



# The Persephone Biannually

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*Charlotte (Grenville), Lady Williams Wynn  
(1754-1830) and her children (on page 8)  
painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1778  
© National Museum of Wales, Cardiff*



# OUR BOOKS FOR AUTUMN/WINTER 2023/4

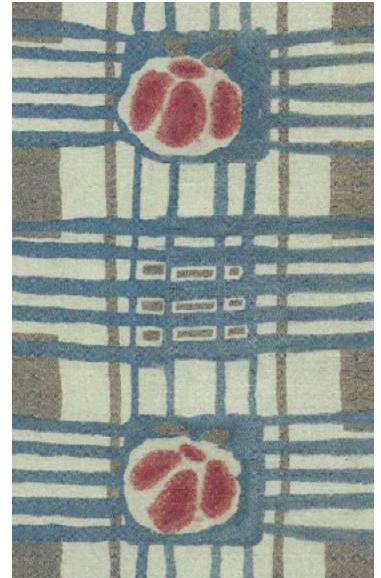
Both our books this autumn/winter are by the genuine article: forgotten women writers. Both were recommended since we had heard of neither of them. PB No. 148, *Out of the Window*, is by Madeline Linford, who was the first editor of the *Guardian's* or, as it was then, the *Manchester Guardian's* Women's Page. She joined the paper in 1913 when she was 18 and ten years later was appointed an editor. Yet, somehow, during the 1920s she found time to write five novels and a biography (of Mary Wollstonecraft, cf. page 28). *Out of the Window* was her last novel and like the other four was totally forgotten. But then, a few years ago, the Manchester historian Michael Herbert created a website dedicated to Madeline Linford's work and wrote suggesting that we read the novels. When we did, we discovered that there was one we really loved.

*Out of the Window* is ostensibly on a rather well-worn theme. A nicely brought-up girl, a doctor's daughter, leaves school and comes home in order to play tennis, go to the dressmaker, do some gentle charity work and wait for a man to propose marriage. So far, so hackneyed. But then she attends

a tea party at a neighbour's house where there is a speaker on a vaguely political theme. He is 'absurdly good looking'. When Ursula first sees him she thinks that 'he had a kind of rough and vigorous beauty, like the figure of an Australian soldier in a memorial window, and the other men in the room seemed limp and colourless beside him.' Indeed.

But the novel is about far more than its plot. Ursula's husband is working-class with a domineering mother. The young couple have very little money and she has never made a bed before or done any cooking – or shopping for food; whereas he considers it beneath him to do any domestic chores. And so we watch as they return from honeymoon and quickly realise that marriage does not only involve love but also housework.

The main theme, and one must not forget that *Out of the Window* was written the year after *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was not published in England, is sexual attraction. Although there is very little about sex, there is a great deal, by implication, about lust or, rather, about the crucial question: should marriage be based on physical or intellectual compatibility



*Roller printed cretonne designed by Constance Irving (1879-1964) for William Foxton Ltd in the late 1920s, in a private collection.*



*'Construction Site', cotton print 1920-30 probably designed by O. Bogoslovskaya, Russian Museum, Leningrad.*

or on something else again? What an extraordinary idea it is that people ‘fall in love’/ are physically attracted to someone, and that attraction, which may be fleeting, binds them to someone – for ever (or used to). This is the conundrum that Madeline Lynford is exploring.

Although *Out of the Window* was certainly Madeline Linford’s best novel, and the *Daily Telegraph* called it ‘a brilliant, sympathetic and altogether convincing picture of a social misalliance’, most reviewers did not seem to have any idea of what the author was trying to do. Even Winifred Holtby, another Yorkshire writer (a little younger than Madeline) who had by then published three novels (including in 1924 *The Crowded Street*, PB No. 76) was patronising: ‘The inconveniences of marrying out of one’s accustomed class and environment are set down with sense and an attempt at justice. The writing is quiet and careful. But [and this must have been a devastating but] nothing here is illuminated for us by the brilliance of spiritual realisation. It is all very nice, as far as it goes, but it remains a matter for decorous and pitying observation, through a glass, and darkly.’

Combined with the *Observer*’s lukewarm comment that *Out of the Window* was ‘a good, capably managed affair,

with many neat touches in it’ one can well understand that Madeline Linford never wrote another novel. Yet when she retired nearly a quarter of a century later, the *Manchester Guardian* editor at the time was quoted as saying: ‘Why so excellent a writer should have given it up [writing fiction] for rather humdrum administrative work I don’t know, but I think it was a loss to literature.’ This is certainly true: but literature lost her because no one can go on writing without encouragement; at some point they have to feel they are getting things right, and

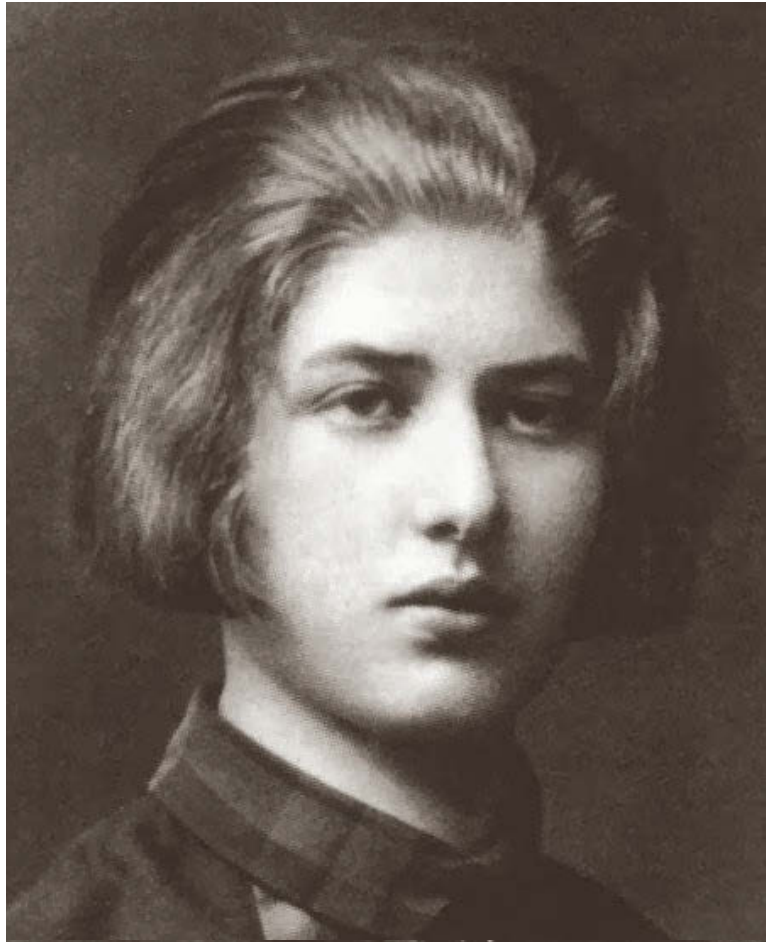
she (understandably) did not.

**O**ut of the *Window* is in fact a much more interesting novel than most of the reviewers recognised. It is full of revealing detail about life only two decades after *Round about a Pound a Week*, PB No. 79 – although the new husband has a job, the young couple does not in fact live on a great deal more than the equivalent of a pound a week. The novel is interesting about trade unions and about social inequality; it is also steeped in something we at Persephone Books call ‘Domestic Feminism’;



it is about women's lives not long before the watershed of WWII; it is feminist without being strident; and of course it is easy to read 'straight', as a novel about a young woman who married for the wrong reasons exploring the simple question, can it work? Overall it is a quietly radical novel asking whether sexual attraction is a sensible basis for marriage between two otherwise unsuited young and naive people? (Even the parlourmaid has more common sense than the nicely brought-up Ursula as she rushes to leave the kitchen in order to meet her young man, albeit with 'fearful uncertainties as to just how much could be done to hold a man's interest without incurring the wrath of God or even a baby.')

After a few months of marriage Ursula observes: 'You know, there ought to be some other solution for girls in love. It isn't fair that they should be tied all their lives and have children, just because they once felt passionate about some man and were blind to everything else. The marriage service should be postponed until they had lived together for a while and the glamorous side of it had got less interesting.' Hear, hear, we shout from the twenty-first century. A hundred years ago it could not be said aloud.



Our second book this autumn, PB No. 149, is *Sofia Petrovna* by Lydia Chukovskaya. Born in 1907, she was brought up in a literary milieu in St Petersburg. Her father, Kornei Chukovsky, was a well-known critic and children's author; he is pictured on the right beside his portrait. (This painting was once owned by the cellist Rostropovich; since the oligarch Alisher Usmanov bought the entire Rostropovich Collection in 2007 it has been locked away in one of Putin's palaces.)

The twenty-year-old Lydia starting working in a publishing house in Leningrad (as St Petersburg had just become), married and remarried and had a daughter. Tragically, in 1937 her 31 year-old husband, the physicist Matvei Bronstein, was arrested. He was executed the following year. It is the brutality, the pointlessness and the inhumanity of Stalin's Purges that is the subtext to *Sofia Petrovna*, written in the utmost secrecy in the winter of 1939-40. 'For years there was only one copy of my

novella; a thick school notebook written in lilac ink. I could not keep the notebook at home: I had already been searched three times and had all my belongings confiscated. A friend gave refuge to my notebook. If it had been found in his possession, he would have been drawn and quartered.’ Even though her friend died in

the siege of Leningrad, ‘the day before his death, he gave my notebook to this sister: “Give it back to her – if you both survive.”’ Miraculously, they did both survive and Lydia lived to see the book published.

**Sofia Petrovna** was first published in France in 1965,

in Russian. It was translated into English by Aline Werth two years later (albeit with a different title, to Lydia’s dismay) and eventually came out in the Soviet Union in 1988. (Not long afterwards the name of the city in which it was set, Leningrad, was changed back to St Petersburg.) Describing two years, roughly 1936-38, in



*The painter Ilya Repin reads of the death of Tolstoy in 1910 while Kornei Chukovsky sits for his portrait.*

the life of an ordinary woman, a widow with a son she adores, it shows her as perfectly happy, especially because she has a job at a publishing house which she enjoys. The genius of the book is the subtle way she, and the reader, sees the horror of Stalin's Purges unfolding against a background of complete and utter ordinariness. Deeply loyal to Mother Russia, Sofia Petrovna begins by thinking that the arrests, the disappearances, the cruel incompetence of officials, the incomprehensible actions by those in authority, are all a mistake. Even when her son is arrested she continues to believe in Stalin's benevolence. Yet she grows increasingly bewildered and cannot understand what is happening. It is a short, subtle, humane, unforgettable parable of what happened in Russia during the horrific years of the Purges when a million people were murdered. And, sadly, *Sofia Petrovna* is in some ways a companion piece to PB No. 106, *Into the Whirlwind*, when, again, Eugenia Ginzburg cannot at first believe what is happening in her beloved country.

‘The risks involved in writing *Sofia Petrovna* were significant,’ writes Dr Helen Tilly, who suggested the book to us and then kindly agreed to write the Preface. ‘Its discovery would have meant arrest and deportation, or more probably at that time, death. Given these

dangers, and as a mother with a young child (her daughter Elena was eight years old in 1939), why did she feel it necessary to write her story? She made it clear later that the preservation of evidence about the Purges was her primary motivation... More broadly, her motivations balance a combination of a duty to history and writing as a form of personal salvation. “For everyone there comes a time when the truth grabs you by the throat and takes hold of your soul. There is no one single time for everyone. With me, it happened when the blood began to flow liberally in the torture chambers of my native city. Was I late opening my eyes? Of course, but open them I did. And having opened my eyes, I wrote, albeit for the ‘desk drawer’, or more precisely, underground, but nevertheless I wrote *Sofia Petrovna*, a novella about a blinded society.” Again, Chukovskaya wrote in 1979: ‘In my novella I tried to show that society had been poisoned by lies as completely as an army might be poisoned by noxious fumes ... I expressly meant to write a book about society gone mad; poor, mad Sofia Petrovna is no personal heroine; for me she’s a personification of those who seriously believed that what took place was rational and just. “We don’t imprison people for no reason.” Lose that faith, and you’re lost; nothing’s left but to hang yourself.’

The urge to process her country’s lived experience eventually resulted in Chukovskaya becoming a leading dissident figure. In the 1940s she was one of the few friends trusted by Anna Akhmatova to memorise sections of her famous poem *Requiem*. Later she spoke out in defence of writers like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov. As Helen Tilly says: ‘In her last years, she became a figure of absolute moral authority in Russia and beyond; in 1990, she was awarded the first A D Sakharov Prize for Writer’s Civic Courage. She gave the prize money to one of the founders of Memorial, the human rights organisation which tried to establish an archive documenting the fate of victims of state repression in the former Soviet Union... Her devastating depiction of her heroine’s confusion, terror and ultimate breakdown, brought about by a system which thrived on violence and emotional manipulation, lies at the heart of *Sofia Petrovna*.’ This intense, brave, brief piece of writing is one of the few surviving contemporaneous accounts of the Great Purge. Unfortunately, it is as relevant today as it was more than eighty years ago.

# GWEN JOHN AT THE HOLBURNE

**G**wen John: *Art and Life in London and Paris* is an exhibition at the Holburne Museum in Bath that runs until April 2024. Persephone Books is sponsoring it, which means that in effect our readers are sponsoring the exhibition, for which we are very grateful. And the curator, Alicia Foster, has written an excellent accompanying biography (which we sell at a reduced price): pleasingly, *Gwen John: Art and Life* is not then-and-then, but thematic, focusing on each phase of GJ's life as a painter.

**T**he first chapter, 1895 onwards, is about her life at the Slade where 'there seems to have been a general understanding that the work of women artists was essentially and inalterably different from men's, and that because of that difference it was less important' (p28). After the Slade, GJ went to France. She was in Toulouse during the winter of 1903-4 and here she painted Dorelia McNeill (later John) as 'The Student' (right). (The book on top is thought to be *La Russie en 1839*; this describes Russia as 'a vast and backward prison'.) Soon GJ was a permanent resident in Paris, and the rest of Alicia Foster's book describes her years there. Ch.13 is in some ways the most fascinating. It is called 'The Modern Interior' and tells us that GJ 'did not paint interiors because she was confined to

them, but because she believed them to be extremely significant, both personally – a space of her own was always essential to her – and in terms of what modern art could be.' When a man paints a female figure in an interior 'he is turning the domestic world inhabited by women into the subject of his art' but 'when a woman paints

an interior with a single woman in it ... she is changing the idea of what domestic life can be and what a room can mean, from a place that women have always "naturally" inhabited to a private space that allows a woman the psychological and creative freedom to imagine it as art.' *A Room of One's Own.*



# LADY CHARLOTTE'S CHILDREN

Charlotte *née* Grenville, Lady Williams Wynn (on the *PB* cover) is on the left of this very large painting, with her children – below – on the right. Her first three children were born between 1772 and 1775; this painting is presumed to date from 1778 when she was 24. Always a most assiduous mother, she later wrote numerous letters which were published in 1920 as *Correspondence of Charlotte Grenville and Her Three Sons*. They are

gossipy, witty and entertaining. In 1824 she wrote to her son Henry: ‘You will have seen, probably in the Newspapers of the decision of the Queensbury Causes which gives to the poor Lord Hertford, £500,000 (one is tired of writing the 0’s).’ And a few days later: ‘The conversation of the last three or four days has been much occupied by this duel of Lord Brudenell’s, who has been fighting, not with the Admiral Tollemache, nor with Mr

Johnson, but from a chivalrous regard for female honour with Mr Heathcote, for declining to marry his sister Lady Emma Brudenell.’ This was because she refused to give up ‘the strictest intimacy’ between herself and a Mrs Johnson. And so on for 400 delicious pages.

‘The format of this portrait recalls early C16th Venetian representations of “The Rest on the Flight with St John the Baptist”’ (writes the National Museum of Wales which owns the painting). ‘It also has a warmth and richness of colour reminiscent of the Venetian High Renaissance paintings which Reynolds admired. The costume is in the Turkish fashion popularised during the early C18th, and the pose derives from the portraits of ladies in Turkish dress by Jean-Etienne Liotard.’

Ironically, the reason we love the portrait is because Lady Charlotte has the weary expression of every young mother. It’s a portrait of maternity, but a realistic portrait. If only I could just read my book in peace, she is obviously thinking. And Watkin, the eldest, looks rather a tiring child, a handful one might say. It just shows that we all look at art differently. Some of us might see this picture as an example of domestic feminism in painting; art historians see Venetian paintings and Turkish costumes and something altogether more highfalutin.





# 1930'S WRITERS ON RUSSIA

During the 1930s, numerous Western intellectuals visited the USSR, drawn by the appeal of seeing a socialist society under construction, and some published accounts of their experiences. Prominent amongst them were Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Julian Huxley, E M Delafield, and Lion Feuchtwanger.

EMD, author of *Diary of a Provincial Lady* (PB No. 105) and *Consequences* (PB No. 13) was in Russia for four months in the summer of 1936 and published *Straw without Bricks: I Visit Soviet Russia* in February 1937. The tone is humorous and lightweight but some of the sentiments are sharp. For example, she thinks often about the White Russians who have been exiled; she finds Leningrad deeply depressing; and says at the end: 'One can only congratulate the Government on the thoroughness with which it has seen to it that everyone coming into contact with foreign visitors upholds the theory that Soviet Russia has attained to earthly perfection within the last twenty years... Yet stories filter through, from time to time... Of people who try to get away and can't – of people who live hunted lives, in cellars – of people who are serving long terms of forced labour as prisoners... Nobody really knows the truth.' Upon her departure she bravely stuffed the manuscript of her book in her underwear, realising that her luggage would be searched but

not her person.

A few months later, in December 1936, Lion Feuchtwanger, author of *The Oppermanns* (PB No 136), arrived in Russia. His main commitment was to bring anti-fascist forces together and this included cooperation with communist parties. Like E M Delafield he had no idea 1936/37 was the very height of Stalin's Purges and wrote in *Moscow 1937* (available online at Revolutionary Democracy): 'I came to the Soviet Union from countries where complaints are the general rule and whose inhabitants, discontented with both their physical and spiritual conditions, crave change ... The air which one breathes in the West is stale ... One breathes again when one comes from the oppressive atmosphere of a counterfeit democracy and hypocritical humanism into the invigorating atmosphere of the Soviet Union. Here there is no hiding behind mystical, meaningless slogans, but a sober ethic prevails...'

He commented on the 'comfortable certainty (of the citizen) that the state is really here for him and not he for the state...' As to Soviet youth, 'how sturdily and with what calm confidence do they face life, feeling that they are organic parts of a purposeful whole... Everywhere in that great city of Moscow there was an atmosphere of harmony and contentment, even of happiness.'

And he concluded that 'of all the men I know who have power, Stalin is the most unpretentious. I spoke frankly to him about the vulgar and excessive cult made of him, and he replied with equal candour. He grudged, he said, the time which he had to spend in a representative capacity, and that is easy to believe, for Stalin is, as many well-documented examples have proved to me, prodigiously industrious and attentive to every detail, so that he really has no time for the stuff and nonsense of superfluous compliments and adoration.'

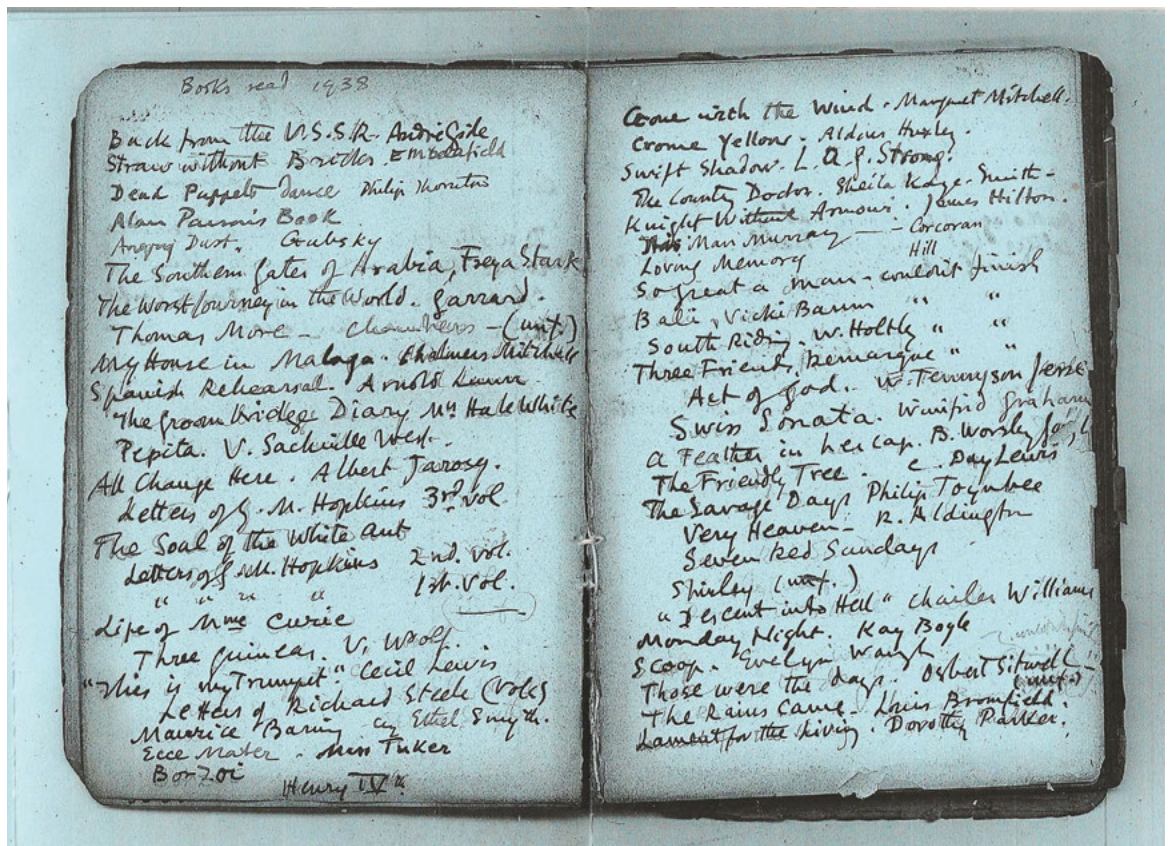
LF's trip is described in detail in Karl Schlegel's 2008 book (also called *Moscow 1937*). The author accepted that LF 'could not pick and choose the preconditions underlying his own knowledge', moreover 'we are not concerned with rehabilitating a writer who had arrived at an excessively anodyne judgement on Stalin's dictatorship.' But, he tells us, at LF's departure from Moscow the press and fellow writers gathered again. 'Of those who came to see him off at Belorussky station on February 8th 1937 the following five writers were murdered shortly afterwards: Sergei Tretiakov, Isaac Babel, Boris Tal [his interpreter], Mikhail Kol'tsov and Maria Osten.' Devastatingly, the last two had travelled to Sanary-sur-Mer where LF lived in exile 'to bring him the invitation to visit Moscow and to persuade him to take it up.'

# OLIVIA SOWERBY'S READING

One of the Persephone girls' great-great grandmothers, whose name was Olivia Sowerby, kept a notebook listing the books she had read. Here is the page for 'Books read in 1938'. It starts with André Gide's *Back from the USSR* and EM Delafield's *Straw without Bricks* (cf. the previous page) and goes on to display a wide-ranging taste in books where *Gone with the Wind* is followed by Aldous Huxley's *Chrome Yellow* and she reads novels by, among others, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Winifred Holtby and Gwethalyn Graham (mistakenly called Winifred Graham). There

are familiar names such as Virginia Woolf (*Three Guineas*) and Evelyn Waugh (*Scoop*). There is also Philip Toynbee's first book, written when he was 21 (cf. the page opposite and page 26). In 1935 Olivia Sowerby read *The House in Paris*, *Illyrian Spring* and short stories by Sylvia Townsend Warner. Consistently, she read about a book a week, half of them fiction and half non-fiction. On other pages of the book she notes down *The Squire*, PB No. 103 and *The Priory*, PB No. 40, Elizabeth Bowen, Rebecca West and Ivy Compton-Burnett. The left-hand side of the page

is for non-fiction and the right side for fiction, although in 1938 she read more non-fiction and had to spill over onto the fiction side; however, in 1940 she read far more fiction. Sometimes she read novels aloud. In 1941 she marked *Middlemarch* as unfinished and it wasn't because there was a war on – in 1943 she read *War and Peace*, *Pied Piper* and, sadly, a Norah Hoult novel with no title which she marked 'very poor'. What a relief that it can't have been *There Were No Windows*, PB No. 59, as that was not published until the following year.



# CHEERFUL WEATHER

In May 1978 *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* by Julia Strachey (below, right) was reprinted by Penguin. Philip Toynbee (the son of Rosalind Murray, cf. page 26) wrote: ‘All it does, on the face of it, is to tell the story of an upper-middle-class wedding in the English countryside. But the observer is so sharp-eyed and so delicate-tongued that her book reveals, on one level, the rich absurdity of the participants; on a deeper level, the helpless despair which they carry about with them as if to the manner born. Good books cannot be adequately described in terms of other books, but sometimes can be usefully located in this way: *Cheerful Weather* is out of Jane Austen, heavily crossed with Chekhov and lightly sprinkled with essence of Bloomsbury. Both the strengths and the weakness of the book lie in the author’s aloofness. Seen so much from the outside, the absurd poignancy of the characters is greatly enhanced. But at a high cost to the reader’s genuine concern. This is not the kind of novel in which we ever forget, or are meant to forget, that we are reading a novel.’

In the same month Victoria Glendinning wrote in the *TLS*: this ‘very good novel is about the wedding day of Dolly Thatcham, whose mother is a dreadful lady, superficial, bossy and conventional to the point of lunacy. Friends and relations litter

the downstairs rooms; among the bustle Joseph sits alone, waiting for a glimpse of Dolly, who is about to marry someone else. Upstairs, Dolly in her wedding dress is drinking rum out of the bottle. Last summer Joseph and Dolly were happy together, but nothing was said, the lines got crossed and now it is too late. There is one moment when everyone else has gone off to the church, when things could be dramatically put right between them; but both are secretly glad when the moment passes. They

are two people who are not in love, but who have been; or maybe, thinks Joseph at the end, it was not love at all but “some depressing kind of swindle”. The personal sadness emerges thinly from the welter of aunts, cousins, servants, sofas, flowers, ferns and fussy décor (a brass Indian tray on trestle legs, a piano covered with Serbian embroidery, silver photo frames, Moorish paper knives). The 1930s atmosphere is thick. The central thread is the love that nearly was.’



# OUR READERS WRITE

‘If you want to be totally and happily immersed in cosy 1930s English suburbia, **Greengates** by R C Sherriff (PB No. 113) is the one for you. The story opens on an auspicious day: Tom Baldwin is retiring from his position as Chief Cashier in a City firm. He is full of plans to make his own retirement busy and fulfilling, with studying, gardening, all the things he never had time to do when he worked. Of course, in no time at all, the new régime is causing havoc with the lives of his wife Edith and the Baldwins’ loyal old servant Ada. All very relatable, all very funny. Tom is conscious that he is worried about how to fill his days, Edith’s dilemma is, if anything, even harder to face: “She had foreseen Tom’s battle, but she had not foreseen her own; how could she say that his constant presence in the house was making her life unhappy? That his only way of helping her would be to go out, and stay out, for eight hours a day?”

The three inmates of ‘Grasmere’ seem to be heading for a crisis, and while we can laugh at their irritations and upsets, it is so perfectly written that we uncomfortably recognise our own little selfishnesses, routines and foibles in their behaviour. But just when things seem to be plunging towards disaster, they find ‘Greengates’; buying this house opens them up to a whole new way of living,

This book makes me roar with laughter, and I could quote paragraph after paragraph to prove my point – except that I want you to find it for yourself. Yes, it is a novel about navigating retirement, something for us all to think about at some point, but also about marriage, about starting again, about finding your true self.’ *s.harkness.substack.com*

‘**Greenery Street**, PB No. 35, fits well into the category of a comfort read, a delightful comedy of the first year of married life. P G Wodehouse was an enormous fan of this novel, and his letter of admiration is reproduced in the fascinating Preface. This is a lovely book to read with real enjoyment, an almost mythical book of good-natured humour, the little incidents of life, and the desirability of living in Greenery Street. The living, if fictional, embodiment of the fortunate couples to be found in the street are the newly married Felicity and Ian Foster, whose road to romance was beset with the usual family concerns. The house of their dreams proves elusive but this is an essentially happy story, so by chance another house becomes available, the marriage is made and Felicity resolves to become the most able of housekeepers, with her books of accounts and her supposed economics. Of course, there are hiccups, Felicity is not a good manager, but this is the first year

of marriage, and everything can be coped with in this tale. An unsympathetic reader would not enjoy this book, as it is very much of its time and there is no great drama; expectations of servants and lifestyles are obviously dated. It deserves to be read in the light of a charming story of a near mythically happy place, a happy time and just an enjoyable read. I really enjoyed my reread of this book, finding lots to appreciate in its gentle and yet knowing humour, its lively and positive characters, including a street of dreams. This is a book to relax into, to be distracted by, when perhaps twenty-first century life is too much.’ *NorthernReader*

‘I love every word I’ve ever read that came from Frances Hodgson Burnett’s pen. **The Shuttle** is a beautiful book; the shuttle of the title refers to the journeys back and forth between America and Europe that were becoming common for the wealthy when FHB was writing. One of the people making this journey is Rosalie, an American heiress who comes to England when she marries her new English husband, who then proceeds to completely wreck her spirit and isolate her from her American family. The portrayal of familial love is very moving and the characters are so vivid. A 10/10 recommend forever.’ *A waste of good paper*

# MANSFIELD V CHEKHOV

It is alleged [*wrote Craig Raine in the TLS in April last year*] that Katherine Mansfield was blackmailed by her former lover for plagiarising Chekhov's story 'Sleepy'. But the KM story isn't an example of plagiarism at all. It retains the central situation and the risky dénouement – and changes everything else.' Something similar happens with Chekhov's 'The Grasshopper' and KM's 'Marriage à la Mode' (reprinted in *The Montana Stories*, also next year in *The Third Persephone Book of Short Stories*). She has taken the template, the given plot: a woman married to a dull, hard-working husband betrays him with a painter, seduced by a superficially more exciting artistic milieu. Chekhov's story concludes with the death of the doctor husband, and his wife's realising the truth about the 'dull' man and the artistic types she had preferred to him.

The KM is much greater, a brilliant story that gazumps its source. Chekhov's arty types talk rather obvious baloney. KM gives us a vivid polyphony of competing vacuousness. Bobby: "Do you think there will be Mondays in heaven?" Moira: 'Moira was asleep. Sleeping was her latest discovery. "It's so wonderful. One simply shuts one's eyes, that's all. It's so delicious."' They say "Hillo" rather than "Hello". They say, "Come, thou wife of William." They ponder the exact colour of

their bare legs: "Mine are the palest, palest mushroom colour." That repetition is perfectly judged. It is a cult, in effect.

The infidelity isn't physical, it is spiritual, fundamental. William, the solicitor husband, decides to write his wife a long letter, nine pages trying to rekindle their love. Isabel reads it aloud to the artistic guests. 'When she reached the end they were hysterical.' At which point she experiences shame. She feels 'vile, odious, abominable, vulgar'. KM's stroke of genius is to make this remorse genuine but muddy. The story ends with backsliding. Her guests shout

up and invite her to join them. 'Now was the moment, now she must decide. Would she go with them, or stay here and write to William. Which, which would it be? "I must make up my mind.'" Oh but how could there be any question? Of course she would stay here and write.'

'No, it was too difficult.' She postpones writing a reply. The last sentence of the KM reminds me of Isaac Babel's boast: 'No iron spike can pierce a human heart as icily as a period in the right place.' It is given a paragraph to itself: 'And, laughing in the new way, she ran down the stairs.'



Gwen John 'The Convalescent', late 1910s-mid 1920s.

# THE PERSEPHONE 149

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

2. **Mariana** by Monica Dickens This funny, romantic first novel, published 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 up 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 Beauman

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

15. **Tell It to a Stranger** by Elizabeth Berridge Observant and bleak 1947 short stories, an *Evening Standard* bestseller. Preface: AN Wilson

16. **Saplings** by Noel Streatfeild A novel by the well-known author of *Ballet Shoes*, about the destruction of a family during WW2; a R4 ten-part serial. Afterword: Jeremy Holmes Also a *Persephone Classic*

17. **Marjory Fleming** by Oriol Malet

A deeply empathetic novel about the real life of the Scottish child prodigy who lived from 1803–11. Translated into French; and 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 Beauman

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

21. **Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day** by Winifred Watson A delightful 1938 novel about a governess and a nightclub singer. Read on R4 by Maureen Lipman; now a film with Frances McDormand and Amy Adams. Preface: Henrietta Twycross-Martin.

A *Persephone* audiobook read by Frances McDormand. 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 Priory by Dorothy Whipple** A much-loved 1939 novel about a family, upstairs and downstairs, living in a large country house. 'Warm, witty and realistic' (Hatchards). Preface: David Conville

**41. Hostages to Fortune by Elizabeth Cambridge** 'Deals with domesticity

without being in the least bit cosy' (Harriet Lane, *Observer*): a remarkable fictional portrait of a doctor's family in rural Oxfordshire in the 1920s.

**42. The Blank Wall by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding** 'The top suspense writer of them all' (Chandler). A 1947 thriller about a mother shielding her daughter from a blackmailer. Filmed as *The Reckless Moment* (1949) and *The Deep End* (2001); a R4 serial in 2006.

**43. The Wise Virgins by Leonard Woolf** This wise and witty 1914 novel contrasts the bohemian Virginia and Vanessa with the girl next door in 'Richstead' (Putney). Preface: Lyndall Gordon

**44. Tea with Mr Rochester by Frances Towers** Magical, unsettling 1949 stories, a surprise favourite, that are unusually beautifully written; read on R4 in 2003 and 2006. Preface: Frances Thomas

**45. Good Food on the Aga by Ambrose Heath** A 1933 cookery book written for Aga owners which can be used by anyone; with illustrations by Edward Bawden

**46. Miss Ranskill Comes Home by Barbara Euphan Todd** A wry 1946 novel: Miss Ranskill is shipwrecked and gets back to a changed wartime England. Preface: Wendy Pollard

**47. The New House by Lettice Cooper** 1936 portrayal of the day a family moves into a new house, and the resulting adjustments and tensions. Preface: Jilly Cooper

**48. The Casino by Margaret Bonham** 1940s short stories with a dark sense of humour; read several times on BBC R4. Preface: Cary Bazalgette

**49. Bricks and Mortar by Helen Ashton** An excellent 1932 novel by a very popular pre- and post-war writer, chronicling the life of a hard-working, kindly London architect and his wife over thirty-five years.

- 50. The World that was Ours by Hilda Bernstein** A memoir that reads like a novel set before and after the 1964 Rivonia Trial. Mandela was given a life sentence but the Bernsteins escaped to England. Preface and Afterword: the author **Also a Persephone Classic**
- 51. Operation Heartbreak by Duff Cooper** A soldier fails to go to war – until the end of his life. ‘The novel I enjoyed more than any other in the immediate post-war years’ (Nina Bawden). Afterword: Max Arthur
- 52. The Village by Marghanita Laski** This 1952 comedy of manners describes 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 make an interesting contrast 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/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, 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 and rather shocking 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 Felgett
- 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 very useful detail.
- 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 *Biannuallies* 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 Buncle' book, published in 1943, is about Barbara Abbott, as she now is, and the 'young' Mrs Abbott, keeping the home fires burning during the war.
- 105. Diary of a Provincial Lady by EM Delafield** One of the funniest books ever written: a 1930 novel, written as a diary, about everyday family life. Illustrated by Arthur Watts. Afterword: Nicola Beauman
- 106. Into the Whirlwind by Eugenia Ginzburg** A Russian woman is arrested in 1937 and sent to the Gulag. Filmed as *Within the Whirlwind* with Emily Watson. Afterword: Rodric Braithwaite
- 107. Wilfred and Eileen by Jonathan Smith** A 1976 novel, based on fact, set in the years 1913–15. Wilfred, badly wounded in France, is rescued by his wife. A 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 Cookery 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 Bawden, Afterword: Christopher Campbell-Howes
- 115. Maman, What Are We Called Now? by Jacqueline Mesnil-Amar** The author kept a diary in July and August 1944: an unparalleled insight into the last days of the Occupation in Paris. 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 short 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 rather 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 sometimes 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* and *The Enchanted April* 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

**148. Out of the Window by Madeline Linford** The first women's page editor of the *Guardian* wrote six books; this perceptive and unusual 1930 novel is about an unfortunate marriage. Preface: Michael Herbert

**149. Sofia Petrovna by Lidia Chukovskaya** A short Russian novel written secretly in 1939-40 about the effect of Stalin's Purges on an 'ordinary' housewife. Translated by Aline Werth. Preface: Helen Tilly

# ‘ROMEO’S COUSIN’

A wonderful midsummer evening in 1979. The party was in the house of Charles S Grosvenor, chiefly known for being rich, but also as a patron of the arts and culture vulture.

We don’t have all that much culture in Brinsley, but from time to time a theatre company from Bristol, Birmingham or London drops by for a week during a provincial tour, probably because of the river walks and the famous moors and Mr Grosvenor’s lavish Friday night parties. Also we have a new theatre, small but with excellent acoustics, converted from an old warehouse.

In my capacity as assistant town librarian, I make it my duty to set up a table with artistically arranged publicity material, which always catches Mr Grosvenor’s eye if no one else’s, so that I always get invited to his theatre parties. This time I was on my own, so I didn’t bother with the chicken pieces in mayonnaise or the salmon and avocado mousse or the mounds of salads, but homed in on the chilled white wine and later the strawberries and cream and the slightly warm white wine. It was a magical evening, a heady smell of honeysuckle in the garden and of other, mostly white flowers which I didn’t recognise, in the conservatory and the vast drawing rooms, but I wanted to get fairly drunk fairly soon because I was celebrating my divorce and I was no longer a hundred per cent happy about it.

Geoffrey and I had had an open, low-key marriage, no great thrill even at the beginning, but he was a nice, friendly bloke and I knew I was going to miss him because he always knew what to do when anything fused or jammed or blew up or simply fell off the wall and also he could always make me laugh, even when I was most angry with him.

I wasn’t at all angry when he started to go out with Violet Armitage; she was interesting and fairly nice-looking and was soon fitting in with our crowd. After all, I was seeing other men, so it seemed only fair that Geoffrey should have Violet. But yes, I was certainly put out when he told me he’d fallen in love with her and wanted a divorce, though I couldn’t make any great issue of it, because it was a risk I’d taken. We’d both taken that risk. In the Seventies, having a great time with no strings was considered the most important thing in a marriage.

Even on that evening when he should have been out celebrating with Violet, he offered to come with me to the party, but of course I had to say no, that I’d invited Bob Chance (‘the devastating Bob Chance’, Geoff always called him), and that I’d be quite all right, thank you.

And I suppose I was all right. I had a new black chiffon dress and silver highlights in my hair and the night was warm and moonlit and several men were looking at me, signalling that

they were available – for a while at least – and several women were looking in my direction and looking away again very quickly, which is always gratifying.

At about midnight, there was dancing on the terrace and at first I was just drunk enough to enjoy it, but after a while and a couple more drinks, I started feeling light in the head and heavy in the feet and wandered off into the garden and almost at once realised that I was being followed, so I waited.

‘Hello,’ my follower said. ‘I hope you don’t mind if I join you out here.’

‘Not at all. I was hoping someone would. After a while it gets just too hot for dancing, doesn’t it?’

‘Indeed it does. You dance very nicely, by the way. I was watching you.’

‘I was watching you, too. Watching you watching me.’

‘You dance so well.’

‘Do I? No I don’t. I don’t think you know too much about dancing. Geoffrey always says I bounce about too much.’

‘But I always think that’s a very good fault. In fact, I think women who don’t are not adding much to the sum of human pleasure. You were. You seemed bent on it. Full of joy.’

‘It’s just the way I dance. I can’t dance any other way. I’m not really full of joy. Not tonight, anyway. I’ve just had a divorce and sometimes it doesn’t seem a particularly good idea. Are you

divorced?’

‘I’m not even married.’

‘No, you’re too young. Listen, weren’t you in the play tonight?’

‘Yes, I was. Were you there?’

‘Rather. In the fifth row of the stalls with the official party. Weren’t you Juliet’s cousin? Or was it Romeo’s cousin? The one who gets stabbed?’

‘Well, Romeo’s friend. But I did get stabbed, yes.’

‘You were very good.’

‘Getting stabbed?’

‘No, all the way through. No, I thought you were very good. Honestly. I like actors. I met one last year. Philip somebody. P’raps you know him? A few months later I saw him in a play on television. Do you do television?’

‘When I’m asked. But I’m not very often asked. Hardly ever, in fact.’

‘Never mind. You will be. You’re very young, aren’t you?’

‘That’s the second time you’ve said that. Come on, you’re not so old yourself.’

‘I’m thirty-two. How old are you?’

‘Thirty.’

‘No you’re not. Maybe twenty-five. I’m a bit drunk, by the way.’

‘I won’t take advantage of you, I promise.’

‘You certainly can if you’d like to, but it’s entirely up to you. I don’t want you feeling sorry for me or anything like that.’

‘No, what I feel seems to be lust rather than pity. How do you feel about good old-fashioned lust?’

‘To be absolutely honest, and

I’m not often even moderately honest, it doesn’t seem to be the old all-in-all, these days. I used to think it was positively the only thing, but now I seem to think other things, things like affection and, well, being comfortable together are quite important too. What do you think?’

‘At the moment, I can’t think of much beyond this lust business. You’re so lovely, that’s the trouble. It’s all these curves and slopes. Oh, I just love the way you’re so round and so flat, so up and down and so on. “Straight leg and quivering thigh.” Oh, so lovely, have I said that before? “And the demesnes, that there adjacent lie.” He knew a thing or two, didn’t he, the old boy? So soft and wet and lovely. Perhaps we can wait till afterwards to discuss affection and so forth. What do you say?’

‘By all means. But I don’t think we’re going to be very comfortable here, do you? On these pine needles? Oh well, yes of course. Under the stars. Under the stars.’

He was about twenty-five; very beautiful, very ardent.

He came home with me afterwards and it was bliss to stretch out on a big soft bed. But it was four or five o’clock by this time and though he was making a great effort to tell me how wonderful I was and how wonderful it had been for him and how wonderful it was that we were going to have this wonderful relationship, he could hardly keep

his eyes open, so that after a bit I turned him on his side and he went straight to sleep.

The next morning I had to go to work so I left him a note. ‘By the way, my name is Anne Daley. Help yourself to bacon and eggs and coffee. A. Daley.’ I couldn’t think of anything else to say.

I phoned the house at one but he’d left. (I discovered later that he’d got a *matinée*.) Of course I could have gone to the theatre that evening to find him, he could have come back to find me, but neither of us made the move; it wasn’t fated to be more than a one night stand, though a very sweet and memorable one.

And it became more memorable as time went on because I discovered that I was pregnant.

Of course it was all my fault. Everyone was on the Pill in 1979. How could he have guessed that I’d decided to come off it because of some scare story I’d read in the library about its long-term effects? Why the hell couldn’t I have remembered I’d come off it? Pregnant and stupid. Oh bloody hell.

The next few months I spent feeling sick, trapped, furious, deciding on an abortion, deciding against an abortion and then feeling sick, trapped and furious again. I managed to go to work – occasionally a little late – but apart from that I hardly stirred from the house.

Geoffrey and I still saw each other occasionally and he was the

first to notice my condition.

‘Look, I think we ought to get married again,’ he said. ‘This thing with Violet isn’t working out too well and I’d be quite glad of the excuse to finish it. We’ll tell her that we spent the night together to celebrate our divorce and that this happened.’

‘As a matter of fact, that was the night it happened.’

‘I thought it might have been. I gatecrashed the party to check that you were all right and stayed just long enough to see that you were.’

‘He was one of the actors. He played Romeo’s cousin. I never found out his name.’

‘You would have if he’d been important to you.’

‘He wasn’t important to me. But nice all the same. Very nice. I don’t want you to think it was just anybody.’

‘Shall we get married then? Remarried I mean?’

‘Are you sure you want to?’

‘Quite sure.’

‘Does that mean we have another honeymoon?’

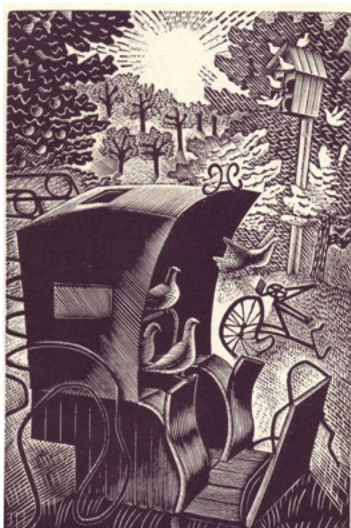
‘Of course. Where shall we go? Madeira again?’

So Geoff and I got married for the second time. Violet wasn’t altogether thrilled about it, but I invited her to be my bridesmaid and luckily she found that quite amusing, particularly since she looked so much prettier than I did. (At that time, I mean, my old white dress two sizes too small.)

And this second time, we seemed to settle down. Little Joe

was born after a few weeks and within two years I had Emily Jane and in no time at all Geoffrey and I had become a proper married couple, spending our Saturday afternoons in B & Q looking at motor mowers and our Saturday evenings with a video and a couple of takeaways.

Violet is married to a dentist



*Eric Ravilious woodcut, 1930*

and has very troublesome twin boys. Geoff always calls her ‘my ex’ but she doesn’t seem at all important to him. I never think of my past men-friends. I saw the devastating Bob Chance the other day and he’d become fat and bald; I hardly recognised him.

Then, two or three months ago, I saw *him*, Romeo’s cousin, on television. He was playing a leading part in a play about the Gulf War. He’d filled out and become very handsome and I nearly fainted with pride. Or perhaps it was desire.

‘Look,’ I told Geoffrey. ‘That’s him. That’s him.’

Geoffrey snatched up the *Radio Times*. ‘He’s called Basil Hargreaves. No wonder he didn’t tell you his name. Why don’t you write to him? Care of the BBC?’

So I did. ‘Dear Basil Hargreaves. My name is Anne Daley and we met one night in 1979 when you were touring in Barnsley with *Romeo and Juliet*. I’m so glad you’re being asked to do television now. I saw you tonight and you looked very handsome and grand. I wonder if you remember that midsummer party when we met? I was very unhappy that night and you did something for me which put me back on the right track. Thank you for that and the very best of luck.’

I didn’t get any reply for a few weeks and then I got a postcard with his photograph on one side and ‘With best wishes Basil Hargreaves’ printed on the other. I threw it straight in the bin, but later I got it out again, wiped it clean and put it in my underwear drawer.

Geoffrey teases me about it.

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Taken from *Not Singing Exactly: The Collected Stories of Siân James* published in 1996

# WOMEN'S PAGE EDITORS

Two of Persephone's authors edited the women's pages on newspapers. The reason this is significant is that before the advent of the internet women's pages were a hugely important part of women's lives. They had pieces on every imaginable subject of interest to women and were certainly a very long way from the narrow confines of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*.

Stella Martin Currey (1907-94), author of *One Woman's Year*, PB No. 135, worked for the *Bristol Evening Times and Echo*. It did not have a women's page as such but from 1928-9 she wrote a column called 'Apples of Eve' with articles such as 'Poultry Farming for Women', 'New Saucepans for Old' and simple recipes. It also had a summer reading column. Alas, the newspaper folded, but Stella started writing novels, the first of which was published in 1933. Twenty years later came *One Woman's Year* (dedicated to her friend Tirzah Garwood, who had died two years before). 'This is a delightful journey through the year,' wrote Simon Thomas of *Stuck in a Book*, 'an anthology of anecdotes, recipes, and so on. The story/ anecdote bit is the longest and perhaps most delightful of each section – just tales from family life, about enjoying village life, the countryside, and everyday activities. All are told with an enjoyably British sense of

deprecating humour. I was often reminded of E.M. Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, which is about the best thing to be reminded of.'

Meanwhile, Madeline Linford had gone to work at the *Manchester Guardian* in 1913 when she was 18. She needed to work (rather like another Manchester writer Elizabeth Myers, author of *A Well Full of Leaves*, PB No. 143, who did a secretarial course and then went to London). In 1921 she was appointed editor of the *Manchester Guardian's* newly created women's page. She wrote later: 'It was for those days a very bold venture. Women's pages were not well thought of by serious journalists, being mainly fluffy, ephemeral, and a sop to advertisers... My briefing was lucid and firm. The page must be readable, varied, and always aimed at the intelligent woman ... I saw her as an aloof, rigid, and highly critical figure, a kind of big sister, vigilant for lapses of taste, dignity and literary English. On this last point my instructions were also explicit. There must be no concessions to popular jargon: words like 'perambulator' were to be given all their syllables and none of the terms loved by fashion writers – "chic", "modish", "ensemble" – could be allowed.'

Then there was Robin Hyde. Philippa Werry writes in her novel in verse *Iris and Me* (2023):

'In 1932, Iris got a job on the [Auckland] *Observer*./ (Derek was a baby still in Palmerston North.)/ The *Observer* came out every Thursday/ and the work was relentless, week after week/ after week. The deadline couldn't be missed./ It was a frantic life, out all the time,/ chasing stories, then tapping away at her typewriter/ late at night, writing them up... Thursday 25 May 1933:/ we didn't know it then/ but her last piece appeared in the *Observer*./ A few days later, they called Iris into the office./ Her job was gone.'

Several of our other authors worked on newspapers either as editors or reviewers: Winifred Holtby, Lettice Cooper, Virginia Woolf (who was a staple at the TLS), Elizabeth Berridge, Kay Smallshaw, and there are bound to be others we haven't mentioned.



Christine de Pisan 1364-1430, an autograph manuscript c. 1410

# J R ACKERLEY ON FORSTER

**E**M Forster, author of PB No. 146 *Two Cheers for Democracy*, was a very special man [*wrote J R Ackerley in his obituary of Forster*]. Few people can have had so many close affectionate friends as he had, and all of them will have regarded him as I did, as someone special, special to each of them. For as many friends as he had, there were as many Morgans. Indeed, he once said to me, ‘One is not oneself but many people.’ He was speaking in a social sense. The truth of this, in the way he put it as a general statement, is far from evident; most of us, I fancy, are much the same to everyone we meet, that is to say we are ourselves; in *his* case it was the truth, he adapted his thought to each new friend and became his or her Morgan.

**H**e had an extra sense, he was able to see into or through other people, and first impressions usually sufficed. He knew he possessed this gift: ‘It’s something I seem to be good at,’ he used to say, as he also said to me in the thirties: ‘I seem to be a Great Man.’ Such remarks may sound priggish and conceited, adjectives as inapplicable to Morgan as any that could be found; he simply meant that, from the evidence, he possessed certain qualities or distinctions, he was good at sizing people up and he had become a great man, which we only become by public recognition and persecution.

**S**uch was Morgan’s ability to attend that he could repeat verbatim things said to him in conversation. A striking remark made to him by anyone, a friend, a visitor, his college bedmaker, T E Lawrence, Orwell, Hardy, Forrest Reid, Lytton Strachey (to drag in a few celebrities), his old aunts Nellie and Rosalie whom he visited regularly until they died, as he kept in personal touch with everyone he liked, and in whose garrulous ramblings some shrewd or droll observation might take his fancy, he would bring it out afterwards, and again long afterwards as fresh as paint.

**M**organ lived to a great age, but he never grew old excepting in his body in the last few years of his life, he never became a blimp or a bore, the scientific age was not to his taste but he never ceased to care about the state of the world and he never lost his faith in human values and human relationships. In the perennial freshness and adaptability of his mind he was perfectly able to keep up with the young, indeed one may say he outstripped them. The ‘fame’ part of it, which had struck and amused him when it became evident, bothered him as it grew, he got more and more bored by the pressure of culture vultures from all over the world, interviewers, biographers, photographers, autograph hunters, sightseers and young writers who wanted the best

free advice on their voluminous typescripts, and had to protect himself from persecution.

**A**s is well known, Morgan did not believe in belief: he was saddened when his friends became converts. Although it was difficult to get him to spend money on himself, he renounced none of the goods life has to offer and was on excellent terms with the world, the flesh and the devil. But he was also formidable, he was tough, as a saint ought to be. Humbug, meanness, deceit, slackness, rudeness, selfishness, he did not let them pass. It was my great fortune to have this wise friend beside me in my life, perhaps something to my credit that I kept him to the end – though his love once given was never taken away. ‘Will it really profit us so much if we save our souls and lose the whole world?’ He wanted all the love and pleasure he could get, and he wanted them for others too. ‘Civilisation, Humanity, Enjoyment.’ I would say that in so far as it is possible for any human being to be both wise and worldly wise, to be selfless in any material sense, to have no envy, jealousy, vanity, conceit, to contain no malice, no hatred (though he had anger), to be always reliable, considerate, generous, never cheap, Morgan came as close to that as can be got.



# ‘THE FEMININE NOTE IN LITERATURE’ BY E M FORSTER

The feminine note in literature – if there is such a thing – must be felt [*wrote Forster in an informal talk given in 1910*]. When you are reading a book can you tell instinctively whether it is the work of a man or a woman? Some may say ‘I can’, others ‘I can’t’, others again say ‘I don’t care: it isn’t a point that interests me.’ All three answers are valuable, because they are emotional answers, and this is an emotional question. Some of the answers that have been given in the past include subtlety of emotion; solidity of emotion; naivety; the reproduction of personal experience; idealism; relentless common sense. One can always tell whether a book is written by a woman – it idealises men. There isn’t such a thing as a feminine note.

But if we turn to John Stuart Mill he says there is only one note in literature – the personal. ‘I grant,’ he says, in effect, ‘that there is often a difference between men’s and women’s books, but I deny that it is more than a difference of subject matter. As things are at present men know more about soldiering and business, women more about domestic economy. Their books are coloured by experiences. Mingle the experiences – as in the future they will be mingled – and you will mingle the colours too. What you mistake for the

masculine or the feminine will disappear, and personality, and nothing besides personality will remain. For think of the past. Think how, until lately, women were the servants or the playthings of men. On such rare occasions as they acquired culture, their outlook was too conventionalised and limited to win them immortality. Time has changed much of this, and will change more. A freer atmosphere is at hand, and the artificial products of the past – the Châtelaine, the Grande Dame, the Bluestocking – will be blown away and give place to the individual, distinguished only by the personal qualities.’

This is Mill’s opinion. But to me it feels all wrong. I should like to suggest that Mill cannot tell us anything about the feminine note, because he only thought of arguing it out, never of feeling for it. He has led us to some salutary admissions. It is true that this question of masculine and feminine is not important in great literature. It is true that in some great literature it does not even occur. It is historically true that women have had a miserable chance as human beings, and consequently as writers, and that if in all the centuries they can show only one supreme head of song, there is ample explanation for this. But to go further than this, to say that

the Feminine Note is the result of limitations, is to cross the line dividing the aesthetic critic from the legal. We feel instinctively it is not so.

Now if we think over women’s books we shall find ourselves dividing them into two classes. The first class is light, naive, amusing, illogical, full of flashes of insight, interspersed with unfairness and stupidity; full of details that are often photographed from life with consummate skill; full of crude and intermittent idealism; in a word it has all the qualities that women are popularly supposed to have. *Evelina* is an early example of this class in fiction; the modern examples are innumerable. The second class is small, but it contains names as great and as diverse as Georges Sand, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. It is full of a quality that women are popularity supposed not to have: solidity; and the literature of the future will probably spring from it.

Jane Austen is the only writer of the first class who has put her powers of observation to school. She does take trouble with her feminine note, and though it was a typical note, the melody is not typical. Never raising her eyes from her own experiences, or from experiences that might have been her own,

she refuses to snatch a passing laugh or administer a passing thrill. The little turns of life, which in other women humorists follow with such whole-hearted zeal, are to her not isolated farces but part of one large comedy. Is not Jane Austen the only woman comedian? The writers of her class will not take the trouble, they thrown away the initial advantage that is given them by their frankness, and the writers of the second class are aiming at something else.

We seem to be entering a new world. The naivety and cheerful illogicality have gone, and in their place we have grave, careful, ordered works full of brain and character drawing, full of emotion, and full – almost too full – of moral purposes. The whole trend of women’s work is away from the surface brilliancy, the sharp schoolgirl insight of the past. In classical scholarship they are not subtle and skilled in the final graces, but they are hard, methodical workers, invincibly acute and severe. Literature echoes this note of seriousness. Even when a novel is as readable and amusing as Miss Rosalind Murray’s [here Forster was referring to one of the ‘two best novels I have come across in the past year’, *The Leading Note*, written fifteen years before *The Happy Tree*, PB No. 108] it is the hard work that dominates and really raises its high position in literature. The future is clearly

on these lines. If only women novelists could add to their solidity a sense of poetry, there is no point they might not reach.

But what is the Feminine Note? A shy little definition of some sort must scuttle by. So here comes something. The Feminine Note is – preoccupation with personal worthiness. That is to say, the

characters in a woman’s book try not so much to be good as to be worthy of one of the other characters. One character is presented as a standard, and by him or by her the others are measured, and approved or found wanting: he or she embodies a moral code. Our definition of the feminine note then is really ethical: it defines a woman writer’s standards.



Ridiculous Taste or Lady's Absurdity, a 1770s satirical print on display in the Gallery at No. 1 Royal Crescent

# 25 MILSOM STREET

**A** *Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary

Wollstonecraft, dashed off in six weeks in 1791, was famous from the moment of publication [wrote Claire Tomalin in *The Listener* in 1972]. But after the reviews, the attacks in prose and verse, the satirical novels, the fact remained that not only did it not change people's thinking, but very few people seem even to have read the book through.

A summary should make it clear how far in advance of her time and how original her thinking was. In the sphere of education she believed that boys and girls should be brought up together in co-educational day schools with physical freedom and bodily exercise, and learning not by rote but by informal conversational methods. She stressed the importance of intelligent maternal care; she believed that fathers should be friends, not tyrants, and that children have the right to judge their parents. Her awareness of the importance of a stable and loving home background, especially in early childhood, shows an instinctive grasp of human psychology which is marked in all her writings and is one of the most attractive things about her. Ardent feminist that she was, she knew the importance of mothering. C19th feminists felt obliged on the whole to suppress or deny their sexuality, mid-C20th ones have embarked on an equally extraordinary

programme – of denying the importance of the family and the parental roles. Mary would have been amazed by both. She gives a touching picture of an ideal marriage, cemented by friendship rather than passion, with man and wife 'equally necessary and independent of each other'.

She is fully aware that marriage is not the only sphere of action for women: they must have financial independence if they are to keep their dignity and freedom, and for this they must be properly educated to be able to take up careers. Amongst the careers she suggested for them were medicine (not just nursing), midwifery, business, farming and shopkeeping; and they would do well to take an interest in politics too, for Parliamentary representation was something they should have. Mothers and widows as well as single women need to be able to plan their lives and manage their own affairs rationally. Women need to be treated and educated as rational creatures with ambitions outside mere matrimony, if they are to contribute to society and be proper companions for men.

Mary Wollstonecraft had intended to write a second volume of *A Vindication* but had spent the last year of her life working instead on a novel, *The Wrongs of Women*, or *Maria*; I suspect that this embodied Mary's thinking for the missing Volume Two of *A Vindication*. It gives a valuable and uniquely

frank picture of late C18th life seen through the eyes of women, and it explores the relations between the sexes with more insight than the rather theoretical *Vindication*. In particular Mary had the courage to assert that women had strong sexual feelings, and that the false refinement which tried to pretend otherwise (a refinement that was to overpower the C19th completely) was degrading to all: 'When novelists and moralists praise as a virtue a woman's coldness of constitution and want of passion, I am disgusted. We cannot, without depraving our minds, endeavour to please a lover or husband, but in proportion as he pleases us.' She ridiculed the idea that it is only women who have the duty of retaining their personal attractiveness in order to hold their husbands' affections.

The sociological observation in *Maria* is particularly interesting. Mary talks about the deplorable conditions of hospitals, run for the convenience of the doctors and students rather than for the patients, and where the poor are experimented on for the benefit of the rich. She depicts the fate of unmarried pregnant girls most vividly: servants turned away by mistresses to be confined in beggary while their lovers are kept in employment; girls abandoned to sink into prostitution, perhaps after being bullied into sex by their employers.

Together *The Wrongs* and *The Rights of Women* make up an extraordinary document; it was no negligible achievement for a young woman born in the mid-C18th to have mapped out almost single-handed the whole programme of feminist reform that was to be put into effect so much later. Extraordinary, too, that her work, instead of being hailed as Holy Writ,

should have been almost entirely neglected by her successors. Her particular blend of attack and warm-heartedness did not occur together again amongst feminists. Her thinking was generous, original and vigorous: she rightly conceived women's emancipation as part of the struggle to improve the quality of life of the whole human race.

In fact it was in Bath that

Mary's feminist ideas took hold. In 1778, aged 19, she took a job as companion to a Mrs Dawson who lived at 25 Milsom Street (left). (This has now been definitively established by the local historian Hugh Williamson and we shall be adding MW to our *Literary Map* when we reprint.) But, as Madeline Linford (cf. pp. 2-4) wrote in her 1924 biography of MW: 'Mrs Dawson was a lady of very peculiar temper. She had had a long succession of companions and had driven away each one by her ill-humour and tyranny. In Mary she found her match and the young girl and the cross-grained old woman lived in something like harmony for two years. But Bath then was the centre of gaiety, and of intellectualism relaxing itself. Dr Johnson and Boswell had stayed there two years before, and it was the rendezvous for all that was rich and famous in the country. The town in the height of its season spread out a pageant of sunshine and luxury: beautiful gowns and scents, powdered wigs, dancing, theatricals and a band playing in the square. Mary was pretty and full of high spirits, and it must have been hard to spend her days in the shadow of a cantankerous woman while youth played in the sunshine all round her. She had no time to console herself with books, and through a dull tangle of petty duties, squabbles and abuse the two years dragged slowly to an end.'



# WOMEN'S VOLUNTARY SERVICE

In Westminster Abbey on May 12th [1959] I listened to fanfares of trumpets sounding over the green berets of the Women's Voluntary Service. The fanfares came at the beginning and end of a noble service commemorating twenty-one years of work by an organisation whose only purpose is to help other people. Over 2000 were there, most of them older women with the medals and chevrons of war service. Afterwards, as we ate a picnic lunch in the sunshine of the Dean's garden, the Abbey bells pealed for us, tossing their metallic music against the heat. We must all have felt a little uplifted and proud, conscious perhaps for the first time that our inconspicuous efforts in villages and towns were part of a great fabric of national benevolence.

I joined WVS in Manchester in January 1939, when its aim was to enlist women for Civil Defence. By the end of that year it had 30,000 members. For the first few months of the war I potted about collecting salvage, not much less belligerently active than the real combatants at that time. With the catastrophes of June 1940 the volunteers were called on. I went to a report and control centre, first beneath Police Headquarters in South Street [Manchester], and later in the basement of the Town Hall. 'You people will never stick it,' said one of the paid workers whom we were displacing. 'When

the bad weather comes, you'll all stay at home.'

I should like to put it on record that during my five years at Main Control I can remember no WVS member absenting herself for a trivial reason. Women came from the bombed wreckage of their homes and at times of bereavement and anxiety. They walked from the suburbs when transport failed. Three weeks holiday were allowed in the year, but at Christmas and other festivals the job went on as usual. Many of us, like myself, had livings to earn and linked part-time and professional work with sandwiches and ferocious Civil Defence tea.

Soon we were wearing the green and burgundy uniform which is now so familiar and honoured. In those days we paid for the various garments and, when clothes rationing started in the middle of 1941, gave coupons for them. The uniform was not easily acquired then. A WVS had to have shown herself a diligent worker and the sort of person who would do it no discredit. I was proud of mine, and like nurses and Salvation Army, found that it edged me through police cordons, barricaded streets, and the many awkward situations of a blacked-out city. The overcoat was in those days of inadequacy and poor materials the warmest garment I possessed.

So for nearly five years the volunteers worked in shifts throughout each day and night. We got to know each other very well and to share the monotony and the occasional feverish rush with a surprising lack of friction. I suppose that in our cellar we were too much conscious of the great issues of the war to be easily diverted into complaint or recrimination. At any rate the atmosphere I remember was cheerful and accepting, though the conditions under which we worked were often uncomfortable.

The WVS has no political interest. It does not, unlike the admirable Women's Institutes, influence local government or attempt to alter the conditions in which it finds itself involved. Its members are neither fêted nor entertained. It is a case, as the hymn says, of 'you in your small corner and I in mine,' and from all those small corners has come a surge of selfless devotion and service that no other nation and no other time has equalled. As I looked round Westminster Abbey I felt that those women had earned their fanfares.

Published in the *Manchester Guardian* on May 27th 1959 (the name was changed to the *Guardian* three months later).

# EVA IBBOTSON ON LIBRARIES

I was eight years old when I came to Britain as a refugee – and was not particularly grateful. Mostly this was because after years and years of being a sheep coming to the manger, or a grazing cow, I had at last landed the part of the Virgin Mary in the nativity play at my convent school in Vienna.

And then ... Hitler.

We came to London in 1934, a bedraggled party consisting of my fey, poetic mother, my irascible grandmother and confused aunt, and rented rooms in a dilapidated house in Belsize Park which, in those days, was a seedy, run-down part of the city. The house was full of suddenly impoverished refugees facing exile. On every floor were lonely and muddled professors, doctors and lawyers, mostly from German-speaking countries. I had no friends, no school yet, nowhere to play.

Then, one day, walking up the hill towards Hampstead to do some shopping for my grandmother, I came across a building with an open door. I went inside. The room was very quiet and full of books. At a desk sat a woman with fair hair and I waited for her to tell me to go away. But she only smiled at me. Then she said: 'Would you like to join the library?'

My English was still poor but I understood her. In particular, I understood the word 'join' which seemed to me to be a word of unsurpassed beauty. I told her

that I had no money and she (her name was Miss Pole) said: 'It is free.'

I joined the library. I did not only join it, I lived in it. I don't really remember when I began to read English as easily as German, but it did not take long. After a few weeks, I got to know the regulars – the tramp with holes in his shoes who came to keep warm and read the *Racing News*, the woman whose mother-in-law was driving her insane ... and my special friend, Herr Doktor Heller, who was a refugee like I was, only from Berlin, not from Vienna.

Dr Heller came very early in the morning and did not leave until the library closed. He came with a pile of medical books – *The Diseases of the Knee*, *The Malfunctions of the Lymphatic System*. The books were in English because this eminent specialist, who had been head of the department of obstetrics in Berlin's most famous maternity hospital, was not allowed to practise medicine in Great Britain without re-sitting every one of his medical exams in English.

He must have been in his thirties, not able to wander from one language to the other as I could, being a child. Sometimes, I heard him sigh – once I even saw him wipe his eyes as he thought of the hopelessness of his task – and then Miss Pole and I exchanged glances. She was very concerned for him,

fetching down the German-English dictionary as soon as he came in. Sometimes, she shut up the library a little later so as to give him more time; he lived in a single, poky room which he could not afford to heat.

There were other crosses for him to bear. His wife, an Aryan, had stayed behind in Germany and decided not to join him. Yet he went on patiently, uncomplainingly, learning again, and in an alien tongue, what he had learnt and forgotten fifteen years earlier.

Then, unexpectedly, I was offered a place at a Quaker boarding school in the country. I left London and so did my family. The library was closed and merged with a bigger one in a grander part of Hampstead. Then came the war. Miss Pole, who must have been younger than I had realised, joined the Wrens and the British government in its wisdom interned its 'enemy aliens'; those men and women who had come to them for shelter.

But for me, things went well. I left school, went to university and, in my last year, met and married a Burma veteran just discharged from the army. A year later, I was admitted to Queen Alice's Maternity Hospital for the birth of my baby. It was a stroke of luck – Queen Alice's was the most famous hospital in London with a formidable reputation.

The morning after my daughter's birth, there was a

certain stirring in the ward, an air of expectation. The nurses stood up straighter, checked the bedclothes, patted the patients into tidiness. Matron rose from the chair behind her desk. And the procession entered. It was the specialist, the Great Man himself, come to do his morning round. No one will believe me when I describe what went on in those days when the specialist came into the ward. Spotless in his white coat, he was flanked by his registrar, his houseman and at least two students eager for his every word.

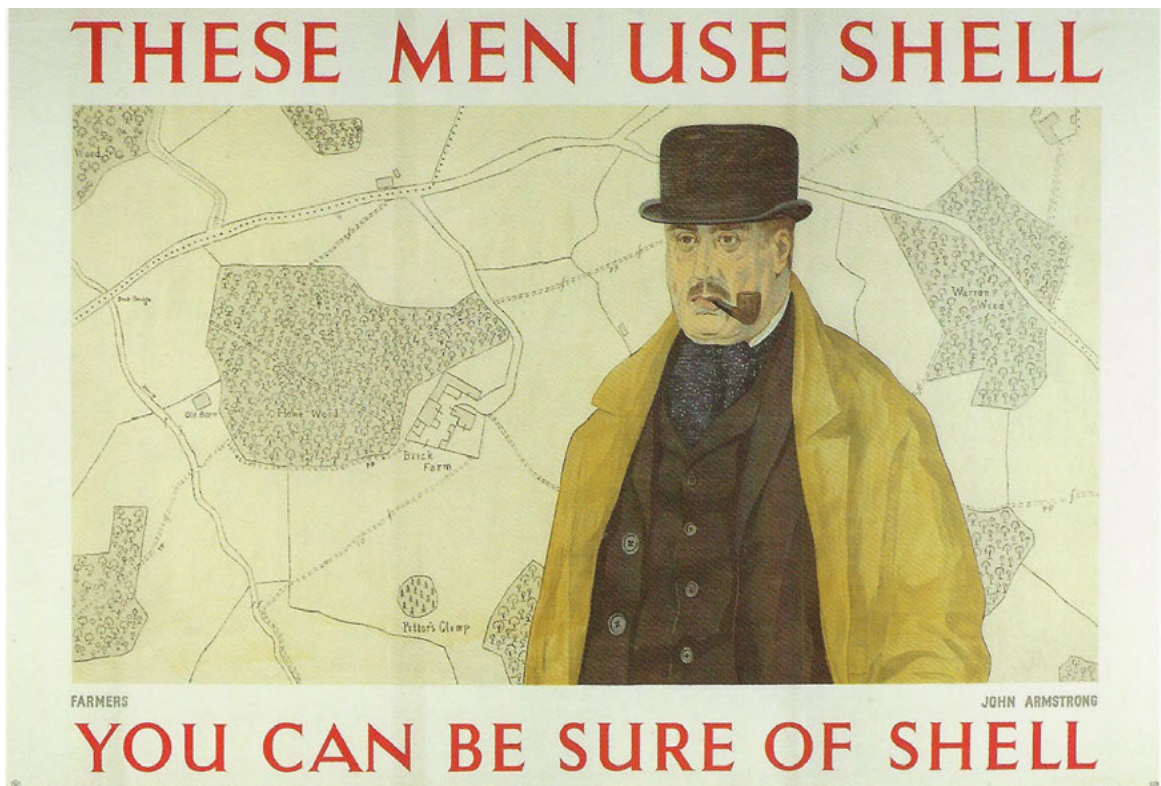
The great man moved slowly between the beds. I had

determined not to speak to him – it would have been like addressing God – but when he came up to my bed, I couldn't help looking at him very hard, hoping and hoping that he would recognise me. And he did. For a moment, he seemed puzzled and then he smiled. 'My little friend from the library!' he said. And he turned to his retinue and said that I had helped him. That I had encouraged him and given him hope. I had done that!

But there's one more thing to tell. After I was discharged, I took my daughter to visit him and there, behind the teapot in his elegant drawing room,

I found a woman whom I knew. 'Reader, he'd married her!' He had done this most excellent thing and married Miss Pole.

© The Estate of Eva Ibbotson (1926-2010). Published in the *Guardian* July 9th 2006. The daughter of Anna Gmeyer, it was Eva who suggested that we reprint her mother's novel *Manja*, now PB No. 39. We always have Eva's own novels among 'the fifty books we wish we had published' in the shop.



# EVENTS

**O**n *Wednesday November 1st* we shall show the 1990 film of *Mr and Mrs Bridge*. This Merchant Ivory film is based on two books by Evan S Connell which are firmly among the '50 books we wish we had published'. Tea will be served at 4 pm and the film shown at 4.15. Madeira will be served afterwards.

**T**he third Persephone concert is on *Thursday November 9th* at 7 for 7.15, a glass of champagne and cheese straws will be served and the hour long concert, given by **Trio Paradis**, will focus on Russian music in honour of Lydia Chukovskaya.

**A**t lunchtime on *Thursday November 9th*, do join us at The Reader Bookshop in Liverpool.

On *Thursday November 16th* at 1pm we shall be at House of Books in Manchester.

*On the same day* at 6 pm there will be a launch at The Portico Library in Manchester for Persephone Book No. 148 *Out of the Window* by Madeline Linford.

**O**n *Thursday November 30th* at 7pm, eighty years since the death of Etty Hillesum, author of PB no.5 *An Interrupted Life*, the actress Susan Stein will make a return visit to Persephone to perform her play called *Etty*.

In a separate event 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.

**O**n *Wednesday December 6th* at 6pm (60 years since Piaf's death in October 1963) the singer Susan Black will repeat last year's stunning performance of *The Life of Edith Piaf* in words and music. French wine and *gougères* will be served.



**O**n *Thursday December 7th* we shall have our annual Christmas event from 3-8pm. Mulled wine and mince pies are served free of charge, gift wrapping is also free.

**O**n *Thursday December 14th* at 7 for 7.15 pm the pianist **Jools Scott** will play to us on our beautiful 1847 Erard piano. The 2024 Persephone concerts will be on January 11th, February 8th, March 14th etc.

**O**n *Wednesday 17th January* we shall show the film of *Into the Whirlwind* starring Emily Watson, based on PB No. 106, a sad companion piece to *Sofia Petrovna*.

**A**nd still on the Russian theme, on *Tuesday 6th February* at 2.30 we shall show the David Lean film of *Dr Zhivago*. Tea will be served halfway through and vodka afterwards.

**N**ext year it will be 25 years since we published our first book; we shall also celebrate reaching 150 titles. For this reason we shall have a *Persephone Festival* from *Friday April 19th to Sunday April 21st*. This will include talks, discussions, book groups, literary walks, film showings, and informal parties. More details on our website.

**A**ll events are £10, except the concerts which are £15. And don't forget our two monthly book groups, details on the website.