THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

December 1999 No.4

Our December Books

Our December Books are published on 22 November, in good time for Christmas. We have decided upon a classic cookery book, a biography which appeals to women but also to men, and a book of funny poetry. None of these is fiction, but because we have five Persephone novels and a book of short stories already in print we feel that those people who would like to give a novel as a present already have enough to choose from.

Good Things in England by Florence White is a classic English cookery book published in 1932, reprinted in 1951 and 1968, but not reprinted since - despite the great revival of interest in indigenous English cookery. Edited, rather than written, by the author, few of the 853 recipes were her own: after a lifetime as a governess, teacher, lady's companion and cook-housekeeper, the sixty-year-old Florence White settled in a basement bedsitter in Chelsea, began collecting English recipes and became the first ever 'freelance journalist specialising in food and cookery' - and in particular in English cookery.

She wrote articles for all the leading newspapers and magazines, gave talks on the radio and then, in 1931, was commissioned by the publisher Jonathan Cape to compile a book of English recipes spanning more than five centuries from 1399 to 1932. If you want to know how to make Frumenty, Fruit Bread, Scarborough Muffins, Pea Soup, Madras Chicken Curry, Whitby Yule Cake or Sally Lunn's Cakes, this is the one place to find out, since all cookery books after 1932 will have drawn their material from this one (as Florence White was all too aware: she wrote in her autobiography in 1938 that 'every original idea or rare recipe embodied in my articles was copied and used by other people. Still, looking back, I see that the fact of my work being so widely copied did help to make English cookery popular.')

Comments intersperse the recipes, for example the various types of English breakfasts are defined as the Indian chota-hazri, 'the normal workers' breakfast at 8 o'clock', The Country House Breakfast and finally the slightly barbed observation that 'we have learnt from Americans to preface all our meals (with the exception of afternoon tea) with grape fruit.' On page 4 we reprint two Christmas recipes. And we can only agree with Elizabeth David, who wrote about *Good Things in England*: 'Florence White's book is a classic, in that the author's collection of English recipes is unique and their authenticity unquestioned. The book is also a lovely one to read, full of fresh ideas and appetising descriptions of English specialities.'

Julian Grenfell: His life and the times of his death by Nicholas Mosley was first published in 1976 and never republished since. Yet it is one of the outstanding biographies of our time. Firstly, it is quite short and selective yet tells you everything you want to know. Secondly, it is about a young man killed in the First World War and asks the question, what was it about his upbringing that made Julian Grenfell welcome and even relish the war? Thirdly, it is a superb description of an appallingly smothering mother. Motherhood is of course a very Persephone theme (one reason why we named ourselves after a daughter famous for the

story of her mother, Demeter, being so distraught at her loss that she condemns the world to six months of winter). As Nicholas Mosley writes in his Persephone Preface:

'When this book was first read it was correctly pointed out that the story had at least as much to do with his mother Ettie as it had with Julian, so pervasively had I felt the need to try to describe and explain her influence over him. But then readers wondered - was I suggesting that "the times of his death" should be taken as being the responsibility of Ettie? I wanted to discountenance this idea, arguing that it was the whole of Ettie's generation that by their attitudes might be said to have some responsibility for their children's eagerness for war...any culpability of Ettie's...might be said to lie with her scorn for Julian and for his heartfelt ideas when in 1909 he set about challenging her...'

Julian Grenfell and his mother, Ettie, later Lady Desborough, in 1900, when he was twelve.

And, as Mollie Panter-Downes wrote in *The New Yorker* (13 June 1977): 'The portrait of Julian that is finally allowed to emerge is of a brave, intelligent, and highly original young man. His mother is as hard a woman to stand up to in print as she was in life, however, and the extraordinary spell that she seemed able to cast on every man she met makes it a little uncertain at times whose biography Mr Mosley is writing.' The truth is that this is a double biography, a biography of an aristocratic comrade-at-arms of the hero of *William - an Englishman*, and of Julian's mother, every bit as dominating as the 'sharp-eyed, masterful mother' who ruled William's life as much as Ettie ruled Julian's.

It's Hard to be Hip over Thirty and Other Tragedies of Married Life contains two books of poetry by Judith Viorst, originally published in America in 1968 and 1971, and in England in 1973. These are funny and perceptive poems about the realities of domestic life which influenced many subsequent women writers, who also look ruefully and ironically at their everyday lives and explore the trivial issues that throw light on the deeper ones. As Judith Viorst writes in the Persephone Preface, in her life the 'most urgent questions were answered not by Plato but by Dr. Spock...the many challenges of marriage and the family sometimes made me feel as if my only two choices were homicide - or humour. I chose humour.' In the last *Persephone Quarterly* (sent free on request to those who missed it or have lost their copy) we reprinted 'Advice from a Mother to a Married Son' (which does not appear in *It's Hard to be Hip*) and this has often been mentioned by people who write to us, and faxed around the world to friends. Judith Viorst's poem about Christmas appears on Page 5.

Good Things in England

A Cheap and Simple Way of Cooking a Ham

Kensington, 1920

1. Soak the ham for 24 or 48 hours according to its requirements; a Suffolk sweet-cured ham requires soaking 48 hours; a Bradenham 4 days; a mild-cured Yorkshire ham 24 hours.
2. Scrape it as usual.
3. Put it into a pot of cold water sufficient to cover it.
4. Bring it slowly to boiling point.
5. Simmer for 30 minutes.
6. Then plunge the still simmering pot quickly into a hay-box cooker; pack the hay round very tight, cover with hay and a blanket, and leave for 8 or 10 hours according to size.
7. Take the pot out, lift off the lid, and it will be found to be perfectly cooked if these directions have been carefully followed.
8. Leave in its liquor till cold as this mellows the ham.

N.B.—The above is not only a saving of gas or electricity, it is also a saving of trouble. The expenditure for fuel is the cost of cooking it for at most 2 hours, whilst when it is once in the hay-box cooker it does not require watching.

Anyone can make a hay-box for cooking purposes: any wooden box with a lid can be used and newspapers used for stuffing instead of hay.

Christmas Apple Pie

1770

At Potton, Bedfordshire, and the places adjacent, it was the custom at Christmas festivities to place on the table a large apple pie called an 'Apple Florentine.' This was made in a huge dish of pewter or Sheffield plate, or silver (or perhaps gold?) filled with 'good baking apples,' sugar and lemon, to the very brim; with a covering of rich pastry. When baked and before serving up, the crust was taken off, cut into triangular portions ready to be replaced on the apples, but before this was done a full quart of well-spiced ale was poured in quite hissing hot.

[I have seen, in 1928, at the King's Head, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, a huge dish that answers this description and was probably used for baking 'Florentines.' These were pies made in dishes without any undercrust and they were sometimes filled with veal and other meat. A new departure from the older English saucer pies made with a crust under and over and the old pudding-pies made in cup moulds, and left uncovered. I do not know whether apple pies are still called 'Florentines' in Bedfordshire, but I do know that an apple pie is considered as much an indispensable part of the Christmas feast in some places as orange jelly is in others.—Ed.]

from: It's Hard To Be Hip

They let the children out of school too early.
I left the Christmas shopping till too late.
Each day we had a holiday excursion,
Which gave us the entire week to wait in line for
Movies by Disney,
Gift-wrapping by Lord & Taylor,
And everyone's restrooms.

On Christmas Eve we started to assemble
The easy-to-assemble telescope
And fire truck with forty-seven pieces.
By midnight it was plain there was no hope without
An astronomer,
A mechanical engineer,
And two psychiatrists.

We rose at dawn to three boys singing Rudolph.
We listened numbly to their shouts of glee.
The kitten threw up tinsel on the carpet.
The fire truck collided with the tree, requiring
One rug shampoo,
Several Band-aids,
And Scotch before breakfast.

I bought my husband shirts - wrong size, wrong colors,
And ties he said he couldn't be caught dead in.
I'd hinted Saint Laurent or something furry.
He bought me flannel gowns to go to bed in, also
A Teflon frying pan,
A plaid valise,
And The Weight Watchers Cook Book.

The turkey was still frozen at eleven.
At noon my eldest boy spilled Elmer's glue.
At five I had a swell Excedrin headache,
The kind that lasts till January two...but
Merry Christmas
And Happy New Year,
I think.

'Remembrance of Christmas Past' by Judith Viorst

Women Engraving Wood

Pat Jaffé, the author of Women Engravers (1990), has written this article especially for The Persephone Quarterly

Years ago, asked to write a book on women wood engravers, I was silly enough to think the subject ill-conceived, and almost turned the commission down. But a quick squint from the historical angle rapidly revealed how wrong my conception was. Britain has produced many brilliant women wood engravers: Agnes Miller Parker, Gertrude Hermes, Lettice Sandford, Joan Hassall, Clare Leighton, Tirzah Ravilious. All are of the twentieth century. Before that, engraving had been a skill much in demand and highly lucrative: so men ran a closed shop, excluding women from professional training. Only when photographic methods of reproduction made engraving obsolete, did men cease their fight to keep the trade to themselves, and leave the field.

There had, of course, been women who engraved before this surrender. Most of them were born into families of skilled engravers who privately trained their daughters along with their sons and indentured apprentices: no one could monitor everything that a master craftsman did in the privacy of his own home, and many a master delivered, as his own, the work of his apprentices, of his sons and of his daughters. In this way Eliza Thompson was trained by her famous father, John, and the Taylor sisters by the two Isaacs, their father and grandfather. We know of both these traineeships through published memoirs, as indeed we know of later engraving circles set up by the wives and sisters of William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and their friends. There is a beguiling intimacy and intensity in wood-engraving, and it is appropriate to a domestic context. I have worked with a class of female wood-engravers in a course run at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts under the benignly sporadic tutelage of Leonard Baskin, and I know the intense pleasure of group concentration in a communal work place, individuals sitting comfortably at a bench, under a strong lamp, chatting, but concentrating with fine steel tools engraving honey-coloured boxwood blocks, and attempting to capture what Joan Hassall has characterised as that 'monumental moment' potential in each wood-engraved print.

I dared to write, in *Women Engravers*, that the women of the Morris circle probably delighted in their work. For this opinion I was lambasted in reviews by feminists who deplored my ignorance of Janey Morris, Georgiana Burne-Jones, Kate Faulkner and Elizabeth Burden's misery. (I suppose that that famous photograph of the Morris and Burne-Jones families, gathered in the garden of The Grange, has much to answer for: they all posed, twitchless, for a minute and a half while the exposure took its relentless time, immortalising them in the depths of uncharacteristic gloom.) Even in the late 1980s there was a reluctance among feminists to believe Georgiana Burne-Jones when she wrote, 'Oh, how happy we were, Janey and I, busy in the morning with needlework or wood-engraving'; or her account of how she and

George Du Maurier's fiancée 'took counsel together about practising wood-engraving in order to reproduce the drawings of the men we loved.' Wood-engraving did not enslave women: they enjoyed it. I know. I am a wood-engraver. It is a most absorbing technique – even for one whose achievements give as little self-satisfaction as mine. It is almost as though, on picking up a tool, and bending over a block, one enters a secret world. Within that world one is in control and in command: others cannot intrude. I am certain of this: I was widowed two years ago and absented myself from the rough justice of socialising with commiserators by setting myself the task of engraving a wild old tree in honour of my husband. To all enquiries I replied that I was busy and had to finish the engraving to use on a card announcing the date of Michael's Memorial Service in King's College Chapel. That engraving gave me, at a time of horrid limbo, the reassurance of having something relevant to do and of being completely in control. It was liberating. To the sculptress Gertrude Hermes, wood-engraving provided escape, steadying her nerves as well as her hand through the turmoil of the break-up of her marriage. James Hamilton described the outcome: 'After her months of isolation and unhappiness...her engravings became more expressive of her immediate personal feelings, and reflected a growing maturity and self-knowledge.'

'Winter' 1927, taken from The Wood-Engravings of Tirzah Ravilious, London, 1987

Little wonder that bookish, talented, visual twentieth-century women have taken such delight in the intimate, intricate craft they were at last allowed to learn. A most delightful illustrative engraver, Diana Bloomfield, opened a talk about wood-engraving with the frank statement: 'I am really a grandmother and a housewife, but here and there I do my engravings. I have to spare what time I can for them and hug it to me and treasure it, because it is valuable to me, and once I start an engraving I like a good six hours in which to get down to it.' Engraving is not one of the fastest artistic processes. But, crisp and sure, you can make from the finished block thousands of identical prints. Patience has always been cracked up as a great female virtue.

Persephone Books Nos. 1-9

More press comment on our first nine books

Our plan is that Persephone books should remain in print for three or four years: we are not a publishing house that is always chasing a bestseller, with the other titles on our list returning from the bookshops if they have not sold after three months. Nor have accountants decided that we must publish a certain number of titles a year whether we love them or not: the only reason our books are published is because we believe that they are wonderful. Also, each month's three are very much chosen to form part of a coherent trio, and the titles as a group are meant to form a coherent and carefully thought-out 'list'.

As regular readers will know, the first three Persephone Books, our March books, consist of a novel about the suffragettes and the First World War, an entertaining period piece about a girl growing up in the inter-war years and a 1953 novel about the destruction of a marriage by the once enormously popular Dorothy Whipple. **William - an Englishman** by Cicely Hamilton was discussed on Radio 4's *A Good Read* in July. Anne Harvey thought that 'this novel is absolutely stunning. It bowled me over when I first read it...and when I re-read it for this programme I was bowled over all over again. It's the sort of book that I've recommended to so many of my friends, both male and female.'

Peter Preston, former editor of the *Guardian*, found it 'terrific' and that, although he thought the early suffragette scenes and the First World War scenes did not quite hang together, Cicely Hamilton was 'such a good writer, it's worth it every page of the way.' In the discussion, Sarah Lefanu suggested that 'there are moments of extraordinarily vivid writing during the central section, when they are being battered by the reality of war' while Peter Preston said that he preferred the second half of the book, which he thought 'very powerfully done, and so, because Cicely Hamilton was in the war herself, are the actual scenes in the war...she's a lovely writer, very poignant, very evocative and evoking the war is what she does as well as anything I've read.'

Mariana by Monica Dickens has been called 'their favourite book' by many people and a reviewer in April called it 'a joy to read', adding: 'This is Rosamond Lehmann territory but...Dickens lacks Lehmann's cloying, deadly earnestness. Dickens writes with a style and verve reminiscent of the best of Mary Wesley or Dodie Smith, and the feckless Mary is a most engaging heroine...The reader cannot help but like the enterprising, irreverent Mary. This is a welcome reissue of a book that should never have gone out of print.'

Someone at a Distance by Dorothy Whipple has continued on its bestselling course (it was in the *Evening Standard* bestseller list for a week in August). The *Nottingham Evening Post* featured it in a two-page article on 2 September, quoting our

remark that originally *Someone* 'had no reviews and was completely overlooked, the reason being that it was published in the period when the Angry Young Men and *Look Back in Anger* were coming in and it felt old-fashioned. But in fact it was ahead of its time. It seems quite an easy read, but it's actually very subtle.' The author of the piece recommended readers to 'make a beeline for the luxurious Persephone Books reprint of *Someone* and asked, 'So is this the start of a Dorothy Whipple revival?'

The following month the *Nottingham County Literary Magazine* observed that *Someone at a Distance* is 'an extraordinary title. It alerts the reader to an element of mystery and menace in a story which at first seems mundane enough...as it describes the breakdown of a model post-war family from the leafy suburbs...Full of insights yet most cleverly paced, "It will get grimmer and grimmer", as its author herself noted; while Nina Bawden, writing in the Preface, explains the simplicity and authenticity of Whipple's style...' Finally the reviewer commended our 'beautifully produced paperbacks' and the endpaper's 'stunning 1950s textile design'.

A reviewer of Susan Glaspell's **Fidelity** in the *Antiquarian Book Monthly Review* (we are reviewed here - we hope and presume - because our books are the collectable books of the future) remarked that 'the novel will no doubt be leapt on eagerly by feminist academics and women's studies enthusiasts. It is an important early feminist text and, unlike so many so-called "early feminist classics", it is also a very good read...Intelligent and thoughtful, it does not fall into the obvious trap of preaching free love at all costs, nor does it aim to vindicate small-town morality. There are echoes of many earlier texts dealing with women's role in marriage. Like *Madame Bovary*, Ruth discovers in adultery all the platitudes of marriage, and *Fidelity*'s deliberately Ibsenite ending shows her finding independence and self-fulfilment outside society's conventions.'

This was the novel that Valerie Grove of *The Times* spoke about at the September Book at Lunchtime and defined (in a column about the lunch in her local paper) as 'a real find', adding that we lunchtime 'women of a certain age...wondered why Susan Glaspell is not remembered in the same breath as Edith Wharton, who could not have told this story better.' Valerie Grove concluded her piece by recommending our books as 'things of beauty, a pleasure to touch' and observing that they are available by mail order only and that "publicity" is by word of mouth.'

An Interrupted Life: The Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum 1941-3 continues on its extraordinary course. This is a book that we do not have to create publicity for, because it generates its own. It is referred to 150 times on the internet; it generates articles without the author knowing about our edition and then a bookseller discovers the Persephone version from the list of books in print; it is often cited, most recently in *Sources,* Seamus Heaney's wife Marie's 'Sustenance for the Soul', sold in aid of charity, in which she asked people to nominate the thing in their life that they found most uplifting. We are deeply proud of having published Etty's diaries.

The Victorian Chaise-longue by Marghanita

Laski is being admired by all who read it. There was recently an interesting review of it by Laura Phillips in the *Jewish Chronicle* in which she called it:

'a magnificently disturbing tale, and it bears comparison with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'TheYellow Wallpaper', in which a new mother, confined to a bedroom with depression, is gradually driven insane by her patronising doctor husband's refusal to allow her intellectual stimulation, a tiny story that has become a feminist text. But Laski's novel also has philosophical and spiritual overtones. Melanie's plight leads her to question both the notion of the continuity of time and the nature of the state of "ecstasy", which, declares Melanie, is timeless...Ultimately, however, it is the sheer power of Laski's imagination in delineating the horror of Melanie's loss of identity, and entrapment, which makes this book unforgettable.'

The Home-Maker, like *Fidelity*, is a novel that has to be recommended by word of mouth because Dorothy Canfield Fisher is not (yet) well known in this country. People tend to read the novel slowly because it is so beautifully written and, the cry goes up on all sides, so modern. Karen Knox, from Nashville, and Dr Susan Peek, a child psychiatrist in Hackney, talked about it at the Book at Lunchtime on 22 October. The discussion that ensued about role-swapping and 'children's rights' (which is what Dorothy Canfield Fisher herself defined as the subject of the novel) was the liveliest we have had yet.

Mollie Panter-Downes's wartime short stories from *The New Yorker*, **Good Evening, Mrs Craven**, which have been collected for the first time in the Persephone edition, has sold more copies more quickly than any of our other books. This is because of the charisma of the *The New Yorker*; the excellence of the stories (she was an indisputably great writer); the good timing (she began to write them sixty years ago this autumn); and the exceptionally lovely endpaper. These would be wonderful stories for reading aloud: Radio 4's short story slot - where are you?

Few Eggs and No Oranges, a thumping great 620 pages, all for £10, has been publicised by a postcard drop (showing the original cover) round the streets of W.11. This has brought a good number of orders and, of course, new names for the data base. ('Can men subscribe?' someone asked plaintively. Of course, of course, we reply. And it's not technically a subscription: the *PQ* is sent out free of charge, and you do not have to buy any books; see 'Persephone Men' in the September *Quarterly*.) *The Hill*, Notting Hill's local magazine, reviewed the diaries as follows: 'One of the most vivid accounts of life in London during the Blitz, Vere Hodgson's indomitable spirit would put Mrs Miniver to shame.'

All our books should make excellent presents - provided you choose the right recipient, for example *Mariana* may be too frivolous for a few, *Someone* might not be good for anyone with a similar misery in their life, Etty could be too upsetting for some people, and *The Homemaker* might not suit a bachelor. However, our December titles are, we believe, suitable for everyone, with a very few provisos (the cookery-challenged should not be given *Good Things*, the very serious-minded might not appreciate *It's Hard to be Hip*). We hope Christmas 1999 and all subsequent Christmases are ones where present-giving becomes Persephone-giving. Please see the order form in the centre, as well as page 16 of this *PQ*, for details of having your presents wrapped in Persephone pink.

The 100 best novels of the C20

1. **The Great Gatsby,** F Scott Fitzgerald
2. **The Catcher In The Rye,** JD Salinger
3. **The Grapes Of Wrath,** John Steinbeck
4. **To Kill A Mockingbird,** Harper Lee
5. **The Color Purple,** Alice Walker
6. **Ulysses,** James Joyce
7. **Beloved,** Toni Morrison
8. **Lord Of The Flies,** William Golding
9. **1984,** George Orwell
10. **The Sound And The Fury,** William Faulkner
11. **Lolita,** Vladimir Nabokov
12. **Of Mice And Men,** John Steinbeck
13. **Charlotte's Web,** EB White
14. **A Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man,** James Joyce
15. **Catch-22,** Joseph Heller
16. **Brave New World,** Aldous Huxley
17. **Animal Farm,** George Orwell
18. **The Sun Also Rises,** Ernest Hemingway
19. **As I Lay Dying,** William Faulkner
20. **A Farewell To Arms,** Ernest Hemingway
21. **Heart Of Darkness,** Joseph Conrad
22. **Winnie The Pooh,** AA Milne
23. **Their Eyes Are Watching God,** Zora Neale Hurston
24. **Invisible Man,** Ralph Ellison
25. **Song of Solomon,** Toni Morrison
26. **Gone With The Wind,** Margaret Mitchell
27. **Native Son,** Richard Wright
28. **One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest,** Ken Kesey
29. **Slaughterhouse Five,** Kurt Vonnegut
30. **For Whom The Bell Tolls,** Ernest Hemingway
31. **On The Road,** Jack Kerouac
32. **The Old Man And The Sea,** Ernest Hemingway
33. **The Call Of The Wild,** Jack London
34. **To The Lighthouse,** Virginia Woolf
35. **Portrait Of A Lady,** Henry James
36. **Go Tell It On The Mountain,** James Baldwin
37. **The World According To Garp,** John Irving
38. **All The King's Men,** Robert Penn Warren
39. **A Room With A View,** EM Forster
40. **Lord Of The Rings,** JRR Tolkien
41. **Schindler's List,** Thomas Keneally
42. **The Age Of Innocence.** Edith Wharton
43. **The Fountainhead,** Ayn Rand
44. **Finnegans Wake,** James Joyce
45. **The Jungle,** Upton Sinclair
46. **Mrs Dalloway,** Virginia Woolf
47. **The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,** L Frank Baum
48. **Lady Chatterley's Lover,** DH Lawrence
49. **A Clockwork Orange,** Anthony Burgess
50. **The Awakening,** Kate Chopin
51. **My Antonia,** Willa Cather
52. **Howards End,** EM Forster
53. **In Cold Blood,** Truman Capote
54. **Franny And Zooey,** JD Salinger
55. **Satanic Verses,** Salman Rushdie
56. **Jazz,** Toni Morrison
57. **Sophie's Choice,** William Styron
58. **Absalom, Absalom!** William Faulkner
59. **Passage To India,** EM Forster
60. **Ethan Frome,** Edith Wharton
61. **A Good Man Is Hard To Find,** Flannery O'Connor
62. **Tender Is The Night,** F Scott Fitzgerald
63. **Orlando,** Virginia Woolf
64. **Sons And Lovers,** DH Lawrence
65. **Bonfire Of The Vanities,** Tom Wolfe
66. **Cat's Cradle,** Kurt Vonnegut
67. **A Separate Peace,** John Knowles
68. **Light In August,** William Faulkner
69. **Wings Of The Dove,** Henry James
70. **Things Fall Apart,** Chinua Achebe
71. **Rebecca,** Daphne du Maurier
72. **A Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy,** Douglas Adams
73. **Naked Lunch,** William S Burroughs
74. **Brideshead Revisited,** Evelyn Waugh
75. **Women In Love,** DH Lawrence
76. **Look Homeward, Angel,** Thomas Wolfe
77. **In Our Time,** Ernest Hemingway
78. **The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas,** Gertrude Stein
79. **The Maltese Falcon,** Dashiell Hammett
80. **The Naked And The Dead,** Norman Mailer
81. **The Wide Sargasso Sea,** Jean Rhys
82. **White Noise,** Don DeLillo
83. **O Pioneers!** Willa Cather
84. **Tropic Of Cancer,** Henry Miller
85. **The War Of The Worlds,** HG Wells
86. **Lord Jim,** Joseph Conrad
87. **The Bostonians,** Henry James
88. **An American Tragedy,** Theodore Dreiser
89. **Death Comes For The Archbishop,** Willa Cather
90. **The Wind In The Willows,** Kenneth Grahame
91. **This Side of Paradise,** F Scott Fitzgerald
92. **Atlas Shrugged,** Ayn Rand
93. **The French Lieutenant's Woman,** John Fowles
94. **Babbitt,** Sinclair Lewis
95. **Kim,** Rudyard Kipling
96. **The Beautiful And The Damned,** F Scott Fitzgerald
97. **Rabbit, Run,** John Updike
98. **Where Angels Fear To Tread,** EM Forster
99. **Main Street,** Sinclair Lewis
100. **Midnight's Children,** Salman Rushdie

Radcliffe, the all women's college in Cambridge, Mass., last year compiled this list of the hundred best novels of the century. It is an intelligent and interesting list with an inevitable American bias, but useful for British readers as well. One book that is missing is Fidelity (1915) by Susan Glaspell, Persephone Book No. 4; it will be in the list before long! In two recent lists of twentieth century fiction top 20's (both headed by The Catcher in Rye) one had two novels by women at Nos 19 and 20, The Bell (1958) by Iris Murdoch and Rebecca (1938) by Daphne du Maurier, and the other had only one novel by a woman (Cold Comfort Farm 1932) at No 12. The lists are for books published from 1900-1959 but otherwise would have included Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar (1963) and Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea (1966).

Plus ça change...

The Square Circle by Denis Mackail (Angela Thirkell's brother) appeared in 1930. Here we reprint an extract about life at Christmas in 'Tiverton Square' London SW3 or 7.

Is there anything new to be said of Christmas in Tiverton Square that hasn't already been said of Christmas in other places? We rather doubt it. Some of the residents, of course, went away...But for the most part the blinds were up in the daytime and the residents stayed where they were. Mistletoe and holly entered by various area doors, in association with potatoes and other greengrocery, and began withering in the customary manner. Turkeys, repulsively naked save for their lolling heads and stiff, protesting feet, followed the same track. The parcel-post became later and later. The delivery of letters passed largely into the hands of odd-looking irregulars with brassards. The pillar-box at the north-east corner was adorned with a threatening announcement about the impossibility of performing its ordinary duties. It snowed a little, and the newspapers instantly talked about Charles Dickens. It thawed, and they printed what were obviously meant to be jokes about plumbers. It rained, and they dropped the subject altogether.

Then for four days - for it is astonishing how seldom Christmas seems able to keep clear of one week-end or the other - a great silence, vacuum, catalepsy, paralysis, greyness, blankness and deadness descended on the entire scene. All movement seemed to be suspended, all sound to be muffled in an enveloping torpor. An eerie light, never strong enough to cast an actual shadow, came and went in the colourless sky. Smuts fell sluggishly, and remained where they lay. Ghostly footsteps stirred languid echoes, and the distant hum of the traffic in the main road sighed and faltered, or for long intervals even ceased altogether. If a door banged or a window were flung open, you heard the thump or screech right across the Square. A motor-horn made you start as though it were a ship's siren rousing a desert island. A sodden heaviness filled the stagnant atmosphere. Time, losing all its ordinary bearings, moved in odd, reluctant jerks, so that you never knew whether it were morning or evening, and were often in some doubt as to whether you were asleep or awake. Moreover, the sensation that you were re-living some previous existence, which at other times of the year usually passed off and left you in a flash, was now so persistent as to destroy all effort and initiative. If you took the pains to think, you would know exactly what was going to happen next and what the people about you were going to say; but why give yourself the trouble when it was all going to repeat itself anyhow? Why do anything when it was really all a dream? Why employ your wits and senses when you couldn't even be sure that you had any? Why not eat, drink, and be dull?

This was Christmas in London. And though there were banquets and gatherings all round Tiverton Square, and people went out and came in, and exchanged greetings and gave each other presents, and sat down and wrote thank-you letters, and telephoned, and went to bed and got up again, they were, one and all, simultaneously the victims of

overpowering inertia. 'Where are we?' they seemed to be asking. 'Who let us in for this? What is the the meaning of it all ? Why can we neither rest nor work, neither think nor stop thinking, neither throw off this extraordinary lethargy nor sink under it to the extent of losing consciousness? Is this the end of all our expense and preparation? Is this the way to occupy four whole days of our pitiably short existence?'

The eternal problem of gift-selection, of hitting on something really appropriate, acceptable, useful, something concerning the value of which there can be no doubt, is solved. Whether the recipient has or has not other cars, the FORD £100 Saloon will be equally gratifying and welcome.

But there was no choice. Nature, with her perpetual twilight, and Man, with his subservience to habit and tradition, had again combined to produce the familiar inevitable result. It didn't matter in the least if you starved yourself during this period, for you were just as sensible of excess. If you took exercise, you felt exactly as though you had taken no exercise at all. If you wore old clothes, you felt exactly as though they were new ones. But apart from these impotent protests, what else could you hope to do? Nothing. Christmas had got you again, and would go on getting you until you were dead. Nobody could save you. It was to this, as the sparks fly upward or as the spots appear before the eyes, that you had been born.

And then, quite suddenly, it was all over. The newspapers returned, with precisely the same amount of news as usual. Breakfast went back to its ordinary hour. Vehicles rattled gaily past the dining-room windows. The shops would be open, the streets would be full, the whole obstruction had been swept away in the night, and the great tide of activity was once more in full flood. More than this, a wind had arisen and was tossing the branches in the Square garden. There was Harris the gardener, again trundling his wheelbarrow with a collection of scattered twigs. There, was the butcher's light van, throbbing opposite your railings. There was a boy, carrying a basket of groceries, and whistling. There was a coal-cart, already making the most delightful and encouraging noises as it backed against the neighbouring kerb. Hypochondria had vanished. Hope had returned...somehow, as you looked back and hastily looked away again, it was impossible to be genuinely depressed. You had come through. You were yourself again. You were alive, awake, and once more you knew what you were going to do.

Our March Books

Our March 2000 books are novels about a young woman and a young man brought up in oppressive families from which they are unable to escape; and a collection of short stories exploring different aspects of life during the 1940s.

E.M.Delafield is best-known as the author of *Diary of a Provincial Lady* (1930); her early novels were also partly autobiographical, but none were as self-revelatory as *Consequences* (1919), which describes (as she wrote in 'Brides of Heaven', 1931) a 'terrible possessive parent' who brought up her daughter to believe that it was 'something between a minor tragedy and a major disgrace for a girl to remain unsought in marriage after her twentieth birthday.' 'With subtlety and insight' (*The TLS* 5 June 1919) the novel describes Alex Clare's belittlement by her mother, her failure to marry, her ten years in a convent and her attempt to escape and try again to be 'normal'.

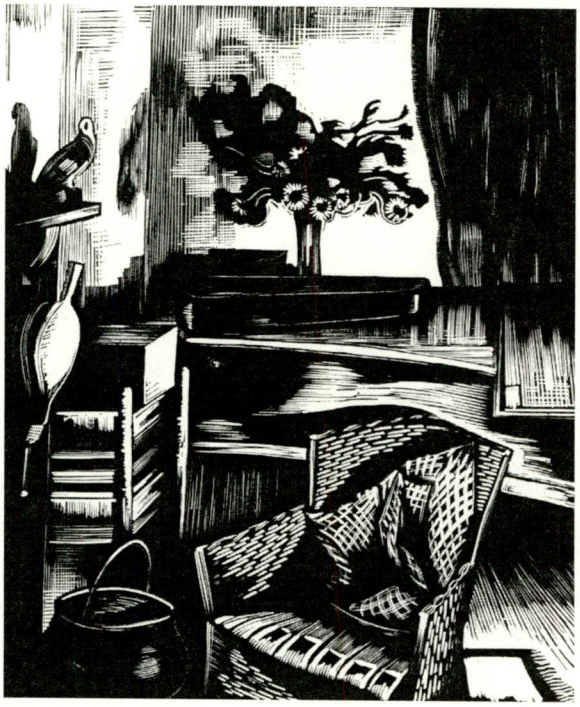
The hero of Betty Miller's *Farewell Leicester Square* (1935, published 1941) has equally rigid parents (albeit living in lower middle-class Brighton instead of upper-class Belgravia) but he is able to run away from home and become a film director, an option closed to his female contemporaries - unless they had a great deal more initiative than poor Alex. However, Alec Berman is also unable to find happiness, in his case because his Jewish background is something of which he is so continually aware that it prevents self-confidence, friendships and, in the end, a happy marriage. Just as *Consequences* is a description of the way Edwardian society shunned those unable to conform by marrying 'well', or at all, so *Farewell Leicester Square* focuses, most uncomfortably and unusually, on the Jew demeaned and demoralised by 'the silky and slippery presence of anti-semitism in England' (Jane Miller in the Preface). Both books - each beautifully written and absorbing - are powerful explorations of the outsider in British society.

Tell it to a Stranger is a 1947 collection by a novelist, Elizabeth Berridge, who is still writing but has not yet acquired the fame of near-contemporaries such as Jane Gardam, Nina Bawden or Elizabeth Jane Howard. We are delighted to be re-publishing these stories, which are not all specifically 'wartime' - although the war is in the background - but simply explore various aspects of English life at the time. The tone is often bleak (and thus at odds with their witty, charming author, who has written a new Afterword - the Preface is by A.N.Wilson - and who will be speaking at the May Book at Lunchtime) yet overall the stories are both funny and moving.

Some of Elizabeth Berridge's themes overlap with Mollie Panter-Downes's in *Good Evening, Mrs Craven* (elderly people surviving in vast, newly-servantless houses, isolated mothers left at home by their soldier husbands, German prisoners of war striking up a friendship with their British neighbours) but the style of the two writers is very different; between them, however, the two collections give an extraordinary picture of life in 1940s Britain.

Our December Fabrics

The endpaper fabric for Florence White's collection of English recipes *Good Things in England,* published in 1932, was designed by Duncan Grant in that year. Called 'Grapes', it is a design of grapes, flowers and leaves on a yellow background and was manufactured by the designer Allan Walton (1891-1948) and sold in his shop; the printer was his brother Roger, who ran the Little Green Dye-works, near Manchester. The design was used throughout the Lefevre Galleries' 'Music Room'; the Woolfs had it as curtains and on a sofa. In 1987 it was re-launched with yellow leaves on both a grey and a pink background as part of Laura Ashley's Bloomsbury Collection, together with other fabrics by Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell.



John Nash 'Interior' 1925 Alphabet and Image *3, p23*

The fabric for *Julian Grenfell*: His life and the times of his death was designed in about 1888, the year of Julian's birth. A block-printed cotton velveteen, attributed to Thomas Wardle (who had worked with William Morris, a favourite of Julian's parents' friends, 'The Souls'), it is a very typical Arts and Crafts repeat floral pattern. But of course we have also chosen it because it is called 'Poppies' - the flower that became the symbol of the millions killed in the First World War.

Judith Viorst's poems, published in the USA in 1968 as *It's Hard to be Hip over Thirty and Other Tragedies of Married Life* and in 1971 as *People & Other Aggravations*, were not easy to match to a fabric: 1960s America had reached 'a sense of a design hiatus, as if the country was in a state of suspended animation' (Lesley Jackson *The Sixties)* and this was especially so in pattern design. We looked at fabrics by the designers Celia Birtwell and Zandra Rhodes, but Judith Viorst was not familiar with their work; however, a Liberty's design struck a chord. And although there is no extant record of its having been exported to America, it almost certainly was. The three-dimensional, kinetic pattern of 'Bangles', 1968, is characteristic of the period ('dense, dynamic and convoluted, characterised by bright colours and the use of circles' *The Sixties*) while the vivid pinks and purples reflect the influence both of op art and psychedelic design; yet are domestic enough for Judith Viorst to have used them at home.

Finally...

Persephone books may be bought directly from us, postage and packing free within the UK, or ordered through a bookshop (although it is quicker to buy from us as we send the books out the day we receive the order). They all, whether they are 120 pages (*The Victorian Chaise-longue*) or 620 (*Few Eggs and No Oranges*) cost £10 or £25 for three. Postage is extra for airmail abroad – details on the order form inside. Please *telephone* 0171 253 5454 or *fax* 0171 253 5656 or *write to* Persephone Books, 28 Great Sutton Street, London, EC1 ODS or e-mail sales@persephonebooks.co.uk or look at our *web-site* at www.persephonebooks.co.uk

For Christmas we will wrap each book in pink tissue paper and tie it with silver ribbon (as on the postcard enclosed with this *PQ*) and unless you request otherwise, enclose a card saying 'Happy Christmas' and who the book is from, while the envelope will also have a 'Do not open before Christmas' sticker. The wrapping service costs £2 per book or £5 for three. Our December books are published on 22 November (instead of 22 December); we are making a little stand against the exhausting and tedious way that Christmas now begins in October – is there no-one else out there who also tries to inject a little excitement into it all by refusing to start thinking about Christmas until 1 December? We guarantee that all our Christmas orders will arrive by 24 December, and you can order until the 22nd (for the panic-stricken we offer a courier service. This would cost between £4 and £8 anywhere in the UK.)

This is how the London bookshop John Sandoe described our first nine titles in its Christmas leaflet.

If we haven't already done so, may we alert you to an exceptional series of rediscovered books, handsomely presented by the new Persephone Books.

The nine so far are all treasures:

1. **WILLIAM: AN ENGLISHMAN** *Cicely Hamilton*
An unusual, angry novel from 1919, reflecting on the recent war.

2. **MARIANA** *Monica Dickens*
A far from sentimental fictional take on her own childhood.

3. **SOMEONE AT A DISTANCE** *Dorothy Whipple*
This subtle, beautifully written novel from 1953 has been much enjoyed by us here.

4. **FIDELITY** *Susan Glaspell*
In the Edith Wharton vein (1915), a dramatic exploration of marriage.

5. **AN INTERRUPTED LIFE: THE DIARIES AND LETTERS OF ETTY HILLESUM, 1941-43**
Personal testimony of Nazi horrors that at times somehow approaches the serene.

6. **THE VICTORIAN CHAISE LONGUE** *Marghanita Laski*
A slim, brilliant, very scary novel.

7. **THE HOME-MAKER** *Dorothy Canfield Fisher*
A 1924 novel examining the inner life of a family.

8. **GOOD EVENING, MRS CRAVEN: THE WARTIME STORIES** *Mollie Panter-Downes*
Classic fiction, pure and simple, that until now has been quite overlooked. A great writer.

9. **FEW EGGS AND NO ORANGES** *Vere Hodgson*
Subtitled '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', this is a delightful chronicle of almost 600 pages.

Our first nines titles are listed on the left. The December titles are *Good Things in England* by Florence White, a 1932 cookery book; *Julian Grenfell: His life and the times of his death* by Nicholas Mosley; and *It's Hard to be Hip over Thirty and Other Tragedies of Married Life* by Judith Viorst, a book of 1960s (but timeless) poetry.

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