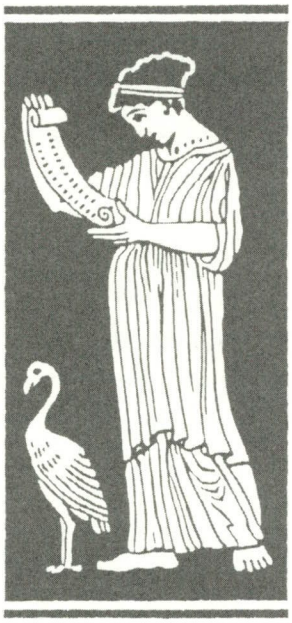
THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY



JUNE 1999

No. 2

Our First Three Months

'How is it going?' people ask, and it is difficult to know how to respond because some things have been going extremely well and some have been appalling. I think I won't dwell on the appalling, partly because I am sure marketing-speak encourages one not to, and partly because there have been so many positive aspects to setting up a new publishing company.

The good part is undoubtedly you - Persephone readers, subscribers, whatever in the end you will turn out to be called - ringing up with orders. Everyone in the office enjoys this: we love talking about the books, describing them and hearing your reaction, putting them in the padded envelopes and waiting for our cheerful postman. (Forget what anyone ever told you about the small business initiative, it is a myth; the only people who are helpful - and in this context I do not mean our wonderful landlord, printer, typesetter, printer of our quarterly magazine or lunch place on the corner with the best soup in the world - are the post office, who charge a mere £250 a year to collect a mail bag every day at 2 o'clock.)

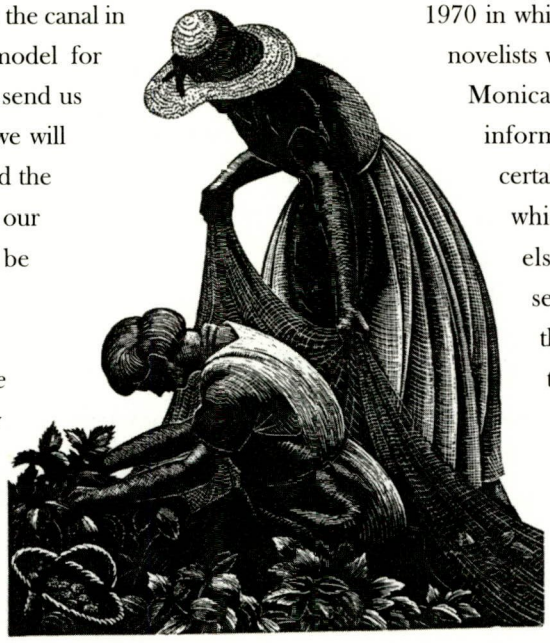
The whirring of the credit card machine is unexpectedly enjoyable: there is a business - not quite avaricious but certainly money-minded - streak that had lain dormant during the years of looking after children and writing books: because we are making money, not a huge amount and not enough to be in profit yet, but a respectable beginning. A very satisfactory number of people have ordered three books for £25, and we recently had our first £100 subscriber - a brave person who ordered all twelve of our first year's books sight unseen.

In some ways this was less an act of faith than with most publishers, in that you now know what all our future books will look like. Something we seem to have got absolutely right is the look of the books. The reaction to them has been - essentially - ecstatic. Everyone loves the grey covers and jackets, and not merely the grey itself but their feel - very smooth and strokable. The endpapers, too, are selling the books (especially the abstract 1950s shapes on a red background of the Whipple). As we hoped when we made the momentous decision to make all the books paperbacks - momentous because no-one has ever had endpapers on paperbacks before, and because they cost the same to produce as hardbacks - Persephone books have become objects that people buy for their own intrinsic beauty.

With our specific look in place, we are confident that we will continue to appeal to our 'one in a thousand'. (If there are 30 million women in Britain, 15 million of these must be potential Persephone readers, ie. over 25. We believe we can be a going concern if we reach 15,000 of them: the one in a thousand.)

Which is why we would prefer not to buy a mailing list from a broker but are going to

see if we can build up our data base through you and your friends. One of this month's books, *The Victorian Chaise-longue* by Marghanita Laski, comes with a postcard reproduction of an especially commissioned painting by David Gentleman of the house (on the canal in Islington) which was the model for the one in the novel: if you send us five names and addresses, we will send you five postcards. And the painting, now hanging in our office, will one day be auctioned in aid of charity.



'Picking Strawberries' by Clare Leighton, from Four Hedges: A Gardener's Chronicle (1935)

The first issue of *The Persephone Quarterly* was greeted with much enthusiasm. And because it fulfills the double function of literary magazine and catalogue, we have decided not to charge a £10 subscription fee in future but to send it out free of charge, thereby ensuring it reaches as many people as possible. Everyone who took out a subscription may claim a free book - just let us know which one you would like.

And what of the books themselves? Oddly enough, they have sold in roughly equal quantities. *William - an Englishman* (already chosen for a university reading list) is seen as the 'greatest' book of the three, the one with the qualities of a classic; and because it is about the First World War and an ordinary couple caught up in it, its relevance to the situation in Kosovo has escaped no one. *Mariana* has been hugely enjoyed as a portrait of a certain kind of inter-war English life; after its re-publication A.S.Byatt kindly found an article written for *Nova* magazine in March 1970 in which she contrasted serious novelists with best-selling ones 'like Monica Dickens who offer information, insight, and a certain kind of artistic pleasure which is unavailable elsewhere, but are never seriously discussed because they were classified some time ago as bestsellers.'

And the Whipple? All have agreed with Nina Bawden's remark in her Preface that it is Dorothy Whipple's 'great gift to be able to take an ordinary tale and make it compulsive reading.' (It was *Someone at a Distance* that was the subject of the first Persephone Book at Lunchtime at which Nina Bawden spoke; our next lunches will be on 22 September, October and November - do telephone for details and to reserve a place.)

This quarter we have added a pull-out order form. Otherwise you may of course order by telephone, fax or e-mail. 'Allow four days for delivery' is our slogan. Why not test it out?

Nicola Beauman

Our June Books

This is being written in the aftermath of the spat about the shortlist for the Orange Prize (but before the winner has been announced). Always keener to report controversy than consensus, newspapers alleged that the chair of the judges had denounced British women's fiction as 'piddling' and domestic. Nicci Gerrard, whose article on 'Sexual Reading' appeared in the first issue of *The Persephone Quarterly,* and who was one of the Orange Prize judges, claimed that this was a media-manufactured controversy. She said in the *Observer,* 'Women have often written interior, domestic novels, and men have often condemned or patronised them for it.' And, referring to the *Guardian* leader (reprinted on page 5) that masqueraded as a contemporary review of *Pride and Prejudice,* she wished she could escape the Orange Prize controversy by reading a Jane Austen novel, 'written two hundred years ago and safe in history's grasp, instead.'

Like most women writers, even Jane Austen was once neglected: we are going to find it quite tricky thinking up openings for these pieces that do not always begin, 'it is a mystery why this book has been forgotten' etc. Thus *Fidelity* (1915), published in England in 1924, is by an American writer called Susan Glaspell who ought to be considered one of the most important novelists of the century but is still only known for her plays. The novel concerns a young girl living in the Midwest at the beginning of the century who runs off with a married man. It demands of us (in the words of the Preface): 'Was it worth it for herself, for her family, for those she lives among? Was it worth being shut out by the society in which, previously, she had lived so securely and so happily?...Was her fidelity to her love and her ideals worth it in the end?' This is a novel as great as any by Edith Wharton or Willa Cather; yet it is true that Jane Austen, a hundred years earlier, would have felt much more familiar with it than with any on the Orange Prize shortlist.

An Interrupted Life: The Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum 1941-43 is undoubtedly our most important book this month, yet it could not find a publisher for many years. Etty lived in Amsterdam as life for Jews became more and more restricted and, finally, doomed. She had a clear vision of the end and refused even to try to escape the fate of those among whom she lived. The first months of the diaries are largely about her affair(s) with two (older) men and in fact there is nothing depressing either about the diaries or the letters she wrote from the transit camp at Westerbork. They are deeply sad; but - and there is no way of avoiding the cliché - uplifting. 'An unknown young woman,' observes Eva Hoffman in her Preface, 'became one of the most exceptional and honest witnesses of the devastation through which she lived.'

Finally, *The Victorian Chaise-longue* by Marghanita Laski, published in the same year as Dorothy Whipple's *Someone at a Distance* and with some of the same period feel (like Ellen, Melanie, before her illness, envisages nothing other

than being a 'good' wife and mother). PD James begins the Preface she has written for us by recalling that on first reading 'it impressed me as one of the most skilfully told and terrifying short novels of its decade. Re-reading it over forty years later confirms both the admiration and the terror. The novel involves the reader in that most atavistic of human horror, confusion of identity and the realisation that one is inexorably trapped by circumstances which one can neither influence nor understand.' It is a short book, almost a novella, but just as powerful as a far longer novel.

This month's PQ woodcuts are all by women: Clare Leighton, Tirzah Ravilious and Winifred McKenzie. Woodcuts seem especially suited to women, being sparing on materials and mess and easy to take up and put down without the brush clogging up or the light going. In fact, in some ways they are the painter's equivalent of Jane Austen's 'little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour (letter to her brother Edward, 16 December 1816). (In a future issue of *The PQ* we hope to have an article by Pat Jaffé, the author of *Women Engravers.*)

Pride and Prejudice

A Guardian leader for 11 May 1999 professed to be a contemporary critique of Jane Austen.

At a time when our country is at war, it seems bizarre that this young author should offer up such a pot pourri of social trivia. She has, indeed, seen the defects herself. 'The work is rather too light, and bright, and sparkling,' she has written, showing a perspicacity sadly absent from her book. 'It wants shade; it wants to be stretched out here and there with a long chapter of sense...about something unconnected with the story; an essay on writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparte.' How true: perhaps this writer's real vocation is as critic (and there can be none more honourable!) not author, for her fiction is sadly circumscribed by its lack of cultural context or mythic backdrop. As if it is sufficient for the modern novel to offer mere characters dancing upon a gaudy stage. One of our leading cultural commentators has rounded on the most recent productions of our female novelists as 'piddling' and 'parochial', and this book certainly bears out her criticism. An endless round of partying in which silly young women can think of nothing but how to catch unpleasant young men. It is all too typical that the arrival of a regiment provides an opportunity for further romantic entanglements. Not for this writer the great issues of state, of war and peace, life and death; she prefers comedy - the only decent character, a churchman, is subject to scurrilous attacks - to high art. The same commentator has castigated 'young women who write about who they had to dinner as if that is all there is to life' and encouraged them to 'think bigger'. I can only second that. Leave Longbourn, Ms Austen, and address the Great Issues. Only then can you hope to write a novel that will last.

The Victorian Chaise-longue

Novelist Penelope Lively recalls what first intrigued her about Marghanita Laski's novel and explains why she thinks it is still such a powerful book nearly fifty years later.

I forget when I first read *The Victorian Chaise-longue*, but I know that I was immediately gripped by this odd, powerful story. Re-reading it - maybe thirty years later - those qualities remain but the book takes on an interesting new significance, seen from the vantage point of the end of the century. It now becomes a period piece on two different levels. The fifties setting that was contemporary when it was written is superimposed upon the Victorian nightmare into which Melanie is plunged. For today's reader, both are distanced, and while this does nothing to diminish the impact, it adds a further dimension. There is a further twist to the time factor.

At its most basic, this is time-travel fiction. But it is time-travel with a difference, avoiding the usual pitfall and cliché of the genre, which is to make it into a form of adventure. What Marghanita Laski has done is to propose that such an experience would be the ultimate terror - not exploration and exhilaration but pure horror. And she is absolutely right. Deprived of their proper placing in time and space anyone would become unhinged, which is why Melanie has to cling to the belief that she is dreaming for as long as she possibly can. You can escape from a dream. The point at which she is forced to abandon this comfort and search for other explanations is her plunge into nightmare.

This is where the Victorian setting in which she finds herself is such a clever construct. It is familiar, in an eery way. She has fallen asleep in a nineteenth century London house and wakes to find herself in another such, but claustrophobically transformed. The objects and decor that she sees are not entirely alien, but disturbing. The chaise-longue itself is of course the vehicle of her displacement. In the early nineteen fifties, when the book was written, Victoriana was not yet fashionable. I can remember buying just such a chaise-longue myself for £4 when I was an undergraduate - draped with an Indian cotton bedspread it nicely embellished a college room; in the same way, for Melanie, Victorian furnishings were not chic but emotive. They suggested a climate that was oppressive. They suggested a past that was not tantalising but ominous.

Melanie is recovering from tuberculosis. That central fact also distances the book. It is quite hard now to realise that the disease was still very much around here less than fifty years ago. I remember the chest X-rays compulsory for all students in the first year at university. I remember also contemporaries who suddenly disappeared in consequence, and re-appeared a year later, having been packed off to a sanatorium in Switzerland. It was an inconvenience rather than a death sentence. But the spectre of the nineteenth century pestilence

still lurked. When Melanie in her nightmare finds herself coughing blood, she knows what this means. And of course she has the wisdoms of her own century - she wants to have the windows flung open, to breathe fresh air. Marghanita Laski is able here to focus on what is perhaps the ultimate horror of her situation - that Melanie with the enlightenment of the future is trapped among those to whom she can explain and justify nothing. To them she is simply disoriented by illness. Crazy - or perverse.

'The Wife', 1929, by Tirzah Ravilious, from <u>*The Wood Engravings of Tirzah Ravilious*</u> *(1987)*

The twentieth century's release from tuberculosis is set against the spectre that stalked the Victorians. But in the stifling, menacing atmosphere in which Melanie finds herself there is another dark, unspoken theme. Sex. Milly - her alter ego - if that is what she is - has been in some way disgraced. But the matter is taboo and what has happened is apparent only through her sister Adelaide's asides and innuendos and the baffling behaviour of two male visitors. To the reader things are clear enough, although it is never certain if Melanie is entirely aware. Once again, the chaise-longue is the hinge between the two planes of existence. The site of rapture, of ecstacy - that is the implication. Sexual rapture and the rapturous response to life and a spring day felt by Melanie when she lies on it, released for the first time from her sick bed. The freedom and happiness of her own sexual life, married to a man she loves, is set in oppositiom to the inhibitions and frustrations of that other age.

The past is another country, and not one that anyone in their right mind would wish to visit. For our own sanity, we need to be firmly tethered to time and place. I think that this simple truth accounts for the success of the story. Most readers find it disturbing - and compulsive. You read with fascination and alarm because of course you identify with Melanie. The reader becomes enmeshed in her nightmare and her search for explanations and for escape. Its intense atmosphere haunts, long after the book has been laid aside. And Victorian furnishings will for ever after have a new resonance, above all the chaise-longue.

Marghanita Laski

Esther Godfrey writes about the inspiration behind her grandmother's novel, The Victorian Chaise-longue

One day during the war my grandmother, Marghanita Laski, bought a Victorian chaise-longue for thirty shillings in a Watford junk shop. It was covered in red felt, with heavy flowered embroidery, and after a while it began to give her the creeps. It was on this piece of furniture that her fictional heroine, Melanie, falls asleep in a state of ecstasy. This has apparently been induced by the promise of recovery from her recent brush with fatal tuberculosis, the prospect of happiness with her husband and their new baby and the sunlight streaming through the windows of her elegant drawing-room. She wakes up in the body of another woman, nearly a hundred years earlier.

Trying to piece together what has become of herself, Melanie remembers a story in which a monk walks outside listening to a lark. He returns to the monastery to find that no one knows him, and that his name can only be found in the records of a hundred years past. Marghanita read this tale as a child, in Arthur Mee's *One Thousand Beautiful Things*, and cites it as having been the direct inspiration for her own story. For the purposes of her novel, she developed a conceit that from a moment of a timeless ecstasy, time can be re-entered at a different point from that at which it was left. Some time later 'she began to wonder why anything so extraordinary should be accepted as within the bounds of even fictional possibility,' and the result of her amateur but scholarly investigations was *Ecstasy in Secular and Religious Experiences*, published in 1961. This draws on evidence found both in literary and religious texts and in questionnaires to identify particular types, symptoms, and triggers of ecstasy. But where those questioned reported sensations and impressions, Melanie's adventure is horribly real.

The chaise-longue links Melanie and Milly, her nineteenth-century counterpart, dragging its past into Melanie's airy modern life, and then dragging Melanie back into its history. Milly is censured by her society, condemned to life after death on the chaise-longue for her unspeakable crimes against respectability. As the parallels between Melanie and Milly are revealed, we understand that it was Milly's misfortune to be born in the wrong time, for as Melanie explains, 'Sin changes, you know, like fashion.'

The Victorian Chaise-longue is infiltrated by ghosts from Marghanita's life. Shortly before it was written she found a house for a very dear aunt, who had profoundly influenced her education, particularly fostering her love of literature and of London. Like Melanie and her husband's, the house was behind King's Cross in what was then considered a slum. It overlooked the canal and was, as the book describes, in a 'hidden

forgotten Regency row'. One of the things I like about the book is the way that Marghanita uses it to laugh at herself. For she was a house buff and a snob, and very much interested in soft furnishings, but she was 'one of those educated women', and in a way Melanie, with her artifice and her helplessness, is the shade of what she escaped being.

And there are other unsettling echoes, some of which I may have imagined. My grandmother came from a conventionally restrictive Jewish family which, though by no means Victorian (she was born in 1915), was still subject to that stifling respectability which by that time most households had thrown off. She certainly remembered it as oppressive. Her parents refused to recognise her very happy marriage to a gentile, and her first child, my mother, was illegitimate according to Jewish rules. In the novel, Melanie, the proud mother of a baby from which she is separated for medical reasons, finds that the situation has been grotesquely distorted in the Victorian life which is forced upon her.

I remember my grandmother canvassing my support for her belief that, like adults, children love to be frightened, and that it is good for them. If what you want to do is write a Victorian ghost story, then fear is certainly a good starting point. So in order to write *The Victorian Chaise-longue*, Marghanita exiled herself to a suitably isolated and ancient cottage in Somerset, where the nearest house to hers was not only empty, but its last regular inhabitant had been a witch. After a week she had a story which she was so convinced by, that, years later, she warned her young grand-daughter against reading it.

Our September Books

It is nearly sixty years since the outbreak of the Second World War: two of our September books mark this anniversary. *Good Evening, Mrs Craven*: The Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes 1939-44 collects twenty-one of her short stories written for *The New Yorker*; of these only 'Goodbye, My Love' has ever been reprinted before. *Few Eggs and No Oranges* is 'A Diary showing how Unimportant People in London and Birmingham lived through the war years 1940-1945 written in the Notting Hill area of London by Vere Hodgson.' Finally, *The Homemaker* (1924) by Dorothy Canfield Fisher, a novel far ahead of its time about a wife who is miserable looking after the children and a husband who is equally unhappy at work. After he is disabled, they swop roles and are intensely happy; but they live in an era and in a community that cannot accept this.

7.0.	Get up ; dress.
10.	Strip the bed and air the rooms.
20.	Unlock the house.
30.	Stoke the boiler.
40.	Light living-room fire if necessary.
50.	Prepare breakfast.

8.0.	Have breakfast.
10.	
20.	Clear away, wash up breakfast things. (Accompany child to school when required.)
30.	
40.	
50.	

9.0.	Sweep porch and steps.
10.	Lay sitting-room fire if needed.
20.	Do dining-room and sitting-room carpets with vacuum cleaner. Mop the surrounds and dust.
30.	
40.	
50.	

10.0.	Make beds.
10.	Mop and dust upstair rooms and W.C.
20.	Attend to bathroom. Wash out bath and lavatory basin. Sweep and mop bathroom floor and landing. Sweep stairs.
30.	
40.	
50.	

11.0.	Look over larder.
10.	Prepare vegetables or pastry for midday or evening meal.
20.	
30.	
40.	
50.	

12.0.	Shopping when required and special weekly duties.
10.	
20.	
30.	
40.	Finish off cooking, and prepare lunch.
50.	

1.0.	Serve lunch or dinner.
10.	
20.	Have lunch, and clear away.
30.	
40.	
50.	

2.0.	Wash up, tidy kitchen and scullery.
10.	
20.	
30.	
40.	
50.	Change.

3.0.	Recreation, resting, visiting or special duties such as ironing, gardening, needlework according to weather and season. Minding young children if necessary.
10.	
20.	
30.	
40.	
50.	

4.0.	
10.	
20.	
30.	
40.	Prepare and serve tea.
50.	

5.0.	Wash up tea things.
10.	
20.	
30.	
40.	
50.	

6.0.	Prepare food for supper or dinner, and cook the meal.
10.	
20.	
30.	
40.	
50.	

7.0.	Put children to bed.
10.	
20.	
30.	
40.	Serve and have dinner.
50.	

8.0.	Clear away meal. Wash up if liked, but this can be deferred until the morning.
10.	
20.	
30.	
40.	Reading, recreation, letter writing, accounts.
50.	

As meal-times vary considerably in different families and in different parts of the country, according to the nature of the husband's work the principal meal is sometimes taken in the middle and sometimes at the end of the day. As a general rule, when the husband's work is near at hand and he can take all meals at home, the principal meal is taken at midday, and the housewife's morning will be necessarily busier, but she should have more leisure between tea and supper.

HOUSEWIFE'S WEEKLY DUTIES

From 11.30 to 12.30.

MONDAY.	Brush all clothes used over the week-end and put away. Collect large articles and send to laundry or do laundrywork at home. If all family laundry is done at home, help may be necessary. Wash silk and woollens first, followed by white things. These can be done in alternate weeks if preferred.
TUESDAY.	Turn out dining-room. Clean silver.
WEDNESDAY.	Special turning out of two bedrooms each week.
THURSDAY.	Special turning out of sitting-room.
FRIDAY.	Thorough weekly clean of bathroom, W.C., landing and stairs. Baking.
SATURDAY.	Special cleaning of hall, kitchen and scullery. Extra cooking for week-end.

'Plan Of Work For A Small Servantless House' taken from The Housewife's Book, A Daily Express Publication, 1937

Fidelity *by* Susan Glaspell

This review appeared in The Times Literary Supplement on 30 October 1924 when Fideliy (1915) was first published in Britain

Those who know Miss Susan Glaspell's plays will very likely be surprised to find her novel *Fidelity* a quiet, leisurely book. [Her plays] are so tense that to read them is like feeling a tightening band about one's brain. They are 'shockers' in which the shocking is all intellectual and spiritual. They strike at the very start with the uncanny...and having struck like hawks, they go on, as might some octopus, to absorb the reader, who all but feels himself their victim. *Fidelity*, the novel, has this absorbent power, but it does not strike at the start. One comes to suspect, what only her future work can prove or disprove, that Miss Glaspell is one of the few people who can work well and fitly in both these methods. There is nothing of the novelist in her plays; and there is nothing of the playwright in her novel.

It is necessary that she takes things quietly in this book, because one of her purposes - perhaps her single purpose - is to draw us unsuspecting into a surprise. For three-quarters of the book we feel that we know what she is after. A small, wealthy town in the Middle West of the United States; a very respectable and conventional set of well-to-do people in it; a girl who, for love's sake, defies their rules and becomes the lover of a nominally married man - in all that we feel that we are quite at home. Except that Miss Glaspell shows a genuine understanding of the girl, and can lead us winding with cautious reverence into her heart and mind, there is nothing much to differentiate this novel from plenty of others, in which the generosity of passion is favourably contrasted with the caution of respectability. 'Love is enough'; we have heard it preached a thousand times. Here we seem to have it preached honestly, whereas it seems usually to be preached for the sake of royalties; but there is little other difference.

Then comes the sudden revelation to herself and to us of what has been secretly growing in Ruth Holland for so long. Love is not enough. Love may well be a transient manifestation of a power that is not transient. Certain people (little Mildred Woodbury, for instance) had better be bluntly told so, and driven back into the fold in time, because, if love is not enough, the fulfilment of life for those who have left the fold is not any return to it. It is the dangerous way of adventure, the quest of what is enough, with the certainty of never finding it. The morality of the book is the individualist morality which is nowadays not much more rare than the heady talk of love being enough; but Miss Glaspell, as novelist, exhibits it with sufficient sternness and dignity to make it good matter for her art. And that, after all, is what we are concerned with. We are to know a noble-hearted woman living out with fidelity and with what courage she may the life that her nature forces

upon her; and a hard life it is. It is Miss Glaspell's very quiet way of lifting her story out of the commonplace and using as her ladder the subtly discerned emotions and thoughts of this Ruth Holland, which inclines us to set her novel high. The distinction of the book lies in its form and pattern and progress as a single artistic presentation of a truth which not many novel-writers grasp.

Fidelity

Extract from Laura Godwin's Persephone Preface

It was in Provincetown, on Cape Cod, very soon after her marriage, that Susan Glaspell wrote her greatest book, *Fidelity*. This most beautifully named novel exposes the limitations of life in a Midwestern town, as experienced by a young woman who falls in love with a married man and elopes with him. It asks the question which is, in essence, was it worth it?...

Using an unusual construction, which allows her seamlessly to return to Ruth Holland when she was in her early twenties and then bring us up to early 1915 when she is thirty-six, Susan Glaspell asks and attempts to answer this question. Relying very little on exposition but instead using dialogue, internal monologue and flashback, *Fidelity* is also a highly dramatic novel, for example it begins *in media res* and draws the reader straight in. This is a novel impossible to stop reading: right until the last page we do not know how it will end.

The heroine has taken another woman's husband and as such is considered beyond the pale by Freeport society. 'She outraged society as completely as a woman could outrage it. She was a thief, really, - stealing from the thing that was protecting her, taking all the privileges of a thing she was a traitor to... You jeer about society, but society is nothing more than life as we have arranged it. It is an institution. One living within it must keep the rules of that institution. One who defies It - deceives it - must be shut out from it. So much we are forced to do in self-defence. We owe that to the people who are trying to live decently, to be faithful.'

Ruth is described from a realistic stance, with a brutal directness, disliked by both critics and readers - a stance that - as well - put Susan Glaspell herself beyond the pale. Hence the frequent imagery of the outsider. Towards the end of the novel Ruth looks out at the sheep huddling together for warmth... Both she and her creator were outsiders. The sheep metaphor 'symbolises the central theme of the novel, the forces drawing humanity together into society versus the exclusion of some individuals on the edge, with their longing to break back into the circle, yet somehow, by their courage, preserving the very existence of those "within".' It takes someone else who is outside the circle to reveal to Ruth that fidelity to the inner life, to the 'world within', is infinitely more important than, like the women of Freeport, 'going through life without being really awake to life at all.'

Plus ça change...

From E. M. Delafield's The Way Things Are (1927) pp. 113-4

In the morning, the boys played in the garden, and in the afternoon it poured with rain.

'We'll play with the bricks in the nursery,' declared Laura cheerfully. This was a success for some time, until Fauntleroy, the terrier, dashed gaily into Johnnie's elaborate construction and reduced it to a jumble of wooden bricks and blocks.

Johnnie's immediate reaction was to fly into a temper with the blameless Edward, whom he kicked and pummelled viciously...

'Johnnie, you can go outside till you - Edward, don't be such a little coward, stand up to him like a man - go outside till you're quiet again, Johnnie.'

Never meet opposition with opposition. Always speak quietly and calmly when dealing with a passionate child.

Excerpts from Laura's little books crowded in upon her mind, but however quiet and calm she might be, it was necessary for her to raise her voice almost to a scream in order to make it heard at all, and this produced the very opposite effect to one of quiet and calm, even to her own ears.

Fauntleroy barked madly.

At last, by exerting considerably more physical force than she herself, let alone the little books, thought really right, Laura got Johnnie and Fauntleroy both outside the door.

Then, as not unusually happened, she vented her disappointment and anxiety about Johnnie in severely rebuking Edward.

Edward sulked mildly, contrived, by a great and obvious effort, to shed a few tears designed to make Laura pity him, and characteristically defeated his own object by suddenly catching sight of a candle-end in the wastepaper basket and exclaiming with enthusiasm:

'Oh, look what I've found, mummie! May I have it?'

'What for?' said Laura, listening to Johnnie's shouts and kicks, now becoming perfunctory and spasmodic.

'To use for my cooking.'

'*What?*'

'Miss Lamb makes us say "Pardon" when we haven't heard.'

'Never let me hear you say "Pardon," Edward. Say "I beg your pardon" or "What did you say?" Or even "What?" But not "Pardon."'

'I'll tell Miss Lamb,' said Edward, much interested in this conflict of authorities.

'No, you needn't do that. It'll be enough if you remember what I've said.'

Then Johnnie returned, declared himself perfectly good, was thankfully absolved by his mother, and lured by her into exchanging a tepid handshake with his brother as a symbol of renewed friendliness.

The remainder of the afternoon was peaceful in so far as personal relations were concerned.

An Interrupted Life

In Facing the Extreme (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999) Tzvetan Todorov discusses Etty Hillesum alongside Solzhenitsyn, Primo Levi, Eugenia Ginzburg and Irina Ratushinskaya as an interpreter of the moral significance of the concentration camps.

I begin with the remarkable story of Etty Hillesum...There is nothing of the professional philosopher in this young woman (she was twenty-seven years old at the beginning of the German occupation of Holland and died two years later), who supported herself as a private tutor and dreamed of becoming a writer. Yet she offers us the rare example of someone who achieves a moral understanding at the very moment the world is collapsing around her. In the midst of the deepest despair, her life glitters like a jewel. She does everything in her power to re-establish harmony in her immediate surroundings, first by looking after those closest to her, then by going to work at Westerbork, the Dutch transit camp. At no time does she preach at us, however, for what she asks of others she demands first of herself. She has taken to heart Marcus Aurelius's precept that one ought not to talk about the good man but to be him, and in her journal she writes, 'All I need do is to "be", to live and to try being a little bit human.'

One might imagine that with her quest for inner perfection came a certain scorn for concrete, material everyday life. Not at all; her embrace of the ordinary is perhaps her most engaging quality. Reading the pages she left behind, we feel in the presence of someone whom we would want to spend time with, to count among our friends, to love. Etty could find the words to express her attachment to the simplest acts - giving a lesson, darning stockings, or drinking a cup of cocoa - and to the people around her, her family and friends. This combination of virtue and love of life - an almost sensual one - makes her an exceptional being. Yet she also feels she must rationalise her conduct, and so she turns to arguments that she finds in books and that arise in conversations with others...

In her journal, Etty transcribes a conversation she had with her friend Jan Bool in the streets of Amsterdam in February 1942: 'I no longer believe,' she tells him, 'that we can change anything in the world until we have first changed ourselves.' Later, in one of her last journal entries, from September 1942, she reiterates her credo in an imaginary conversation with her good friend Klaas: 'We have so much work to do on ourselves,' she writes, 'that we shouldn't even be thinking of hating our so-called enemies.' Her fellow inmates believe otherwise, however. Here is the way she describes one of them, a man from Westerbork, to Klaas: 'He hates our persecutors with an undying hatred, presumably with good reason,' she says. 'But he himself is a bully. He would make a model concentration camp guard...'

In one of her gripping letters from Westerbork, Hillesum describes what it is like to be in the camp and then realises...that she has perhaps not said what she is expected to say: 'This is a very one-sided story. I could have told quite another, filled with hatred and bitterness and rebellion.' Though she never stops fighting the injustices of the camp, hatred remains her chief enemy: 'The absence of hatred in no way implies the absence of moral indignation. I know that those who hate have good reason to do so. But why should we always have to choose the cheapest and easiest way? It has been brought home forcibly to me here how every atom of hatred added to this world makes it an even more inhospitable place....' Etty Hillesum was always driven by the same desire, to contribute to the world's goodness, not its hatred, and to care for others around her. In her journal, when she reflects on what life will be like after the war, she knows that what she has fought against will not necessarily have disappeared. '"After this war [she recalls someone telling her], two torrents will be unleashed on the world: a torrent of loving-kindness and a torrent of hatred." And then I knew: I should take the field against hatred.' That war, the war against hatred, was the only war Etty Hillesum ever agreed to wage. Before that day could arrive, however, her turn came and she was packed into a train for Auschwitz, where three months later, in November 1943, she died. But her writings continue the fight today in her stead...

An extract from Eva Hoffman's Preface to An Interrupted Life

We know from the outset what will come at the diaries' tragic end. And yet, to start reading them is to be jolted into fresh surprise. All the writings she left behind were composed in the shadow of the Holocaust, but they resist being read primarily in its dark light. Rather, their abiding interest lies in the light-filled mind that pervades them and in the astonishing internal journey they chart. The trajectory of that journey echoes classical accounts of spiritual transformation; but Etty's pilgrimage grew out of the intimate experience of an intellectual young woman - it was idiosyncratic, individual, and recognisably modern...Etty Hillesum lived at a time when the macrocosm of historical events almost completely crushed the microcosm of individual lives. It was her enormous act of resistance to reverse this order of importance, to assert that the microcosm of the soul can encompass the external world and, in addition, hold infinite space. By starting always with the origin of herself, she had forged an original and richly humane vision. Ultimately, no act of personal resistance or perception could withstand the impersonal forces unleashed in the Holocaust. But by knowing and feeling so deeply and fully, an unknown young woman became one of the most exceptional and truest witnesses of the devastation through which she lived and of the suffering humankind whose fate she chose to join.

Eva Hoffman

The June Endpapers

For the *Fidelity* endpapers we have chosen a late nineteenth century Log Cabin coverlet made of silk fabrics, sewn by a woman who lived in a small town in Illinois. The Holland family in *Fidelity* lived in Davenport, Iowa, not far from Illinois; they were not impoverished and would therefore have used silk scraps for a coverlet; yet the silks are quite utilitarian and might have been used by Ruth when she lived in Colorado (she owns a sewing machine). In addition, Susan Glaspell's husband's family estate in Iowa was called The Cabin - her mother-in-law had built herself a log cabin in the grounds in which to live the simple life. And red is a good base colour for the coverlet since the Colorado mountains are called Sangré de Cristo 'because they went red at sunset'. And of course a coverlet symbolises the thrifty values of the American pioneers evolving into the settled lives of their more comfortable descendants.

'Rose' by Clare Leighton, from her book Four Hedges (1935)

Etty Hillesum's diaries and letters were written in Amsterdam, where she had been a student from 1932-35. The fabric used for the endpapers, called C.S.P., was designed for the Dutch company De Ploeg during these years and is one that she might have bought as a bed cover or curtains for her student room (she refers to 'the divan's blue coverlet'). The designer was Otti Berger, who achieved international recognition as a weaver and textile designer at the Bauhaus in Germany. She left for Britain in 1937 but, returning to Czechoslovakia to visit her sick mother, was unable to leave; she died in Auschwitz in 1944, a few months after Etty. The textured lines and knots in the fabric have a sadly evocative look of barbed wire; yet it has a beauty and a sensuous quality that Etty would have very much appreciated. If she had bought this fabric in the 1930s, it might have come from the Metz & Co. department store on the Keizersgracht. It was on this street that, in 1942, Etty worked for the Jewish Council.

The Victorian Chaise-longue (1953) by Marghanita Laski is set in both 1953 and 1864.The endpaper at the front of the book is an early 1950s Sanderson's fabric, 'shiny cream curtains printed with huge pink roses', that might have hung in Melanie's bedroom, and the back endpaper is 'berlin-wool cross-stitch embroidery that sprawled in bright gigantic roses' across the chaise-longue. The roses echo each other, those of the 1860s appearing garish to the young 1950s couple, who might have gone to Sanderson's showroom to choose something up-to-date but in keeping with their Georgian house.

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