities of Jane Austen and her contemporaries better than Bath, which still carried associations of a bawdier, more gregarious, less discriminating age.

In Clifton there were fewer public buildings or public rituals obligatory on visitors. The new lodgings tended to be more substantial, more individual, better spaced and better provided with gardens. Then its airy clifftop situation, its proximity to the permanent open spaces of the Downs, its elevation above the smelly, working centre of the city of Bristol all recommended it to Jane and she consistently considered Clifton a healthier and more pleasant place to be.

Finally, in *Emma* Bath's function as a marriage market, so distasteful to Jane, is very clearly shown. Did she perhaps suspect that one of the motives of her own parents, in retiring to Bath, had been to find husbands for two daughters who had reached their middle twenties without securing this 'pleasantest preservative from want'?

© Maggie Lane in the Jane Austen Society Annual Report for 1997

‘TO PRISON WHILE THE SUN SHINES’

Once, when I went to Holloway Gaol to visit a friend who had been sent there by a puzzled Government, the wardress who led me across the echoing stone yard was inspired to make a little pleasant conversation.

‘It’s pretty here in summer,’ she remarked sombrely.

At the time it was natural, perhaps, to credit her with a grim sense of humour; but a morning spent not long afterwards in a London police court suggested another explanation. You cannot sit in a police court and watch while men and women pass out into captivity, without realising how many there are of us who go through the world snatching desperately at the air for some of the colour of life. I think my wardress-guide would scarcely have burst out with her involuntary remark had not someone come in from the outside to remind her that she lived in a grey semblance of a world, full of people who had tried to take a short cut to happiness and managed to get lost on the way. It was her instinctive human defence of a system that thinks to cure a desire for sunshine by shutting it out.

All the people I saw convicted in the police court that morning went to prison while the sun shone; for it was one of those irrepressible summer days that even London smoke cannot

succeed in dimming. The brilliance of it had touched the official soul of the constable who guarded the door; and the little crowd on the pavement, clamouring with or without justification for admittance, was at least being handled with wit and good humour.

‘Only those under remand, if you please!’ remonstrated the doorkeeper politely, placing on one side the little woman who was waving a visiting-card at him. ‘Press, did you say, madam? Pressing to get in, I should call it, wouldn’t you? Well, well, I can’t say what might happen presently if you care to wait on the chance. Those under remand only. Yes, yes, to be sure! If you were let out on bail the previous evening, you’re under remand; but you’re not a prisoner yet, or you wouldn’t be out here, would you now? Pass inside, please. The other lady is your mother? Some of you ladies can show a lot of mothers today, it seems to me. Right along the footway, ladies, if you please. Those under remand only!’

A man with a blue paper in his hand made a path with some difficulty through the crowd of waiting women who continued to throng the pavement with courageous patience. He was admitted without question, but wore the air of a man who felt that his natural prerogative as a frequenter of police courts was being infringed. Certainly

the constable who guarded the door took far less interest in him than in the ladies on remand; and he was received without any wit at all. After him came the gentlemen of the press, who were also passed in without comment; and seeing this, the lady with the visiting-card resumed her plea.

‘Oh, come along,’ said the indulgent constable; and she found herself at last inside, confronted by more constables and an inspector. They were all smiling. She dived in her bag for credentials, but was instantly waved aside with fresh humour.

‘We don’t ask any questions, and it’s best to give no answers,’ she was told pleasantly, as they took her across an empty ante-room that seemed unnecessarily large, into a crowded court that was certainly unnecessarily small. It was all very still; the wit and the clamour and the sunshine outside seemed suddenly very far away.

Admitting freely that tradition and fact are at variance in most countries, one felt that the little judgment hall, with its want of space, of sunlight, of air and sound and all the things that matter, was strangely at war with the accepted notion of the publicity of British justice. The British public was there, it is true – a dozen strong, perhaps, very self-conscious, and eaten up with pride at having succeeded in getting past the constable at the door. But it was a distinctly

exclusive, not to say private, sort of public.

One forgot all this, however, when the magistrate came in and began to hear the cases. There were a good many, and they were heard with extraordinary rapidity. I suppose the offenders knew beforehand what they were charged with – an advantage they sometimes had over the magistrate when he mixed up the charge sheets. But the British public, jammed together on the one bench reserved for it, could only gather occasionally why this or that person was fined or sent to prison or remanded. One thing could be clearly deduced from the progress of that heart-breaking procession of human failures, as they passed, generally in hopeless silence, from the greyness of the police court to the more complete greyness beyond. They were all people who had snatched desperately at the air for some of the colour of life, and had succumbed helplessly before they found it.

No court of justice could help them. You could not expect a magistrate, faced with something like forty cases, to stop and consider the terrible monotony of existence that had driven the little scullery-maid to be “drunk and disorderly,” or the poor clerk to steal his employer’s money, thinking to steal his happiness with it; or the lad with the jolly fearless face to beg in the streets because he was “out of work” – at fifteen! – or the boy, whose eyes

were swollen with crying, to be so unmanageable that his father had to bring him to a place where no child should be, at an age when, in happier circumstances, he would be just starting for Eton with a prospect before him of unlimited opportunities for “ragging.” The magistrate was not unkind; nobody was unkind. All the prisoners were scrupulously asked if they had anything to say, if they would like to call a witness. Anything to say! You might as well try to discharge a mountain torrent through

a bath tap. As for witnesses, a bewildered woman, convicted of drunkenness because she had been found lying unconscious on the pavement, could not be expected to have secured a witness to prove her contention that she was merely faint. One by one, they all shook their heads mutely, and went away to prison while the sun shone.

Then the remand prisoners, the women who had thronged the doorstep in the early morning, who were there to answer for their rebellious



Detail from Blue and Silver: a portrait of Miss Theodora Bennett in Blue Dress and White Hat 1906 by Philip Wilson Steer, in a private collection, last sold at Messum's in 2021.

manner of demanding a human and a political right, were brought into the dock by ones and twos; and there crept a change, a subtle change, into the musty atmosphere of ages. The court was still bathed in its queer half light. There was the same feeling in it of spectral unreality. You knew even more certainly than before that the machinery of the little judgment hall was entirely inadequate to deal with the prisoners in the dock. But the hopelessness of the whole thing was gone. These were not people whose spirit had been driven out

of them by monotony and bad luck, as it had been driven out of the derelicts who stood in the dock before them. These were not people who were going to give in before they had won from life what they demanded from it. It may be a perilous business to hunt down the colour of life for other people; but it is a less hopeless kind of job than hunting it down for yourself.

The great British public, represented by the handful of spectators who had evaded the censorship of the constable at the door, might, without

cudgelling its brains unduly, have found some connection between the dreary convictions it had just witnessed, between the clumsy if kindly handling of habitual offenders, and this passage through the dock of imperturbably serene young women who, by the grace of God and the aid of a good cause, did not belong to the criminal classes.

There was the same rapidity in hearing the cases, the same courteous farce of asking for questions that could only be answered outside the police court, and then, perhaps, only once in a hundred years or so. And there was the same unimaginative treatment of those who thought it worthwhile to accept the invitation to speak.

‘Have you anything to say?’ came the regulation enquiry, hallowed by centuries of official belief in the innocence of unconvicted prisoners who yet felt their cases to be prejudged. Then, as the woman in the dock showed every indication of having a great deal to say, this would be followed up with a hasty ‘Yes, yes; but I have nothing to do with that. I am here to administer the law as it stands.’

So the law was administered as it stood; and the colour of life still flickered elusive beyond the grasp of all of us, as thirteen more offenders, a rebel woman every one of them, went away to prison while the sun shone.

Short story by Evelyn Sharp (1869-1955) from *Rebel Women* 1910



Roger Fry 1866-1934 self portrait 1928 – The Bloomsbury Group naturally supported the suffragettes

MOLES IN THE BOOK STACKS

Recently, some excellent publishers, eg. the British Library with their Women Writers series, Dean Street Press with their ‘middlebrow’ authors and Faber with their backlist Classics, have been ‘discovering’ writers like May Sinclair, Elizabeth Fair and Kay Dick and have made a significant success of them. And their editors, who call themselves ‘archive moles’ (in the delightful words of Faber’s classics and heritage editor Ella Griffiths) have been writing and talking about ‘how we choose our books’ (in fact the title of our leaflet that we keep in the shop).

A few books such as *Daddy’s Gone a-Hunting* and *The Oppermanns*, which have been published in the US by McNally Editions, have been gleaned from the Persephone list. But most of them are titles that Persephone, and Virago before them, decided not to publish. So we are astonished, and not a little awestruck, by the success of, for example, Margaret Kennedy’s *The Feast* and Kay Dick’s *They*. And we read that a forthcoming title from McNally is *A Green Equinox* by Elizabeth Mavor. What? we mutter as we go to the shelf and get down our copy to reread. What did we miss?

It is not just that tastes differ and marketing budgets vary. A new type of book is being rediscovered. ‘What I see as Virago or Persephone’s core market (and indeed Penguin’s and Vintage’s) were *classics* readers

who were looking for books with a critical seal of approval,’ said Becky Brown of Curtis Brown in an article in *Prospect* magazine. ‘However, the new iteration of the market is more for treasure seekers; readers who are thinking more about idiosyncrasies, about things that didn’t just pass under the radar on publication but passed under it again in the first generation of reissues.’

So, yes, a second generation of backlist is being reprinted. And this depends, of course, on the taste of the moles and is rather hard to define. It’s not overtly feminist (*No Surrender*), it’s not domestic humour (*Diary of a Provincial Lady*), it’s not really a page-turner (Dorothy Whipple), and it’s not political (Marghanita Laski). Think fantasy, think the slightly weird, think noir, think large issues. Take our fellow Bath publisher, Handheld Press, as an example. It has several different series: the Weirds (Weird fiction from the past, mostly by women), Science Fiction Classics, Fantasy Classics, World War 2 Classics, Biographies, Comic Classics, and the Defiants: stories of the resisters, the women (usually) who won’t put up and shut up.

It’s heartening that a publisher can create a unique identity. Yet this is painstakingly done. None of those we have mentioned ‘hoover’ up books at random. They choose their titles after much deliberation and, as a result, you can match a book to a publisher and build up what

posh marketing departments call ‘brand loyalty’. So it’s both exciting and energising to watch this new ‘iteration’ of reprints; we are delighted by the new moles that have appeared (and very much appreciate our friendship with them); and are thrilled that literary agents like Curtis Brown and publishers like Simon & Schuster now ‘get’ the importance of backlist and have started ‘heritage’ departments which go through their archives; search for likely reprints in secondhand bookshops; talk to the families of a not-long-deceased author; welcome recommendations; and so on. With the result that the moles have dug up books that it would not have occurred to Persephone to reprint but have made a huge success of them.

It’s a long, long way from a 1980 review in the *Financial Times* by its literary editor Anthony Curtis in which he questioned the vogue for Stevie Smith’s work and said: ‘There are not when you get down to it all that many women writers for feminist publishers to revive.’ Carmen Callil sent the cutting. She wrote on it – ‘poor fool.’ And she was right. There is no chance that the moles will ever return to their burrows empty-handed. Only this spring, once the **PB** has gone to press, we shall be reading Elizabeth Coxhead (overleaf). We discovered the article but have never read her novels. Who knows...

‘WRIT IN LIPSTICK’

‘Chloe liked Olivia. They shared a laboratory.’ [wrote the novelist Elizabeth Coxhead in 1962]. With this famous quotation from an imaginary novel, Virginia Woolf epitomised what she believed to be the task of the woman novelist, in interpreting the new worlds opened up to women through their entry into the professions. And several of her contemporaries applied themselves to this task; Rebecca West, for instance, and Winifred Holtby in her all-too-brief-career.

But the inheritors of Mrs Woolf’s wit, sensibility and exquisite evocative power, the school headed by Rosamond Lehmann, Elizabeth Taylor, Penelope Mortimer and Elizabeth Jane Howard, seem to me to have narrowed instead of widening the range.

It would be unfair to say that they have only one theme; but the anguish of love betrayed so haunts them that it eclipses all the rest. Reading them, you would never know there had been a movement of women’s emancipation – and indeed, for the young married woman of the middle classes, there hasn’t. She is the one to whom our society has given a thoroughly dirty deal, by shutting her up in a suburban house or flat with a family of small children and a lot of gadgets, and no intellectual outlet – except, of course, to write novels.

Granted that what matters to the novelist is quality rather than quantity of experience, still there is an irreducible minimum. Jane Austen is often cited as an example of genius flourishing in a little room, but was it really so confined? The rector’s daughter in a country parish took her place in a complete social pattern, her letters show a wide scale of visiting, and there were revivifying contacts with brothers making their way in four different professions.

George Eliot’s was the ideal novelist’s life, a youth deeply rooted in the countryside, and then London to sophisticate the early experience. Mrs Gaskell, Mrs Ewing and most of the other 19th century women novelists enjoyed careers which were *mouvementées*, compared to the suburban matrons of today. Poor they might be, but they could always afford to employ a cook and nurserymaid and escape into the wider world.

Our contemporaries make full use of the material life allows them. The vulgar rootlessness of country-club culture, the searing monotony of basements in Hampstead and villas in Bucks, are exposed with biting irony. There is a riotous gallery of ‘dailies’ and refugee helps, eccentric, neurotic or fey. Children are handled with an absence of sentiment verging on the brutal. But love is the novel’s mainspring; how could it be otherwise? All the initiative

in plot and in the heroine’s life comes from her man.

And this fact gives her a curiously passive quality, despite the treasures of wit and perception with which she is endowed. She is physically beautiful – this is generally insisted on, and surely marks a backward step from the piquant Victorian taste for plain leading ladies. Nervously, almost gloomily, she cherishes her beauty to hold him by; lipstick smears every other page. But all in vain, he will betray her.

Sometimes the position is reversed and the heroine is mistress instead of wife, but it will come to the same thing. As a mistress, she is allowed some profession or career, but a perfunctory one, which she is ready to drop like a hot potato when he gives the word. In that case he will not give it; he will go back to his wife.

Not since Ouida has fiction known such arrogant and elusive males. Off they go to their business trains, to lives full of interest and financial profit. (Exact nature often left vague. Evidently they do not permit their spouses to be the interfering helpmeets that Mmes Proud and Grantly were.)

Feminist pride might well wilt under the spectacle, were it not luckily possible to counteract by reference to novels of the younger masculine school. There is no shortage there of men who are failures in their professions

and buffoons in love.

Of course, it can be argued that the ephemeral nature of sexual passion is a basic fact in the human predicament. But to write as if it were the whole of that predicament is to create a hothouse world, and finally to provoke in the reader a gusty reaction. Individually these novelists receive, and deserve, high praise, but there are epigrammatic collective mutterings against them. 'No woman can draw a man without leaving a rim of lipstick inside the cup.' 'Women see nothing straight and everything accurately.'

And equally, of course, there are exceptions. But it is noteworthy that the two who give their characters the widest political and intellectual scope, Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer, have backgrounds that are not English, but South African.

There is also a quite different school, of what one might call the clever-freak novelists, led by Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark. They are certainly not bounded by the suburb, though they can draw it exquisitely when they need to; nor are they circumscribed by their sex, but will enter boldly into the mind of a central male character. But he is an emotional cripple, an oddity, a monster. He is the ghoulish octogenarian of *Momento Mori*, the male old-maids of *The Bachelors*, the pathetic homosexual

of *The Bell*, the masochist of *A Severed Head*. He is not, like Lydgate in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, a representative human being, with a widely-shared failing that will drag him down.

And so it seems to me that writing of this kind cannot, for all its brilliance, have the universal and tragic applicability that *Middlemarch* has. It is a fascinating backwater (explored with equal enthusiasm, I must concede, by male contemporaries) on whose muddy banks the strange slimy misfits of our society are washed up gasping. It is salutary, and in some mysterious way enjoyable, to read about them, but we can't, as with the heroes of the big Victorian novels, feel that they speak for us all.

I shall be accused of the heresy of wanting novels to be about 'ordinary people'. But no people are ordinary to the writer who considers them with a sufficiently perceptive eye. What I would like to meet is character in the mainstream, as opposed to the backwater, be it suburban or emotional; characters with professions and backgrounds and families and social contacts, not merely characters at the cocktail party, in the nursery or in bed. If the sort of solid documentation that C P Snow gives the people of his novels could be allied to feminine sensibility, then we would have a novelist indeed.

I genuinely want to know how Chloe and Olivia are getting on

in their laboratory. (Not writing novels, that is evident, or the female C P Snow might have emerged.) How are women being affected by all these new careers open to them, how do they reconcile the struggle for, and occasional achievement of, power and authority with their domestic and emotional lives? What happens when *they* take the business train, maybe leaving him behind?

And I would particularly like to have a closer acquaintance with the working-class girl, who has made her stage appearance in Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*, but remains very much a 'super' in the eyes of the (hitherto male) working-class novelist, waiting to be tumbled in whatever is the local industrial equivalent of the hay.

'Did nothing then happen to women in the mid-20th century?' I can hear the research student of the year 2000 enquire, after trying to form a picture of our society from the works of its women novelists. The answer is that much that was bewildering and disconcerting, much that was beautiful and significant, happened to them – but not to those of them who held the pen in their hands.

First published in *Books and Bookmen* in March 1962 by author, critic and mountaineer Elizabeth Coxhead (1909-79); she wrote ten novels between 1934 and 1967.

THREE RECENT REVIEWS

The protagonist of Penelope Mortimer's 1958 novel *Daddy's Gone a-Hunting*, Persephone Book No.77, is a 37-year-old housewife named Ruth who is sliding into a madness of midlife suffocation and despair. Alone in her kitchen early in the novel, Ruth drinks gin and tentatively confesses to an imagined listener the source of all her angst. When she married Rex, her trivial bully of a husband, at 18, she was three months pregnant with their daughter, Angela. 'She doesn't know, of course,' Ruth explains, to no one. 'I didn't want to get married. I didn't want Angela. We had to get married. There was nothing else to do.'

The burden of consequence on Ruth is a dead weight. She has no perceptible life force, no desires, less shape than crumpled tissue paper. Her fuzziness is countered in the novel by Mortimer's caustic narration, which laces Ruth's ennui with a ferocious current of social critique. The novel appears to anticipate what Betty Friedan would propose a few years later, in 1963, as 'the problem that has no name' – the profound unhappiness of a generation of educated women trapped in the domestic sphere with no way out.

The novel's animating force is a simple, repetitive plot point: the now 18-year-old Angela, announces to Ruth that she's pregnant. Ruth becomes angry; she also finds, once

again, that she's being forced by circumstance into acting against her will. 'It wasn't that she had taken a step; she had been pushed, stumbling forward and finding responsibility thrust into her arms, finding herself committed without knowing how it had happened.' Angela is intent on having her pregnancy terminated, which was unlawful in the UK until 1968. To save her daughter from repeating history, Ruth has to balance conflicting impulses – her desire to protect Angela from the risk of an illegal procedure versus her desire to secure for her a future less miserable than her own.

In *Daddy's Gone a-Hunting* Penelope Mortimer steps lightly into a sparse and immensely tricky genre, the literature of parental regret. Ruth's resentment of Angela and Rex is an 'unmentionable thing', a secret 'battered down so long that [it] had become almost unrecognisable as the truth.' And yet Angela has always felt it; her life has been defined by 'being rejected, abandoned, betrayed by someone who ought to love her.' (Names shiver with symbolism throughout Mortimer's story: Ruth, in British English, means 'repentance', 'remorse', 'regret'. Rex is the cruel king of his sturdy, commuter-belt castle; during the week he disappears to London to his job as a dentist, performing countless 'careful excavations into rotting bone.' Angela, meaning 'messenger', is the character

whose circumstances force Ruth into action.)

Penelope Mortimer doesn't theorise or expound; she lacerates, instead, with description. Her 65-year-old novel is, through its atmosphere and circumstances, one of the most compelling arguments for freedom of reproductive choice that I've ever encountered. Without choice, she suggests, we're condemned to follow tramlines of predestination that punish everyone involved. Without choice, everyone suffers, including the children born not out of love but resentment... Sophie Gilbert in *The Atlantic* May 2022.

Lion Feuchtwanger's novel *The Oppermanns*, Persephone Book No.136, tells the story of a prosperous Jewish family in Berlin during the rise of the the Third Reich. The main character, Gustav, is co-heir to a successful furniture business and leads a comfortable life of intellectual pursuit (he is at work on a book about the Enlightenment writer Gotthold Ephraim Lessing), romantic pleasure (he keeps a lovely young mistress) and social prominence. At fifty, 'he really was doing well. Physically, materially, and spiritually.' But this illusion of safety cannot endure. The novel charts the National Socialists' anti-Semitic pressures across various fronts. Over three sections titled 'Yesterday', 'Today'

and ‘Tomorrow’, Feuchtwanger delineates – with what was, at the time, agonising prescience – the ever-darker unfolding of the Reich’s repressive mission resulting in a novel at once unbearable and unputdownable; his masterpiece ... is also an alarmingly timely reminder: the Nazis’ first steps – censorship, disinformation, and the sowing of fear and mistrust among citizens – in turn permit the unspeakable.’

Clare Messud in *Harper’s*
October 2022.

When it was published in 1924, almost a century ago, *The Home-Maker*, Persephone Book No. 7, a story of radical gender-role reversal by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, was one of the ten bestselling novels of the year... All through her career, DCF was passionately politically engaged, a Progressive reformer with strong and influential opinions that informed both her nonfiction and her fiction. Her characters are forceful and still alive on the page today, and the book is compulsively readable. Her focus on children’s inner lives, and on the intensity and sometimes ferocity of family life, was distinctly her own. There’s a great scene in *The Home-Maker* in which Lester, seeing that his son Stephen is frustrated and building toward a tantrum, offers the child a chance to whip a ‘pretend egg’ – that is, a basin of soapy water – with

the eggbeater that Stephen has always wanted to handle, but which his mother never let him touch. What ensues is pure Montessori. Stephen’s father ‘did not offer to show him how it worked’. Instead, he observes with Wordsworthian awe the child’s struggle to figure it out, quoting Wordsworth’s ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’ and imagining himself a spectator at a prize fight as he watches his son fight to master his eggbeater: ‘Stephen could feel the thinking place in his head draw together hard—and command his hand to turn regularly. How it hated to, that old hand! And how Stephen loved the feeling of bossing it around!’ And his father reflects: ‘How the afternoon had flown! It was hard to put your mind on anything but the absorbing spectacle of Stephen’s advance into life.’

In *The Deepening Stream* (1930), Persephone Book No. 141, DCF wrote for adults about these same issues – the profound importance of childhood triumphs and sorrows and memories, the way a child’s intellectual, moral, and spiritual character is shaped by the real-world experiences of growing up and the challenges set by the world, from daily family tensions to war, cataclysm, and suffering. This long and complicated book may be the greatest WWI novel you’ve never heard of,

a home-front novel of France and relief work, a novel that combines international relations and domesticity. DCF wrote about topics and experiences that don’t regularly turn up in fiction, and not only the decision to take her young children into a war... Her great theme is nurture, not nature. Children are malleable – in negative ways as well as positive ones – and education is all. Family life can stunt you and corrupt you, family life can be brutal, and family life can also be glorious and even redemptive... DCF lived her life in the spiritual place where Montessori thinking met American transcendentalism... She took the moral choices of everyday life as seriously as she took the literary choices of what would be widely read [through her work for the Book-of-the-Month Club]. Most of all, she took family life and child development seriously, glorying in the daily accumulation of small insights and struggles for mastery ... Her fiction remains absorbingly interesting almost a century later – sometimes for reasons of historical curiosity, but more often for that alchemy of plot and character and sensibility which turns family power struggles and international power struggles into the stuff of the novel.

Perri Klass in *The New Yorker*
February 2023

‘**S**omeone at a Distance’ is a beautiful and moving story, not just about love, but the lies we tell to protect love. Dorothy Whipple writes her characters with the kind of understanding that comes from a keen observer of the ordinary. Her style is clear-eyed and precise, superbly elegant and subtle, witty but never showy. Her characters live and breathe and leave little footprints wherever they go; even the minor ones. And it’s her attention to the small

things – sentences that are only half-finished, furtive glances, hands that brush one another in passing, the smell of nicotiana on a hot summer night, that make the storytelling so powerful. We see the inevitability of the drama, long before the characters in the middle of it. Described by J B Priestley as ‘the Jane Austen of the 20th century’, DW was the bestselling author of nine novels, many short stories and two volumes of memoirs. Her popularity waned when her

understated storytelling was replaced by the much louder and pithy voices of the 1960s. (Famously her editor informed her that what the publishing world wanted was more action, more passion.) In DW’s own way – quietly probing, loving and truthful – she was just as disruptive as the writers of the 1960s who replaced her.’

Rachel Joyce in *The Sunday Times* in January 2023.



An unidentified sitting room somewhere in Europe, shown in an anonymous British watercolour of about 1840.

EVENTS

Our first event this spring/summer will take place in our upstairs room on **Thursday 1st June** at 4pm: tea and cake will be served and Nicola Beauman will give an informal talk on domestic feminism in fiction and in Persephone novels in particular (repeated from the one given at the Bath Festival the previous month).

On **Thursday 8th June** we shall show the film of *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding*, PB No. 38. A cream tea will be served at 4pm and madeira afterwards.

On Bloomsday, **Friday 16th June**, in an event postponed from last year, John Mitchinson will be in conversation with Francesca Beauman about James Joyce's *Ulysses* in particular and what makes a classic in general. The event will be at 4pm when tea, Irish beer and Irish soda buns will be served.

In December it will be fifty years since the death of D E Stevenson, the author of the three *Miss Bunicle* books. On **Thursday 21st September** at 4pm, over a cream tea, D E Stevenson's granddaughter Penny Kent will be in conversation with Nicola Beauman about her grandmother and her work.

On **Thursday 30th November**, eighty years since the death of Etty Hillesum, author of *An Interrupted Life*, PB No. 5, Susan Stein will make a return visit to Persephone to perform her play called *Etty*. This will be at 7pm and at 3pm Susan will give a talk called 'Finding Etty', relating the story of her 15 years of research on Etty's writings – travelogue, memoir and history combined.



More events (which cost £10 per person, £15 for the concerts) may be added, please look at our website. And please let us have your email address as we plan to start emailing people about our events.

We are having a piano installed in our first floor room and on the third Wednesday of the month at 7pm, starting on **20th September**, plan to start hour-long piano and violin concerts. The performers will be young musicians and the music will be mostly 'salon' music though with short pieces by eg Chopin, Schubert, Elgar and Dvořák added to the mix. A glass of wine is included in the ticket, and we can seat fifty.

The new books for autumn are *Out of the Window* by Madeline Linford, a 1930 novel by the first Woman's Page editor of the *Guardian* who wrote five novels during the 1920s but then concentrated on journalism. And *Sofia Petrovna* by Lydia Chukovskaya, written clandestinely in 1939 and first published in English (in a translation we are using by Aline Werth) in 1967.

Advance notice: next year it will be 25 years since we published our first book; we shall also celebrate reaching 150 titles. For this reason we are planning a Persephone festival from 19th-21st April, which will run over three days and will include talks, discussions, book groups, literary walks, film showings, and informal parties. The cost will be as reasonable as we can make it; we hope to obtain discounted rates at local hotels.

About Persephone Books

Persephone Books is a publisher and bookshop.

The company was founded in 1998 to reprint neglected, mainly mid-twentieth century, women writers. We sell our books online, in our shop in Bath, and in some other bookshops.

We publish mostly novels, but also short stories, cookery books and biography. Each title has been chosen for its readability and impact. Our authors range from our best-selling author Dorothy Whipple to well-known writers like Katherine Mansfield, to many who are less well-known such as Jocelyn Playfair, Amy Levy and Helen Hull, and even a few men like R C Sherriff and Leonard Woolf.

The unifying thread that links our books is the domestic: all focus in some way or another on women's lives in the home. We call it domestic feminism.

The Persephone Grey books have a uniform look: the covers are grey and each has a patterned endpaper, along with a matching bookmark, taken from a textile designed around the time the book was written. They cost £14 each or three for £36 if bought from us (or £16 each from other bookshops).

The Persephone Classics have pictures on the front cover and are therefore more bookshop-friendly. They cost £11 each.

Our books make excellent presents and can be posted anywhere in the world. We sell our own book tokens, a 6 or 12 month book subscription service, and various Persephone box sets, for example Six Cheerful Books or Six Wartime Novels; and we also publish a free magazine, the *Persephone Biannually*, and the *Persephone Catalogue*.

Our main focus, however, is always on our wonderful authors, of whom we are so proud. If you have not heard of Persephone Books, we are confident that you have a marvellous voyage of literary discovery ahead of you.

'A gem of a place' *New York Times*

'The closest thing British publishing has to a cult' *Observer*