THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

September 1999 No.3

Our September Books

This month's titles are a collection of short stories, a diary and a novel: of these, the first two books are published to coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War.

Good Evening, Mrs Craven: The Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes, reprints 21 short stories first published in *The New Yorker* between 1939 and 1944 and (with two exceptions) never reprinted since. They are stories of the highest quality which in our view should be set beside those by Elizabeth Bowen, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Elizabeth Taylor, English women writers who wrote stories about the war and were also published by *The New Yorker*. In her stories Mollie Panter-Downes explores almost every aspect of English domestic life during the war: boredom, separation, sewing parties, fear, evacuees sent to the country and to America, obsession with food, the camaraderie of the blitz, above all the social revolution engendered by the war; thus in 'Year of Decision' (29 April 1944) the husband expostulates, 'For heaven's sake...It doesn't matter to me or Hitler whether I pick up my pyjamas off a chair or the floor' while his wife persists in her orderly smoothing of the eiderdown 'as though the action were yet another moral shot fired at the slowly advancing enemy.' This theme of the English middle classes resisting the changes engendered by the war was one to which Mollie Panter-Downes would return in her greatest novel, *One Fine Day* (1947), and which her background as a social commentator - she wrote *The New Yorker*'s famous 'Letter from London' throughout the war and for many years afterwards - equipped her to make very much her own. She used language with an insight and a poetic sensibility that is the mark of a great writer. 'All over London,' she wrote in 'Fin de Siecle' (12 July 1941), 'telephone bells were ringing angrily through empty rooms over which the fine brick dust, seeping in at shuttered windows, was beginning to settle.'

Few Eggs and No Oranges is sub-titled 'A Diary showing how Unimportant People in London and Birmingham lived through the war years 1940-45 written in the Notting Hill area of London by Vere Hodgson.' Vere was a sparky, unflappable, 38 year-old social worker, formerly a teacher. She had lived in Notting Hill since the early 1930s and nothing, certainly not Hitler, was going to force her to leave Ladbroke Road. Thus the outbreak of war had in some respects made little difference to her life, but the beginning of the Blitz did - which is why she chose to start her published diaries on the day it began. From them, we get a very clear impression of everyday life as lived by ordinary Londoners during the long years of the war. For they were long, and the length of the diary - over 600 pages - itself gives an extraordinary feel of those five years from 25 June 1940 to VE Day in May 1945. *Few Eggs and No Oranges* is funny, observant and uncomplaining; above all it is a chronicle of the way in which an ordinary woman coped in very unordinary circumstances. As the original publisher wrote in 1976, 'Many exciting, frightening, marvellous stories have come out of the years of WWII demonstrating the courage and

heroism of people in crises, but few recorded at the time, day by often unexciting day, the extraordinary resilience and determination, depression and humour, compassion and insight, and sheer slogging hard work under continual harassment of ordinary people throughout those five years.'

The Home-Maker by Dorothy Canfield Fisher is a novel by the well-known American writer first published in 1924 in America and Britain. It is about a husband who is miserable going out to work and a wife equally miserable staying at home. Only after he is disabled and she goes to work in a department store can each find happiness. But what will small town New England make of their role-swopping? This is also one of the greatest novels ever written about childhood, especially about a child's autonomy and sense of self-worth being eroded by his parents' well-meaning but foolish attempts to discipline him 'for his own good'. The editor of A *Guide to Twentieth Century Women Novelists* (1997) comments that husband and wife are forced to 'adopt deceptive ploys to maintain their innovations, but the deception takes a great toll on their self-respect', and adds that Dorothy Canfield Fisher 'took an ironic view of men who put on their hats and go off to work at the first sign of emotions in the home...her feminism involves insisting both on the importance of work outside the family (as well as financial independence) and on the value, indeed the vitally important nature, of parenting, caring and the personal life...'

The Provincial Lady, 1947 edition, at a loss about Christmas presents because she could not give everyone Persephone Books.

Each trio of Persephone Books attracts increasing attention (see pp. 8-9 for more about the reaction to our first titles). *Good Evening, Mrs Craven* has been chosen by Heywood Hill bookshop as one of only seven recommended autumn fiction titles - the others are by Patrick O'Brian, George Mac-Donald Fraser, Dick Francis, Giles Foden, Joseph Roth and Sue Townsend; *Few Eggs* is to be launched with a party in the Notting Hill street where Vere Hodgson lived and wrote her diary and all the houses in the surrounding streets will receive a postcard reproduction of the characterful cover of the 1976 edition of the book (as will Persephone purchasers); while *The Home-Maker*, a huge success on first publication, has been overlooked in recent years, when feminist emphasis has been placed almost exclusively on sexual and personal happiness, and will we are sure be seen as both thought-provoking and pertinent in current debates about the roles of men and women.

Few Eggs And No Oranges

An extract from Leonard Mosley's London Under Fire (1971), the book which first brought Vere Hodgson's diary to public notice

Miss Vere Hodgson had had a busy day at her office in Holland Park, but the prospect of going to the theatre that evening of 7 May 1940 revived her spirits and refreshed her, even though there was no time to go home to wash and change. The curtain rose at six o'clock in London now, and that meant she had to rush straight from the office to the show...

She felt slightly guilty nowadays when she confessed that so far she had found the war disappointing. ('As if wars are run for your entertainment. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Vere Hodgson!') But she nevertheless could not suppress the thought that for some time now the war had both bored and depressed her. Worried her too - a nagging sort of anxiety that something was wrong, that this wasn't the way a war should be run if things were to come out all right in the end.

Vere Hodgson was a brisk, good-looking woman in her middle thirties of an English type no one (except official registrars) would ever call a spinster even though she was unmarried. She had left university in her early twenties and gone to Italy to teach English to young ladies a year or two her junior (among them Mussolini's daughter, Edda) and one got the feeling that that was where she had left her love, if not the whole of her heart...She was

Aunts

This poem by Virginia Graham was written in 1944 and appeared

Children, when you have gone your several ways,
and have sought the long days'
happiness, and the night's elusive dream,
incredible as it may seem
you will turn, at some moment, like thirsting plants
to your aunts.

Now, aunts are not glamorous creatures,
as very often their features
tend to be elderly caricatures of your own.
Aunts use eau-de-cologne
and live in rather out-of-the-way places,
and wear pointed white shoes with laces
tied in a neat bow.

Oh, I know, I know!
Nevertheless I maintain
that when you are old enough to learn pain,
are acquainted with sorrow, and know what fear is,
your aunts will not seem nearly such drearies.

You'll see,
believe me!

When you've broken off your engagement and want to hide,
you will go to Aunt Beatrice at Ambleside.
When the charwoman falls down dead,
Aunt Edith will give you a bed.
When your heart breaks, as hearts sometimes do,
Aunt Constance at Looe
will feed it on Comish cream and philosophy,
soothe it with strawberries for tea;
and when, with the dew still behind your ears

secretary, consultant and general dogsbody at the Sanctuary in Holland Park, a charitable trust which gave shelter, money, food and general advice to the poor of Notting Hill and North Kensington, as well as running a mission for the needy in the East End...But how little seven months of war had changed the nature of her work. She remembered that first night of war in September 1939, when the air raid warnings had sounded at two in the morning over London. For months the people had been told that once war began death would rain down upon them from the skies...But then nothing had happened...

That morning three young women had come to see Vere Hodgson at the Sanctuary; they were all young, with young children, and all of them foolish, she knew that. At the outbreak of war they had been evacuated from London, along with half a million other young mothers, to escape the slaughter that the government feared was coming. When it didn't come they had drifted back to 'the Smoke' because they hated the loneliness of country life, the unfamiliarity of green fields, the inhospitality of the unwilling hosts upon whom they had been billeted, and because they missed the warm friendliness on London's back streets... In London they had about 28/- a week (the average bus driver's weekly salary was about 95/-) to keep themselves and their children fed, clothed and the rent paid. Their husbands were either in France or Norway or in the north of England in training camps, called up for the duration...What right had the government to call men into the army and pay them such appalling wages for giving their services to the country? The Americans were right when they called it the 'phoney war'... **Seven weeks later the Blitz began - which is when Vere Hodgson chose to start her published diaries.**

in Consider the Years 1938-46 (1946)

you set forth to conquer wider spheres,
I do not think you will get much further the first night
than Aunt Maud in Shanklin, Isle of Wight.
Oh, yes, children, aunts are kind
and quite resigned
to the fact that you will not go near them for years,
and then bring them your tears.
Although at your tender age
you resent their neglect of the Stage,
their inability to differentiate between jazz and swing,
and their poor reactions to Bing,
the day will dawn when they will rise up like rocks,
sheltering you with their long imprimé frocks
and cornflowered hats worn at such hopeless slants -
your nigh-forgotten, soon-remembered aunts.

'The Aunt' or 'Kensington High Street', 1929 by Tirzah Ravilious

Tirzah Ravilious

engraved 'The Wife' in PQ No2 and 'The Aunt' in this issue. Here we print an extract from British Wood Engraved Book Illustrations 1904-40 (1998) by Joanna Selborne.

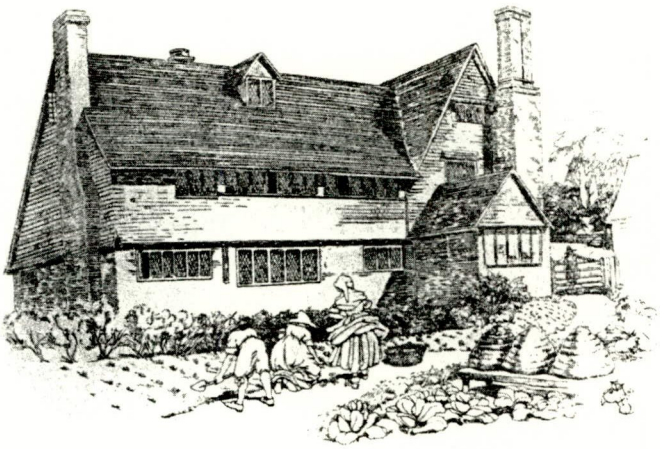
Tirzah Garwood (1908-51), Eric Ravilious's most talented pupil at the Eastbourne School of Art, came strongly under his influence...Her output, mainly produced between 1926 and 1929, was small and consisted mainly of single prints or ephemeral work, most of which appeared in journals or other publications...though favourably reviewed at the time, her wood-engraved work has since been unjustifiably neglected by historians of the medium...From the start she was technically assured with a clean, incisive line and an interesting variety of toolmarked textures which she no doubt learnt from Ravilious. Already in these prints she had formulated a personal style consisting of large rectangular scenes dominated by figures, with background details multifariously patterned: undulating waves, speckled pebbles, stripy wallpapers and curtains, and stippled carpets. She shared with Ravilious a wry sense of humour and an enjoyment in satirizing domestic life and the social scene. She had an eye for oddities in her subjects which ... were 'like herself, unpredictable, delightful, mildly dotty...'

Although not strictly for book illustration, most of Garwood's wood-engravings contain a narrative element, as epitomized by a series called 'Relations' for a Curwen Press calendar, a commission resulting from Ravilious's contact with Oliver Simon. Only eight prints appear to have been completed. These are probably her finest wood-engravings and among the most vivid portrayals of 1920s middle-class life by a contemporary practitioner: young society women with bobbed hair and low-waisted party dresses with their stiff-shirted companions in Table Turning; a starchy uniformed nanny pushing a baby in a huge low-slung pram; prim black-stockinged, felt-hatted schoolgirls walking in pairs along a chequered pavement in The Crocodile; a tweed-jacketed man in breeches holding a spotted handkerchief to his nose while he leads a string of dogs past a masculine-looking lady tending her Scottie dog in The Dog Show; fashionable shoppers in The Aunt or Kensington High Street; and various relations such as The Wife in cluttered domestic interiors. People and possessions predominate, individual objects taking on a meaning of their own. Garwood often chose a close-up view, rarely confronting it straight on: she placed furniture and figures at an angle, sometimes perversely cutting off chairs or limbs at the block edge. The use of all-over patterning and her way of seeing has much in common with Ravilious's. Her scenes, however, are more closely observed, intimate revelations of everyday life somewhat mockingly described...Tirzah's and Eric's marriage in July 1930 marked the decline in her wood-engraving output...and her career as a wood-engraver came to an end when in 1932 she and Ravilious moved to Great Bardfield in Essex to share a house with Charlotte and Edward Bawden.

Mollie Panter-Downes's novel:

The stories in Good Evening, Mrs Craven paved the way for the classic novel One Fine Day. Here we reprint an extract from the introduction to the 1985 Virago edition.

One Fine Day...is almost a hymn of praise to the English, and particularly to the ordinary Englishwoman who did not fight in the war but lived through it as acutely as any soldier - a theme usually ignored in literature, where the experience is often seen as a male prerogative... The novel was originally called 'The Vanished House', the inspiration being the image of a house in the country throttled and dying through the deprivations of wartime, yet still ensnaring its owners with its tentacles...Stephen and Laura have not adapted very well to changed circumstances, 'wretched victims of their class, they still had dinner'. They are struggling to keep up a way of life which has really ended (elaborate flower beds, silver candlesticks, dinner in the dining room, ironed sheets) but without the human props that used to sustain it... *One Fine Day* provides an interesting commentary on social change among the middle classes in the 1940s, the era when servants were a vanished species but labour-saving devices had not effectively arrived...and encapsulates a realistic assessment of postwar life in a tiny but symbolic corner of England; it describes crumbling houses, eroding standards, remnants of barbed wire, country lanes still without their proper signposts. Yet it also contains an unsentimental vision of the years to come: 1946 was a time when the middle classes felt themselves quite besieged from every direction. Mollie Panter-Downes began this novel in the same spring that the Labour M.P. Hartley Shawcross stood up in the House of Commons to declare ringingly in his famous phrase: 'We are the masters at the moment and not only at the moment, but for a very long time to come.' *One Fine Day* may be a threnody for a passing way of life, but it is also a hymn of praise to a newly developing one. It is a novel of infinite subtlety, perception and delicacy, full of tenderness and humour - and yet with a pervading strain of melancholy tinging the optimism like autumn leaves in an Indian summer.



A tile-hung sixteenth-century house near Chiddingfold, Surrey (A History of Everyday Things in England Vol.II by Majorie & C.H. B. Quennell, 1919,p. 30) where Mollie Panter-Downes lived from 1930 until her death in 1997.

Our First Six Books

We now have nine titles in print, three each for March, June and September 1999. The September books are described on pp. 2-3; but of course there will be some readers of PQ No. 3 who will not have heard about the first six books.

No. 1 is ***William - an Englishman*** by Cicely Hamilton. Published in 1919, when it won the Vie Femina Heureuse Prize, it has been forgotten for eighty years. And yet this extraordinary novel, which begins with a scorching satire on the suffragettes and the merry time they have in their obsessive battle to gain the vote, and ends with a description of the First World War seen through the eyes of an 'ordinary' Englishman, is one of the great novels of the century. Nor is this just our view: *William* was chosen by the *Mail on Sunday* for its summer reading feature and described as 'a valuable find and certainly the most beautiful of the books listed here - thick paper, generous typesetting, lavishly colourful endpapers and matching bookmark.' In August it was discussed by BBC Radio 4's *A Good Read*, when Peter Preston, former editor of *The Guardian,* called Cicely Hamilton 'a terrifically good ... lovely writer, very poignant, very evocative and evoking the war is what she does as well as anything I've read.'

No. 2 is ***Mariana*** by Monica Dickens, a wonderfully readable novel about a girl growing up in the inter-war period. It is funny and wise and sad, but above all profoundly observant about life at that period. *The Spectator* observed that 'the contemporary detail is superb... and the characters are observed with vitality and humour' and *The Lady* that 'it is so enjoyable that it is impossible to understand how it disappeared from view for so long.' The *Sunday Telegraph* too described *Mariana* as 'funny, poignant and a perfect period piece.'

No. 3 is ***Someone at a Distance*** by Dorothy Whipple: 'We have all delighted in this unjustly forgotten 1953 novel,' wrote the wonderful John Sandoe Books in their summer catalogue, calling it, 'A well-written, compelling tale of unsuitable love'; while John de Falbe of the same shop referred to it in *The Spectator* as 'a very good novel indeed about the fragility and also the tenacity of love.' The *Daily Telegraph* commented that Persephone's launch 'deserves every success if the reissue of this book is any guide to form...The prose is simple, the psychology spot on.' *Someone at a Distance* was in the *Evening Standard* bestseller list for the first week of August.

No. 4 is ***Fidelity*** (1915) by Susan Glaspell, a beautifully written novel about a girl running off with a married man at the turn of the century. Using flashback to tell a gripping story, this is a novel that explores moral dilemmas - is love enough? Does it matter that the couple could not be married? Should small town Iowa have been so unforgiving? Eugene O'Neill and Susan Glaspell were together considered the two great American playwrights of their time and in our view Glaspell is also a very great novelist. The least heard-of of our novels, *Fidelity* is, however, the one most likely to endure as a classic of the six we publish this year.

No. 5 is ***An Interrupted Life***: The Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum 1943-45 was featured in both *The Tablet* and *The Jewish Chronicle*, where the journalist Anne Karpf called the book 'a mesmerising achievement - and Persephone

should be congratulated for reprinting it.' She concluded: 'Even as we cry for her, we understand that her ability to accept the inevitable and live so richly was an outstanding act of resistance, as significant as any physical rebellion. Her book is a lesson in living.' And Sue Gaisford wrote in the *Independent on Sunday*: 'At the end of this intensely moving book, what you remember is her shining integrity and her steadfast conviction that "All that matters now is to be kind to each other, with all the goodness that is in us."'

No. 6 is ***The Victorian Chaise-longue*** (1953) by Marghanita Laski, 'a little jewel of horror' that was described by PD James in her especially written Persephone Preface as the novel which had 'impressed me as one of the most skilfully-told and terrifying short novels of its decade' while Penelope Lively in The PQ described it as 'disturbing and compulsive... Its intense atmosphere haunts, long after the book has been laid aside.' This particularly beautiful Persephone book has a 1953 fabric on the front endpaper and on the back an embroidered fabric that might have been the cover for the chaise-longue upon which poor Melanie lies down.

Persephone Men

A word for men only. Marketing jargon encourages one to target: it is no good trying to sell books because they are neglected or because we think they are beautiful or even because we think they are wonderful. Every publisher presumably thinks their books are beautiful, neglected and wonderful. One has to be specific, and we have focused on women who have exhausted our contemporary women writers and are searching for readable books that are overlooked but enduring. So, we are sorry, chaps. We do not want to exclude you; but remember that women, when they read 'he', have all their lives taken it for granted that 'he' means 'he or she'; it is one of those givens that all but the most extremely dungareed feminist does not need spelt out. So, if you are a man, please go on buying our books even if you are left out of our publicity material. We want male readers but hope you will be sympathetic to our marketing strategy.

This pen and ink drawing appeared in the Daily Mail Ideal Home Book (1952-53).

The Home-Maker

Here we reprint part of one of the great scenes from Dorothy Canfield Fisher's novel in which Lester surreptitiously observes his son learning to use an egg whisk and his son comes to a realisation of the extent of his father's love for him.

The little boy went at it again, but with none of his first jaunty cocksureness, cautiously, slowly, turning the handle a little at a time. He made no progress whatever. The combination of the two dissimilar motions was too much for him. If someone had held the egg-beater still, he could have turned the handle, he knew that. But he would never ask anyone to do it. He would do it himself. Himself! He tried again and again without the slightest success and began to put on the black, savage look he had for things that displeased him.

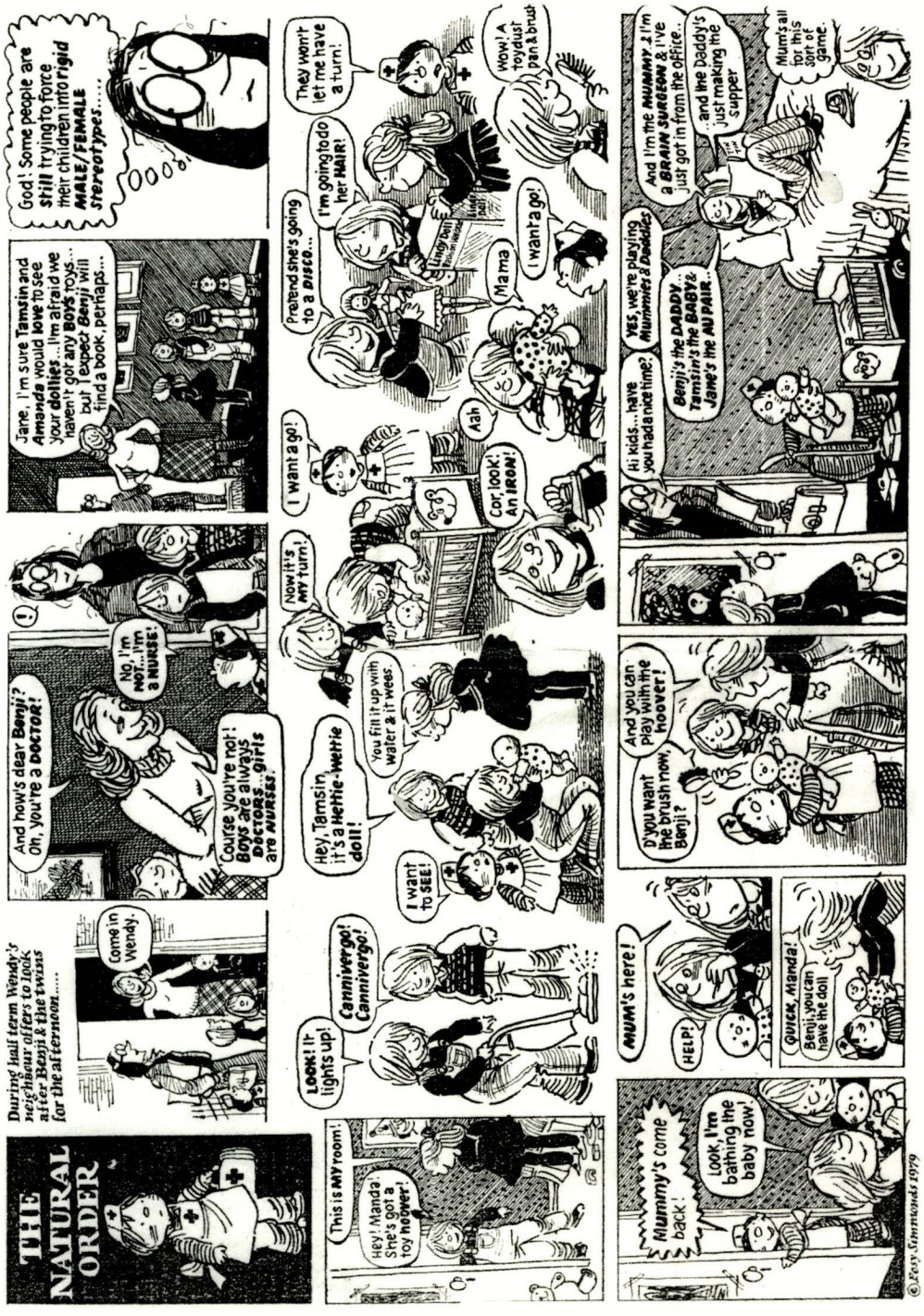
His father...shook with silent mirth over the sudden, hot-tempered storm which followed in a tropical gust, when Stephen stamped his feet, ground his teeth, and, turning red and purple with rage, tried by main strength to master the utensil. He turned his eyes discreetly down on his darning when Stephen, with a loud 'Gol darned old thing!' threw the egg-beater across the kitchen. He felt Stephen suddenly remember that his father was there and glance apprehensively up at him. He chose that moment to stoop again to the oven door and gaze fixedly in at the bland face of the rice pudding.

But he did not see it. He saw Stephen's fiery little nature at grips with itself, and inaudibly he was cheering him on, 'Go to it, Stevie! Get your teeth in it! Eat it up!' He was painfully, almost alarmingly interested in the outcome. Would Stephen conquer, or would he give up? Was there real stuff behind that grim stubbornness which had given them such tragic trouble?...He held a needle up to the light and threaded it elaborately. But he was really looking at Stephen, standing with his stout legs wide apart, glowering at the prostrate but victorious egg-beater. In spite of his sympathetic sense of the seriousness of the moment Lester's diaphragm fluttered with repressed laughter. Cosmic Stephen in his pink gingham rompers!

He took up another stocking and ran his hand down the leg. Stephen sauntered over towards the beater, casually. He glanced back to see if he need fear any prying surveillance of his private affairs, but his father's gaze was concentrated on the hole in the stocking. Carelessly, as though it were an action performed almost absent-mindedly, Stephen stooped, picked up the beater, and stood holding it...His clumsiness, his muscular inexpertness with an unfamiliar motion, astounded his father. How far back children had to begin! Why, they did not know how to do anything! Not till they had learned.

This did not seem to him the trite platitude it would have been if somebody else had said it to him. It cast a new light into innumerable corners of their relations with Stephen which had been dark and pestilential. They hadn't begun to be patient enough, to go slow enough...

Plus ça change...



This cartoon by Posy Simmonds first appeared in The Guardian in 1979.

"It Was Nothing Like That"

The old war time film was drawing to an end. To the triumphant strains of Beethoven's Ninth symphony, the squadron of Spitfires flew in formation into the black and white sunset and the widowed heroine gazed bravely at the camera. As the lights went up, a young woman turned impulsively towards me and said: 'How frightful the War must have been for you!' Yes, it was frightful, I thought, but it was nothing like that.

A picture came into my mind. It was Louisa's large living room in her North London flat. The sewing machine was set up on the dining table, there was an ironing board in one corner and a dressmaker's dummy stood incongruously in the middle of the room. About eight young women were meeting together for their weekly session of Make Do and Mend. It had been quiet since the end of the Blitz and I had come up to London with my babies on a visit to my in-laws and had dropped in hoping to see someone I knew. Solweg was there. She was still working at the BBC where her husband had an important job and would not be called up, and there was Dottie, who had married a cousin of Louisa's, apparently because he was the first man in uniform to propose to her. After a whirlwind courtship and four weeks of married life, he had been posted overseas. Bored and lonely, she had come to London to find a job. Now she was discovering her peach bloom prettiness and a London filled with lonely young men in uniform.

London had emptied during the Blitz and landlords were pleased to let their flats at low rents. The young women, unhappy and restless after their husbands had joined up and gone away, but precluded by children from doing war work, had drifted up to London to find an escape from loneliness and perhaps a part time job. I recognised Rosalind, whose romantic history I already knew. She had escaped across Europe from Austria as war was breaking out and was fixed on returning as soon as the war was over to find the father of the child she had borne.

The door opened and a girl walked in waving a pair of curtains. 'What can I do with these?' she cried. 'I've met a smashing bloke, I think he's a Pole. He's asked me to a dance next Tuesday and I've absolutely nothing to wear!' We gazed dubiously at the large blue cabbage roses. Louisa held the curtains up to the girl and cast a professional eye over them. 'It will have to be simple,' she said, 'low neck, bishop sleeves,' and began deftly cutting the material. 'Next Tuesday, did you say? My God, you'd better get cracking!' The machine whirred.

Rosalind made tea and someone produced a packet of biscuits. 'Last of my points coupons,' she said, 'it was these or a tin of baked beans.' Cigarettes were passed round. 'Oh Camels! Where do these come from?' someone asked. 'An American doctor gave them to me last night at the Players Theatre,' said Dottie. 'A W.V.S. woman brought in some American officers and as they passed us, they said "Introduce us, Introduce us!" but she wouldn't, so I introduced myself. Oh! By the way, Louisa, I said if he was stuck for somewhere to stay on his next leave, you could probably fit him in.' 'Not again, Dottie!' said Louisa, but everyone knew that her hospitable flat was open to any young officer on leave from his unit,

who wanted a few nights in London.

As they smoked, the women became confidential. 'Do you know,' said Solweg, 'someone tried to pick me up in the British Museum Reading Room today. Honestly, hardly a promising place you'd think.' 'I always get picked up on trains,' said Rosalind. 'That's the fun bit,' a fair girl laughed, 'it's after that things get complicated.' 'Give me Americans,' another girl said, 'at least they'll give you a tin of Spam!' 'Bill may be coming on leave next week,' said Louisa. There was a sudden silence as the women looked at her with a mixture of envy and compunction. Then everyone spoke at once. 'I'll always take the kids if you want some peace.' 'I'll lend you my silk nightie.'

woodcut by Agnes Miller Parker from Essays in Russet (1944) by Herbert Furst p57

'What are you going to do while you're in London?' someone asked me. 'Oh! Do some shopping, see a few people,' I said. 'Heavens! You want to enjoy yourself!' the fair girl said: 'Go to the pub, enjoy yourself.' 'Robin will be here at the weekend,' said Louisa kindly. 'I'll ask him to take you to the flicks. I know, why don't you go to one of those tea dances at the Waldorf with him?' How could I explain to them how I, and others like me, had no wish whatsoever to go out with any men except their husbands? A kind of superstitious dread made me feel that if I enjoyed myself with someone else, that would be the moment for the exploding shell, the anti-personnel mine, the sniper's bullet. It was as if one lived on two planes: ordinary life in a safe enough village, looking after the children, doing the chores, and underneath a nightmare that sometimes came too close, a nightmare we had each to live with in our way. Was that why, when we saw the telegraph boy's yellow motorbike coming over the hill, we each rushed indoors and locked the front door until he had safely gone by? We were the lucky ones, we who were secure enough to suffer our anxiety and grief, not to try to evade it under a hectic shield of gaiety.

But looking back after 40 years, it is waiting I remember most: waiting for news, waiting for the All Clear, waiting for babies, waiting in the fish queue, waiting in makeshift offices for ration books, for identity cards, for all the paraphernalia of wartime, waiting for letters, for trains, above all waiting for the war to be over and for our men to come home. And thinking of those who would never come home. And I remember the nightingales who sang so loudly to drown the sound of the bombers overhead.

Norma Lacey (1917-95)

Good Evening, Mrs.Craven

An extract from 'War among Strangers', published in The New Yorker on 17 January 1942 and, like Mollie Panter-Downes's other wartime stories, not reprinted until now.

'John, I'm so dreadfully worried about the children. I didn't sleep a wink last night.'

'I don't think you need worry,' he said. 'I really don't. From what we know of them, the Maddisons seem thoroughly good, solid people...We can cable Mrs. Maddison, of course, and ask for news. Cables are going through without much delay,' he added in his Ministry voice.

Mrs. Bristowe had the peevish sensation that she was listening to a Civil Service pamphlet, one of the bracing kind that was pushed in at the door with the mail and told you to stay put, to keep off the roads during invasion, and to avoid panic and despondency. What she had wanted, ever since that awful moment last evening, was a bosom on which to lean and cry, not a bit of brisk, official buff paper. She said crossly, 'I suppose Germany's going to declare war on them next.'

'It certainly looks like it.'

'I ought never to have allowed the children to go without Nanny. Never, never! Or I ought to have gone with them myself.'

'Now, darling! You know you didn't want to leave your job in the W.V.S.'

'Oh, damn the W.V.S.!' she cried, and hung up.

A moment later she regretted it, but by then it was impossible to do anything. Another call, to tell John she was sorry, to receive his amused forgiveness, would make her hopelessly late for the canteen.

She ran upstairs to get her hat and was halted in the bedroom, as though by a blow over the heart, by the photograph of the children on her dressing table. It was the latest snapshot, taken by Mrs. Maddison on Simon's birthday and sent over with a long, careful letter describing his presents, the children who had come to tea, what he had said, what Janet had worn. Certainly, Mrs. Maddison did the thing handsomely – regular cables, details of gains in height and weight, school reports, copious snapshots. Now that her children weren't here, Mrs. Bristowe seemed to know far more about them than she ever had before.

She sat down, the photograph in her hand, the canteen forgotten. The children looked very fair and English in the clear American sunlight, Simon in his shorts and jersey, Janet in her smock from Liberty's. The tears came into Mrs. Bristowe's eyes again, and refused to be pushed back, as she thought of the last time she had seen her children, that dreadful morning at the port from which they had sailed. They had seemed terribly small then as she stood beside them, making inane remarks to their escort, a jolly Girton girl who looked, thank God, as though she would be good at swimming. The time which elapsed before Mrs. Bristowe got the cable saying that they had arrived safely was the worst torture she had ever known...Letters and photographs didn't tell you anything, really. No, thought Mrs. Bristowe wretchedly, she had sent her children into a war among strangers. Kind strangers, but strangers all the same.

Our December Books

Persephone Books Nos 10-12 will be published on 1 December:

Julian Grenfell (1976) by Nicholas Mosley is about the First World War poet who was born in 1888 and died in 1915. Although it is one of the best biographies of recent times, it has never been reprinted. Possibly this is because it is not a 'straight' biography, exhaustively cataloguing every known fact of Grenfell's life; rather it evokes the relationships and *mores* of an entire segment of society, allowing the reader to understand not just Julian - and his intense relationship with his mother - but a whole era of history.

Good Things in England by Florence White is a 1932 cookery book. Elizabeth David called it 'a classic, in that the author's collection of English recipes is unique and their authenticity unquestioned.' The original format is so beautiful that we are reissuing this title as a facsimile with, of course, 1932 endpapers and a grey jacket.

It's Hard to Be Hip Over Thirty... and Other Tragedies of Married Life, poems by the American writer Judith Viorst, were published in America in the late '60s and early '70s; English readers first read them in *Nova* magazine. They too are redolent of an entire era. Viorst's work is very American but no-one, of whatever age, sex or nationality, can avoid laughing at these 50 extraordinary poems, which are funny, pointed and painful. Here we reprint 'Some Advice from a Mother to Her Married Son' which is not in *It's Hard to Be Hip* but perfectly encapsulates Viorst's style and wit:

The answer to do you love me isn't, I married you, didn't I?
Or, Can't we discuss this after the ballgame is through?
It isn't, Well that all depends on what you mean by 'love'.
Or even, Come to bed and I'll prove that I do.
The answer isn't, How can I talk about love when the bacon is burned and the house is an absolute mess and the children are screaming their heads off and I'm going to miss my bus?
The answer is yes.
The answer is yes.
The answer is yes.

Our wrapping service: We will wrap books in pink tissue paper, tie them with grey ribbon and, if requested, will put in a specially designed and printed card telling the recipient who they are from; in December we will even stick a Persephone label on the front of the padded envelope saying 'do not open until Christmas'. This costs a mere £1 extra per book (but, we are sorry, our usual special offer of three books for £25 does not apply to wrapped presents). If you wish to give Persephone books to everyone on your Christmas list and would like us to send them off, just telephone and ask or indeed simply send us a list of names and addresses with your credit card number. There will be more details of our Christmas titles in the December Persephone Quarterly which comes out at the end of November. N.b. we also do our own book tokens.

Our September Fabrics

The fabric we have chosen for *The Home-Maker* is Warner's 'Galway', exported to the USA from 1915 onwards. Its design was based on a French woven sample showing two birds confronting each other in a manner typical of medieval tapestries; it thus has a timeless quality suitable for a novel about the age-old intricacies of family and domestic life, as well as resonances both of courtship and of confrontation, appropriate to a novel about a loving family who find happiness only through the parents' role reversal. The silk velvet and terry material combines a small touch of luxury with homely qualities; the slightly worn quality of the sample evocatively reveals the texture of the towelling and the velvet, while the pink on a brown background is a practical colour combination.

John Nash 'Quiet Evening' 1924 Alphabet and Image 3, p.22

For *Good Evening, Mrs Craven*: The Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes we have chosen a fabric designed soon after the introduction of clothes rationing in June 1941. It shows various items of brightly-coloured women's clothing against a background of writing explaining what can be bought for how many coupons. Like the stories, the fabric is a little frivolous but with a background of deep seriousness. Clothes are referred to throughout, in virtually the first line of the first story ('Mrs. Ramsay dressed for her lunch with Gerald Spalding...and...chose the navy alpaca suit with a crisp lingerie blouse') and in the last when Frances chooses a sleeping bag for a baby made of a blue material embroidered with a pink rabbit. Above all 'Coupons', as the fabric was called, could have been designed and worn in no other era.

'London Wall' is a fragment of a printed rayon (but convincingly linen-like) scarf which we have had photographed for *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, Vere Hodgson's wartime diary. A brick wall provides the background for slogans ('careless talk costs lives', 'if you must talk, talk victory') hand-written onto brightly coloured 'posters'. There are eleven altogether, two of which had been partly cut off our sample but which evidently said 'Give us the tools, we will finish the job' and 'This is "London Wall" by Jacqmar, Copyright'. (Jacqmar was a well-known scarf-manufacturer.) One of the smaller 'posters' has the slogan 'Bill stickers will be prosecuted by Jacqmar.' Slogans were an important part of everyday life in wartime: this fabric was one of a number with them on and Vere Hodgson, herself extremely patriotic, might easily have worn the scarf (if it had not been beyond her means). Because it was a London wall it is doubly appropriate for a Londoner's diary.

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