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#### Our March 2000 Books

The majority of Persephone readers will have read *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*, but those who read the moving, absorbing and deeply disconcerting *Consequences* (1919) will never be able to think of its author, E.M.Delafield, in the same way again.

Even more than *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*, *Consequences* is an autobiographical novel. E.M.Delafield's upbringing was similar to her heroine Alex Clare's and 'was based on the theory of the period that whatever a child most enjoyed doing must necessarily be "bad for" him or her.' As she grew up she was made '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.' Since she did not manage to get married she, like Alex, felt an abject failure and went into a convent.

Twenty years later, E.M.Delafield would write about her time there in a memoir called 'Brides of Heaven', reprinted in the E.M.Delafield biography; it reveals that the convent scenes in *Consequences* accurately and heart-rendingly recapture the experience. (Since, I am pleased to say, we have ten nuns on our mailing list - who found us through an article about *An Interrupted Life* in *The Tablet* - we can confirm that convent life has completely changed!)

The first part of the book describes Alex Clare, aged 12 when it begins in 1889, being groomed to

Cover: Betty Miller at her desk at home in London in 1950. Photograph by Mark Gerson ©

become a society hostess or mistress of the manor. Her upbringing is, however, so authoritarian and so insensitive that she is gradually broken by it, her natural high spirits crushed by the way, time after time, she is made to feel gauche, inept and generally a failure. Eventually, when she is 21, she enters a convent, only to emerge ten years later into a world that has not yet changed enough for her to be able to find happiness. 'A scream of sheer horror against Victorianism' is the Preface's summing-up of *Consequences*.

Our second March book is also about the effects of a repressive upbringing, but Alec Berman, the hero of *Farewell Leicester Square* by Betty Miller (the mother of the more famous Jonathan), manages to escape from it in order to become a successful filmmaker; there are many similarities between his career and that of the real-life Alexander Korda and the book is an interesting portrait of the film world in England in the 1930s.

But the main focus of Farewell Leicester Square is 'the silky, slippery presence of anti-Semitism in England amongst precisely those people who would never have admitted to it' writes Jane Miller in the Preface, adding that Betty Miller 'was also concerned with the self-hatred it could produce' if the person involved never stopped feeling an outsider, as happens to Alec.

In the great central scene in the novel he and his friend Lew, having been shocked and shaken by an anti-Semitic newspaper, discuss their situation. "Why in the name of sense don't we throw up the **∞**≎∞

sponge and go to Palestine," Lew said suddenly... "Just imagine...belonging..." But Alec's response is that "there's only an area about a quarter the size of Wales for sixteen million Jews to redeem themselves on. Even spiritually, that's overcrowding." Nothing would be solved for the millions 'tolerated, and yet not tolerated. Living in a sort of civilised limbo.'

Originally this book was rejected by Victor Gollancz, himself a Jew, and it was not published for another six years, in 1941. The reasons were twofold: it was embarrassingly angry about anti-Semitism; and, given that its author was only 24, it was overall too controversial, too uppity.

Curiously enough, the author of our third March book, Elizabeth Berridge, was also only 24 when she wrote the first of the short stories appearing in Tell It to a Stranger: Stories from the 1940s. Indeed, in one sense each of our March 2000 books are by angry young women: perhaps older writers are more accepting, more ready to laugh at things rather than to rail at them?

The stories make a wonderful duo with Mollie Panter-Downes's, not just because they are set at the same period

#### 'Publisher of the Year'

Helen Osborne in The Sunday Telegraph Books of the Year 5 December 1999

'Not a book of the year but a publisher of the year: Persephone Books, launched in the spring and an exemplar of mail-order enterprise, producing three fine paperback editions a quarter of books which have slipped out of print. Mostly by or about women, but nothing to scare men off.'

but also because both writers are witty and perceptive and have an ability to hone in, almost brutally,

> on aspects of human behaviour that most people, tactfully, ignore: Mollie Panter-Downes's wife wishing her husband's leave had not been deferred because she is too weary to say goodbye to him all over again, Elizabeth Berridge's Lady Bountiful who will not admit to herself that she chooses to put her Red Cross duties before the needs of her soldier son. In his Preface. A.N.Wilson invokes Chekhov; and he refers to Elizabeth Berridge's seeing with 'penetration and profound artistic intelligence but also with gentleness and love.'



E.M. Delafield, in her VAD uniform, in 1917, at the time when she was beginning to write <u>Consequences</u>. 'Acting on my own initiative for perhaps the first time in my life, I volunteered and was accepted...It was emancipation of the most delirious kind. It was occupation, it was self-respect – above all, it was freedom. One of the results...was that I suddenly felt again the desire to write.' <u>Beginnings</u>, 1935 p71

# from: It's Hard to be Hip

I write in the bedroom with unsorted laundry, A crib, and a baby who hollers. My husband the writer gets gold velvet chairs, A couch that cost four hundred dollars, A wall-to-wall carpet, bright red and all wool, And a desk big enough to play pool on. I type in quadruplicate, two sets for me And two for the baby to drool on, In a setting conducive to grocery lists And decisions like chopped steak or flounder. Did Emily Dickinson have to write poems With diaper-rash ointment around her? Did Elizabeth Browning stop counting the ways When Robert said one hot pastrami? Excuse me, the big boys just came home from school And they're yelling their heads off for mommy.

My husband the writer makes long-distance calls To people too famous to mention.

The closest I get to the great outside world Is listening on the extension

Or reading old Digests while taking the kids

For their flu shots and antibiotics.

(Everyone knows that the mother who works Will doubtlessly bring up psychotics

Unless she's right there when the chicken pox pop Or they're stricken with gnat bites and toe aches.) Did Edna St. Vincent Millay rise at dawn For a first-grade production called Snowflakes? Did Marianne Moore put her symbols aside To wipe Quaker Oats off the table? Excuse me, my husband would like a cold beer. I'll be back just as soon as I'm able.

The baby is sleeping, the beds have been made,
And I've mopped where the kitchen was muddy.
My husband the writer has finished the Times
And he's vanishing into his study,
Where no one would dare to disturb his deep thoughts
(Or the half-hour nap he requires).
I've gone to the cleaners and picked up dessert
And I even put air in the tires
Before sitting down at my second-hand Royal.
(He just bought a new Olivetti.)
Did Miss Amy Lowell find Patterns besmirched
With dribbles of Junior Spaghetti?
Does Phyllis McGinley refrain from her rhymes
Whenever her garden needs spraying?
Excuse me, the dishwasher's gone on the blink.

Maybe I'll switch to crocheting.



'The Writers' by Judith Viorst, in People and Other Aggravations, from <u>It's Hard to be Hip</u> (1973), Persephone Book No 12

The Writer by Rex Whistler, from The New Keepsake, 1931 p.144

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# The Oprah Winfrey Revolution

A longer version of this article about the Oprah Winfrey Book Club by D.T. Max first appeared in the <u>New York Times</u>, by whose kind permission it is reprinted, and then in <u>The Guardian</u>. Will Persephone Books be the next revolution?...

n average, thirteen million Americans watch Oprah's Book Club, the segment of 'The Oprah Winfrey Show' devoted to novels that is broadcast about once a month. With her book club, there is no organisation to join, and Winfrey does not sell or send her readers the books.

Book Club episodes begin with a short documentary about the author, typically followed by a discussion over a meal between Winfrey, the author and four or five viewers who have written in with their responses. They talk about what they thought of the book and – especially and extensively – its relevance to their own lives. Could they be friends with the main character? What did the book teach them about themselves? This is the real innovation that allowed Winfrey to turn novels into television. She focuses the discussion on the response from the viewers and herself.

The show receives as many as 10,000 letters each month from people eager to participate. By the time the segment appears, 500,000 viewers have read at least part of the novel. Nearly as many buy the book in the weeks that follow.

This approach has made Winfrey the most successful pitch person in the history of publishing. Since its debut in September 1996, Oprah's Book Club has been responsible for twenty-eight consecutive best-sellers. It has sold more than

twenty million books and made many of its authors millionaires. It has earned publishers roughly \$175 million in revenue. (Winfrey and her show do not profit from the books' success.)

More than a marketing phenomenon, Oprah's Book Club is a vast experiment in linked literary imagination and social engineering. Toni Morrison calls it 'a revolution' because Winfrey's rapport with the camera cuts across class and race. When Winfrey says, 'Reading changed my life,' millions who see where she has got to listen to her. Women from the inner city to the suburbs rush out each month to buy Oprah's pick.

Winfrey's success been keenly observed by New York publishers, who say that it has influenced what fiction they acquire and promote. And although Winfrey has enriched them, her declared goal is grander: 'To get America reading again.' Her agenda extends beyond increasing literacy. She wants to expose people to books that matter, books that in some way touch the self. 'The reason I love books,' Winfrey keeps telling her audience, 'is because they teach us something about ourselves.'

Winfrey's canon does not conform to New York's literary fashions; she draws from a separate sense of what an important book is. For one thing, the narratives she has chosen are overwhelmingly by women – twenty-two out of twenty-eight. In eight

novels young women are abused, raped or murdered. A dozen men commit adultery or act abusively toward their families. Women nurture, men threaten. The book club includes no novels of soldiers in war or old men dealing with mortality. Only five novels have male protagonists. The implication is this: we are women, and we are going to read about women.

'Secrets of a Small Town' would be the correct headline for many of the books: out of twenty-eight Winfrey has now chosen, only five take place in a city, and the only protagonist who spends considerable time at an office job is Ria in Maeve Binchy's Tara Road. (She leaves shortly after marrying.)



'Spring' 1926 from <u>The Wood Engravings of Tirzah Ravilious</u>, London, 1987

Winfrey's fictional

landscape is one in which people are loving, hating and thinking – but, unlike modern women, almost never working. Winfrey's choices tend to draw their themes from real life, but their locales and lifestyles come from our fantasies. In most parts of America, 'Oprah' bridges the gap between the afternoon soap operas and the early local news. The novels Winfrey chooses do much the same.

The club seems to be composed of two kinds of novels. One is an optimistic, meliorist novel, the sort embodied in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The other is less sanguine about our shared humanity, more weighed down by race, like Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. It would be too simple to say that in the first Winfrey finds her hope and in the second her reality, but it is true that

these are two of her favourite books.

The story of what happened with the book club's first selection, The Deep End of the Ocean by Jacquelyn Mitchard. shows how surprised publishers were by Winfrey's power. The book was a page-turner about a woman whose child is kidnapped and turns up living with a neighbour. Viking printed 68,000 copies in

June 1996. Three months later Winfrey started the book club. After her producers contacted Viking, they printed 100,000 more copies, a blasé response, considering that 'Oprah' appearances had given enormous boosts to non-fiction authors like Deepak Chopra and John Gray. But fiction was different, everyone assumed. Viking ended up fulfilling 750,000 new orders. And *The Deep End of the Ocean* would go on to have 4 million copies in print.

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Subsequent publications have been smoother. Publishers have learned how to print in one week a million copies of a book with a tiny initial print run. *Mother of Pearl*, by Melinda Haynes, went instantly

from 10,000 in print to 760,000. White Oleander jumped from 25,000 to one million. Vinegar Hill, by A. Manette Ansay, jumped from 18,000 copies to 875,000.

So how does Winfrey choose her books? Winfrey emphasises on television that she personally loves every selection. Without that certainty in the audience's mind, the show would lose its power.

Winfrey's system has levelled previous distinctions between, say, Edwidge Danticat, a delicate literary writer whose books had sold modestly, and Maeve Binchy, a

commercial writer whose perky *Tara Road* was already on the best-seller list when Winfrey chose it. New York's publishers treat one as art and the other as commerce; one gets prestige, the other money. But within the world of Oprah, they are equals.

Should anybody's taste be as influential as Winfrey's has become? 'As an industry we are both in awe of and uncomfortable with someone holding so much power,' an executive at a large publishing company

a delicate literary A bestselling writer herself, author of <u>The Home-Maker</u>, Persephone writer whose books had sold modestly,

A bestselling writer herself, author of <u>The Home-Maker</u>, Persephone Book No 7, Dorothy Canfield Fisher also helped to create bestsellers through her years of selecting novels for The Book-of-the-Month-Club, a forerunner to The Oprah Winfrey Book Club.

said, insisting on anonymity. No one could name another industry that delegates the creation of so many of its new stars to a single personality.

Of course, as many editors reminded me, Winfrey didn't invent the kind of fiction she promotes - a genre Marty Asher. the editor-in-chief of Vintage Books, calls 'accessible literary fiction'. Publishers have been selling it for fifteen with vears success, especially since the breakthrough of The Color Purple. But the scale of Winfrey's ability to reach readers unprecedented. Indeed. there something more than a

little mystifying about publishers' inability to find some way to replicate Winfrey's magic touch. The phrase I kept hearing about Winfrey was that she was like a 'bolt of lightning'. Nobody knew how to catch it in a bottle. The book industry has failed to do what Winfrey has done so easily: find new readers.

# Jane Eyre by Nicci Gerrard

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At a literary event one evening last year Julia Blackburn, Carol Shields and Nicci Gerrard talked about their favourite books of the millennium, which were The Book of Margery <u>Kempe</u>, <u>Emma</u> and <u>Iane Eyre</u>. Nicci Gerrard has allowed us to reproduce her notes.

E very time that I read Jane Eyre - and I must have read it ten, twenty times - I am shocked. It is a novel that is hiding in plain view. A smuggled bomb. Somehow, we think of this book as a solid, deep-grained, sturdy, morally-steady, modest, plainspeaking classic; the grave and profound contrast to her sister's wild and romantic Wuthering Heights; the perfect novel for teenage girls to read. Actually it is startlingly romantic, gothic, lush, angry, passionate, erotic, neurotic, exploding with feelings of lust, loneliness and despair.

Nabokov once said there was no such thing as reading, only re-reading. With *Iane Evre*, re-reading always turns up new revelations, for it contains all our fantasies. I read it as a girl, and was seduced by the orphan fantasy - how plain, poor, unloved, bullied and desolate Jane Evre found herself a home and rose above those who had tormented her.

I read it later for the romance - the burning love between her and Mr Rochester. And then. in my twenties, I also discovered its extraordinary rage against oppression and coldness of the soul, for its heartfelt, exploding plea for the rights of

women to have full lives. And learnt the way it hardly holds together as a novel - it keeps threatening to flood its banks; the mad woman in the attic continually rupturing the book. That wild, mocking laugh. God is regularly invoked, but God's love is a dim force compared to the wild passions of Iane Eyre and Mr Rochester. And I read it always, as well, just for the sheer narrative pleasure of it, the tale of finding and losing and once more finding love.

Jane Eyre is a feminist narrative (no wonder reviewers in 1847 praised it when they thought it was by Currer Bell, then loathed it as soon as they discovered it was by Charlotte; they couldn't deal with the mad, bloated alter ego in the roof, or the maimed and blinded and tamed Mr Rochester, or with the outspoken female desire). It is a fairy tale (but Bluebeard as well as Cinderella); it is Rebecca and The Sound of Music and Mills and Boon. It

> the televised version of Pride and Prejudice (Darcy plunging into water in his clothes is pure Jane Eyre and Iane Austen would have hated it). It is wild. I'm always shocked by how wild it is. Always delighted

#### Bilberry Pies

Haworth, Yorkshire, 1867

These pies we may be sure were enjoyed by the Brontë Sisters, at Haworth Parsonage.

INGREDIENTS: Bilberries 11 pints; castor sugar 4 oz.; baked apples 2; pastry; white of egg. Cream if obtainable.

METHOD

- 1. Mix the bilberries with 2 or 3 oz. of
- sugar.

  2. Bake the apples in the usual manner scrape out the pulp, sweeten it, and mix it with the bilberries.

  3. Grease a pie-plate, and sheet it with short or pulf pastry.

  4. Fill it with the bilberry mixture; do
- not on any account add a drop of
- not on any account add a drop of water.

  5. Cover it with a thin sheet of pastry.

  6. Brush with white of egg, dust this with castor sugar; or leave plain; bake (in quick oven at first to cook the pastry and afterwards in a slower one to cook the fruit).
- N.B.—All fresh fruit pies, gooseberries, blackberries, raspberries and red currants, strawberries and raspberries, apple, peach, etc., can be made in this way.

from Good Things in England, Persephone Book No 10

by its anger and desire.

# Julian Grenfell

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From a review of Nicholas Mosley's book by Philip Toynbee, The Observer April 1976.

I uch of this book is about Julian's mother, the famous/notorious Ettie Desborough and her circle of friends. These were that rich, well-born circle of late Victorians and Edwardians who come to be known as 'the Souls'; figures like Arthur Balfour, George Wyndham, George Curzon and Margot Asquith who prided themselves on being of the great world but also in some sense aloof from it. Except for Balfour they were by no means the intellectuals they took themselves for; but they were witty, sharp, worldly, malicious.

**Nicholas** Mosley describes them with compassionate but unsparing criticism which brings them alive in all their pathos and in nearly all their awfulness. Lady Desborough herself emerges as a monstre sacré whose monstrousness gradually overwhelms the sacred element as the story of mother and son emerges in its full horror. She was the Bad Mother of nightmare and myth: vain and selfish. notoriously acquisitive of lovers; determined that her sons should not only love her more than they could ever love anyone else but also that they should accept all her own values and social predilections. She was also, of course, a fabulous charmer, who could weave her spells not only over her men and women friends but also, and to dire effect, over her own children.

By the time he was half-way through Eton, Julian's rebellion was tentatively underway. Although his background had saddled him with with an appalling arrogance, it is also true that he violently renounced his mother's empty and increasingly pitiful world of

ostensible audacity but deep timidity.

Julian Grenfell was killed in May 1915, before the regimented, production-line horror of that war had had time to be fully developed. A regular officer in a (dismounted) cavalry regiment, he enjoyed a good deal of the independence he craved, and he won his DSO for the solitary stalking and killing of German snipers. Mosley is very good at explaining why Grenfell loved war so much; and why this chronically morose and nerve-ridden man fully accepted that war involved being killed as well as killing. It is no good tut-tutting at the Happy Warrior sentiments of 'Into Battle': for me this remains one of the best English poems about the joys of fighting...

Nicholas Mosley has penetrated a great mass of material, some of it shamelessly doctored by Lady Desborough to suggest that no amount of tiffs could mar the pure love of her eldest son for his mother. If he did continue to love her right up to his death it must have been a desperate and spellbound love indeed. After reading this book it is hard not to feel that the hatred went much deeper. By raising such fundamental issues as these the author has given his subject a pathos and a grandeur which should do much to overshadow...the legend...of the immolated poet; a young man who came second only to Rupert Brooke in the pantheon of the nobly dead who had joyfully 'given' their lives in the Great War.

### Good Evening, Mrs Craven

This review by Ruth Gorb appeared in the Ham & High on 17 December last year.

his collection comes as a revelation. If Mollie Panter-Downes is known at all it is as the author of an excellent novel, *One Fine Day*, and as a prolific correspondent for the *New Yorker*. She should, we now realise, be celebrated first and foremost for her short stories.

They are small jewels, ineffably English but with the wit and heart-break of Dorothy Parker. Like Jane Austen and Barbara Pym she paints on a tiny canvas, but unlike them she uncovers the raw pain beneath the breeding and good manners of a small section of society.

There was a great deal of pain to be found in the time that these stories

span. The years 1939-44 were bleak, cold and lonely for the women left behind when their men went to war. It was a time of air-raid shelters and chilblains, digging for victory and making do, evacuees and gas masks. Above all it was a time for British pluck.

In these stories women pedal to Red Cross meetings on their bicycles, struggle to keep up draughty old houses with no help, wait for letters. What we have here is a picture of the domestic side of war, of women who can only wait, turn on the radio, and sit down 'like all the other anxious women to knit and listen.'

Critics will say that all the main characters are, like their creator, upper middle-class. Absolutely true and in view of the turmoil that was going on in the world outside, the fact that there were no more servants does not seem to our eyes cataclysmic. But it did trigger a very real social revolution.

Some of the families. abandoned by their domestic staff, struggled to keep up standards. Others. such as the doughty old Mrs. Walsingham, opted sensibly for eating in the kitchen and the English middle-class way of life was never the same again.

Mollie Panter-Downes gives herself an alter ego in the form of Mrs.

Ramsay, a woman who takes a quizzical view of the Home Front. The humour of these four stories contrasts poignantly with the desolation in some of the others. The mistress, unlike the wife, has to worry and mourn in secret for her man. A middle-aged spinster finds herself alone again when the camaraderie of the air-raids is over. A young married woman, whose husband has been away for three years, loses control and hits her little dog and as she does it 'can hardly see him for the tears in her eyes and the dreadful empty feeling in her heart.' That story, written in 1944, is called, with chilling aptness, 'TheWaste of it All'.



#### Persephone Books Nos 1-12

Persephone Quarterly have read all our books! But for those who have not...

The effect of war on ordinary lives is a strong Persephone theme and our very first book was Cicely Hamilton's 1919 novel William - an Englishman, an 'extraordinary fiction classic' (New Statesman) about a young couple caught up in the First World War; Persephone Book No. 11 was Julian Grenfell: His life and the times of his death, the 1976 biography of the First World War poet by Nicholas Mosley. These two books make an extremely interesting pair, the working-class clerk and his suffragette wife confronted by the grim reality of Belgium in the first weeks of August 1914, contrasting with the life of a brilliant young man who seemed to find true happiness only in the horrors of war.

In both these books concepts of pacifism and aggression are continually in the authors' minds, but another theme common to both of them is mothers (Persephone herself was, after all, only rescued from the underworld because of her mother's pleas). We considered changing the title of *Julian Grenfell* to Ettie and Julian, since the stifling relationship between mother and son is such a strong thread in the book; the reason we did not (apart from Nicholas Mosley's understandable affection for the original title) was because of *An Interrupted Life*: once people have read that extraordinary book they always refer to it as 'Etty'.

In William - an Englishman Cicely Hamilton shows us, in one deft scene, how completely William was under the thumb of his mother - until she released him, through her death, into the world

of socialism and suffragettes and the love of his wife Griselda. But Ettie Grenfell might never have released Julian; nor did she have any interest in feminism. 'It was as if Ettie had gained enough confidence in her feminine power - and indeed amusement at the way in which men played their own games with power - to imagine that on this account she did not have to fight any battles' writes Nicholas Mosley in his Persephone Preface.

The imagery of battles runs through Few Eggs and No Oranges as well, since they were raging overhead and all around. Vere Hodgson was a unique observer of everyday life in Notting Hill during the Second World War and many have commented on her ability to record what she saw given the difficult circumstances in which she was living. One reason I think was that her job gave her easy access to a desk and a typewriter; another was that she lived alone, and therefore her diary became a lifeline; and a third was that she originally wrote for her relations and wanted to file her weekly letter.

Mollie Panter-Downes also filed a weekly letter during the war, in her case for readers of the New Yorker, and found time to write short stories. 'The revelation of 1999 for me,' said Felipe Fernandez-Armesto in The Independent, 'was boldly published, beautifully designed, dazzlingly written. The stories in Good Evening, Mrs Craven first appeared in the New Yorker in wartime. Mollie Panter-Downes is as profound as Katherine Mansfield, restrained as Jane Austen, sharp as Dorothy Parker.' And Angela Huth in the Daily Mail wrote that 'as a lover of short stories (these) are my especial find. Panter-Downes is marvellous

on the inner states of outwardly calm folk abiding by their admirably old-fashioned priorities.'

To read the diaries and letters of Etty Hillesum

is, unfortunately, to enter a completely different universe: 'The letters from Westerbork are frankly harrowing' commented Eva Figes in a lead review in The Guardian in December last year, quoting Etty's words. 'It is a complete madhouse here: we shall have to feel ashamed of it for three hundred years.' Yet the diaries and letters are uplifting because of the strength of Etty's serenity, her vision and her never-failing compassion humour. 'All that mattters now is to be kind to each other with all the goodness that is in us' she wrote at her desk in Amsterdam in the dark days of 1942. Of all our

back into print in this country. But Susan Glaspell's Fidelity is the novel we believe to be the greatest of those we have published so far.

books, Etty Hillesum's

An Interrupted Life is

the one that we are

We are convinced that it will come to be seen as a great American classic, and that it will be made into a film. Everyone who has read it has lent the book to their friends or bought more copies and many have written appreciative letters to us; the most recent letter from a reader said that she thinks 'it is the sort of book which moves one to new positions. She has more of an understanding of men than Edith Wharton and it is a far better book than Sinclair Lewis's Main Street.'

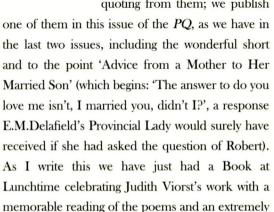
The other great American novel we have

reprinted is The Home-Maker. Alas, this is the title that has so far sold fewest copies of all our books (yet one of them had to!). The reason is simple: not many English readers have heard of Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Yet The Home-Maker has an extremely modern theme. It is about a husband and wife who swop roles and is also about children who are unhappy, but flourish when looked after by their father. All this in 1924. Anyone who has a

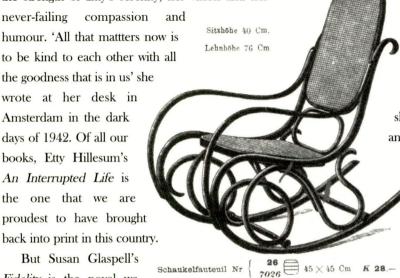
> partner who stays at home with children should read this wonderful book.

A third American book that is focused on family life was defined in the Evening Standard as being about 'the shortfall between romantic dreams and married reality' - It's Hard to

be Hip Over Thirty and Other **Tragedies** of Married Life by Judith Viorst. First published in the early 1970s, it is impossible to convey the qualities of these funny, compassionate, realistic, wry poems without quoting from them; we publish



interesting talk about 1960s New York life.



Thonet Bentwood rocking-chair 1904

Mothers seem to have been mentioned so often already in this piece that readers may be beginning to wonder if not being one rules them out as Persephone readers. But we all have mothers; or we have or have had family life; and we are all aware that our happiness or otherwise is dependent on our early family relationships. That is why one critic made such a pertinent observation about Someone at a Distance when she said that the first sentence reads like George Eliot. For it is making a deeply moral point that might have been made in Middlemarch, which is that the central tragedy of the book, the destruction of a family, will come about because of the mother's egoism: 'Widowed, in the house her husband had built with day and night nurseries and a music-room, as if the children would stay there for ever, instead of marrying and going off at the earliest possible moment, old Mrs North yielded one day to a longfelt desire to provide herself with company.' The coming tragedy is implicit in this superb sentence: it is because, spoilt by her husband, Mrs North resentfully feels that now she 'didn't come first with anybody' that disaster comes about for her children. Inevitably there will be some readers who think Someone at a Distance is just the story of a suburban husband's adultery. But it has a moral acuteness rarely matched in twentieth century fiction: it is morally 'engaged', as we used to say at Cambridge in the days of Leavis.

In contrast, Monica Dickens's *Mariana* has a lightness of touch and humour and above all a readability almost unmatched among our books. 'Written during the war, but as fresh and funny now as then' (*The Spectator*), it is the book we recommend for teenage readers, bracketing it with *Dusty Answer* and *Cold Comfort Farm* as three unmissables for that age group; and it is surely no

coincidence that these books' first-time authors were all in their twenties. *Mariana* is also ideal for the bed-bound or the vulnerable; there is something hugely enjoyable about it, and sometimes it is quite a relief, after all, not to have to be morally engaged.

Another book which can be read on one level as simply a relatively light (if scary) book is The Victorian Chaise-longue; but on another it is a powerful feminist statement about being trapped. Melanie, in the 1950s, is a young woman whose husband and doctor, having smothered her with kindness, render her child-like; she is then trapped in the 1860s and rendered equally helpless by her bullying sister. Ensnared first by male domination and then by Victorian morality, she, as Milly, cannot escape from the grip of either. The January 2000 issue of House and Garden, praising the book for being 'beautifully reprinted', commented: 'It is the skilful assimilation of 19th and 20th century literary conventions that makes the novel so particularly horrifying - its distillation of Victorian Gothic horror within the stricter verisimilitude of the modern novel.'

Food of the Victorian period features in our cookery book, *Good Things in England*, and many of the recipes would have been familiar to the Brontë sisters. On Page 8 of this issue we reprint the recipe for bilberry pies they are thought to have eaten at Haworth. The recipe inspired the *New Statesman* to adapt it for its readers ('drain a 450g jar of Polish bilberries...serve with cream to keep out the wuthering cold.') 'Like all classic culinary works, *Good Things* is a pleasure to read,' observed the *Sunday Telegraph*. We were very pleased when a speaker on The Food Programme chose it as his 'number one British cookery book.'

# The Rainy Day, the Good Mother, and the Brown Suit

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Dorothy Canfield-Fisher wrote this story in the 1930s and it was published in <u>Fables for Parents</u> in 1938. It reveals her intense interest in methods of bringing up children and especially in being <u>A Montessori Mother</u>, the title of one of her books. Freddy is of course Steven in <u>The Home-Maker</u> (which we published last autumn) but with a sensitive, thoughtful mother.

nd yet she had done exactly what the books on child training assured mothers would ward off trouble on a stormy day. She had copied off the list of raw materials recommended by the author of 'The Happy Child Is the Active Child': coloured paper, blunt scissors, paste, pencils, crayons, plasticine - she had bought them all, well ahead of time, and had brought them out this morning after breakfast, when the rain settled down with that all-day pour. But, unlike the children in the books, Caroline and Freddy and little Priscilla had not received these treasures open-mouthed with pleasure, nor had they quietly and happily exercised their creative instinct, leaving their mother free to get on with her work. Perhaps her children hadn't as much of that instinct as other people's. At least, after a little listless fingering of coloured paper Freddy turned away. 'Say, Mother, I want to put on my brown suit,' he said. Little did she dream then what the brown suit was to cost her. She answered casually, piling up the breakfast dishes, 'I washed that suit vesterday, Freddy, and the rain came. So it's not dry yet.'

He trotted back and forth after her as she stepped to and fro with the slightly nervous haste of a competent woman who has planned a busy morning. 'But, Mother,' he persisted, 'I want to put it on. I want to.' He raised his voice, 'Mother, I want to put my brown suit on.'

From the pantry where she had just discovered that the cream she had planned to use for the dessert was soured, she answered him with some asperity, 'I told you it isn't dry yet!' But she reminded herself of the excellent rule, 'Always make children understand the reasons for your refusals,' and added, 'It's hanging on the line on the side porch. Look out there, dear. You can see for yourself how wet it is.'

He did as she bade him, and stood staring out, leaning his forehead on the glass.

Yet a little later as she stood before the telephone, grocery list in hand, he tugged at her skirt and as Central asked, 'What number, please?' he said with plaintive obstinacy, 'Mother, I do want to put on my brown suit.'

She said with considerable warmth, 'Somerset three six one. For heaven's sake, Freddy, that suit is WET. Is this Perkins and Larsen? How *could* you put it on! What price are your grapefruit today? Freddy, let go of my skirt. Grapefruit, I said. No, no – G for glory, r for run – '

But when she turned away from her struggle

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with the clerk, Freddy plucked at her hand and whimpered in the nasal fretting tone she had sworn (before she had children) no child of hers should ever use, 'Mother, I waa-a-nt to pu-u-t my brown-'

'Don't whine,' she told him with a ferocity so swift and savage that he recoiled and was silent. She

thought remorsefully, 'Oh, dear, to scold is just as bad as to whine.'

Going back into the pantry she recalled with resentment that the psychologists of family life say the moods of children are but the reflections of moods of the mother. She did not believe a word of it. 'Did I start this?' she asked herself unanswerably, and. 'How can anybody help being irritated when they're so perfectly unreasonable!'

But she was really a very good mother. She remembered that the basis of child-rearing is to understand each child at all times, and went resolutely back

into the other room, determined to understand Freddy, if it were her last act. Disconcertingly, it was not Freddy, but Priscilla who ran to take her hand, who said pleadingly, timidly, as if appealing from the cruel decree of a tyrant, 'Mummy, Fred does so want to have you let him wear his brown

suit this morning!' The mother contained herself, collected the children – three-year-old Priscilla, five-year-old Fred, six-and-a-half-year-old Caroline – led them to the window and said, 'Now just look at that suit! How could I let Freddy wear anything that's as wet as sop?'

Woodcut by Gwen Raverat from Mountains and Molehills by Frances Cornford, Cambridge University Press, 1935, p4.

At least that was what she thought she said. What the children distinctly heard was, 'You're in the wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong. And I am right, right, right, as I always am. There's no use your trying to get around that!'

They stared gloomily out at this idea rather than at the wet clothes. Their mother went on, 'What in the world does Fred want to wear his brown suit for, anyhow? What's the matter with the suit he's got on?'

What the children heard was, 'No matter what Freddy said his reason was, I'd soon show you it was all foolishness.' They

attempted no answer, shaken as they were by wave after invisible wave of her impatience to be done with them and at something else. Indeed she was impatient. Why not, with her morning work all waiting to be done. She held her children for a moment with the bullying eye of a drill-sergeant, and then said, challengingly, 'Well-?' She meant, and they knew she meant, 'I hope you realise that I have you beaten.'

Something in Fred – it was something rather fine – exploded with a crash. His round face grew grim and black. He looked savagely at his mother, thrust out his lower jaw and, keeping his eyes ragingly on hers, kicked a footstool, viciously, as if he were kicking her.

'Fred-*dy*,' she said in a voice meant to cow him. But he was not cowed. He kicked again with all his might, looking at his mother and hating her.

And then - he was only a little boy - he broke. His hard defiant face crumpled up into despair. He crooked his arm to hide his suffering from his mother - from his mother! - and turned away to lean against the wall in the silent, dry, inexplicable misery which often ended what his mother called 'Fred's tantrums'. Little Priscilla began a whimpering. Caroline put her hands up to her face and hung her head.

Their mother thought, her nerves taut with exasperation, 'I'd just like to see one of those child-specialists manage *my* children on a rainy day! They'd find out a thing or two!' But she loved her children. She loved them dearly. With her next breath she was ashamed of being angry with them. The tears came to her eyes and an aching lump into her throat. Bewildered, dismayed, she asked herself, in the purest surprise, 'Why, how did we get into this dreadful state? What can the trouble be?'

She went back into the pantry, took a long breath, took a drink of water, tried to relax her muscles, cast her mind back to the book about what to do on a rainy day. But she could recall nothing else in it but that appeal to the creative instinct. She had tried that, and it had failed.

She heard the front door open. The voice of a

young cousin, no special favourite of hers - cried, 'Ye gods and little fishes, what weather!' He slammed the door behind him. Although he was nineteen, he still slammed doors as if he were twelve. He had come as he sometimes did when it rained, to wait in the living-room for the bus that took him to college. One of its stopping places was their corner.

Priscilla, the literal, asked, 'What does "gods and little fishes" mean?'

'Mean?' said the freshman, laughing and flinging his books and his rain-coat down on the floor. What do you mean, mean? You mean too much, Prissy. What does this mean?' As she began to wash the dishes the mother could see that he had flung his heels in the air and was walking on his hands. 'He's too old for such foolishness,' she thought severely. And sure enough, out of the pockets of his adult suit of clothes, now upside down, little-boy junk rattled down around his hands. The children squealed and made a rush towards the bits of string, dirty handkerchiefs, knives, fish-hooks, nails, pieces of cork, screws and pencils. 'No you don't!' said he, returning his feet to the floor with a bang. 'Everything there is a part of an important enterprise.'

'What's a "portant enter-" began Priscilla.

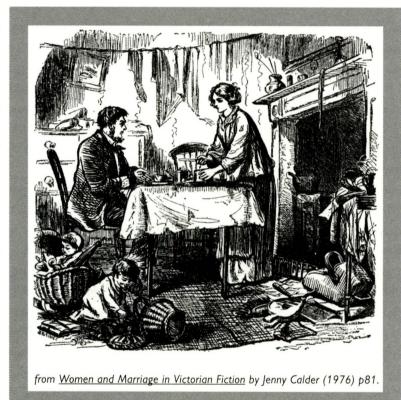
'Whatever I do,' he told her coolly, 'were it only to make a mousetrap. If *I* made mousetraps there'd be a four-strip concrete road to my door in a week's time, you bet. No mousetrap of mine would ever have let out Uncle Peter's mouse, believe me.'

'What? Who? What's Uncle Peter's mouse?' clamoured the children.

'Oh, surely you know that story. No child of our family gets brung up without hearing that one. No? Well, one morning when Uncle Peter and **>>>∞** 

Aunt Molly came down to breakfast - Priscilla, do *not* ask who they were and where they lived, it's no matter - they found a mouse in their trap. It was the kind of trap that catches the mouse alive, so they got the cat, and they all went out on the porch to open the trap and let the cat catch the mouse. Priscilla, do *not* say this was horrid of them, it was,

and I can't help it, but that was the way it happened and it was so long ago probably they didn't know any better. So there they all were' he illustrated how tensely they stood, stooping over an imaginary trap - 'the two children and Uncle Peter and Aunt Molly. And



the cat. She was scrooched right close in front of the cage' - he quivered and crouched with such vivacity of acting that the children began to laugh - 'while Unde Peter s-l-o-w-l-y, s-l-o-w-l-y lifted the door of the trap till it was open enough for the mouse to get out.' He drew a long breath and made a dramatic pause. The children gazed at him, mouths open, eyes unwinking. 'And then - !' he sprang into the air, 'the cat jumped!' He clutched at Fred. 'Uncle Peter hollered!' He ran to Caroline

and seized her arm. 'The children yelled bloody murder!' He flung the children to right and left. 'Aunt Molly shrieked!' He sank back on the floor. 'But the mouse was gone!'

He gazed with enormous solemnity at his spellbound listeners. 'The cat was prowling around, sniffing and lashing her tail' - he sniffed the air and

> getting up on his hands and knees lashed an imaginary tail - 'but there - was no mouse.'

He sat crosslegged and earnest and went on, 'Well, Aunt Molly was terribly afraid of mice, and she always had the idea that all a mouse wanted to do was to run up folks' clothes, so she was sure the

mouse had done that to one of them. So she took one child and then the other, shook them till their teeth nearly dropped out' - he shot out a long arm and seized Priscilla, Caroline, and Freddy one after the other, shaking them hard and setting them into giggling fits - 'and put first one and then the other inside the house and shut the door, quick! Then she shook herself hard. And went into the house and shut the door. Then Uncle Peter shook himself hard. And went in quick and shut the door. And

then they all had breakfast, wondering all the while about where that mouse could have gone to. And after they'd finished breakfast, Uncle Peter stood up to go to the office and took hold of the lower edge of his vest to pull it down' - he seized the lower edge of an imaginary vest vigorously and stood appalled, a frantic expression of horror on his face - 'and there was the mouse!' The children shrieked. 'It had been right under the edge of his vest and when he grabbed the vest he put his hand right around it, and when he took his hand away the mouse was in it, squirming.' He showed them how it squirmed, and then, speeding up to expresstrain speed, finished the story all in one breath, 'And he was so rattled he flung it right away without looking to see where, and it went spang into Aunt Molly's face and she fainted dead away - and the mouse beat it so quick they never did see it again.'

He grinned down at the children, literally rolling on the floor, as pleased with the story as they. 'Say, kids, what-d'you-say we act it out? Let's. Who'll be what? I'll be Uncle Peter. Priscilla, you be one of the children. Caroline, you be Aunt Molly – that's a swell part! You must yell your head off when I throw the mouse in your face. Fred, you be –'

'I'll be the cat,' said Fred, scrambling to his feet.

So they acted out the little drama, throwing themselves passionately into their roles, Caroline so magnificent with her scream and faint at the end that Priscilla said, 'Oh, *I* want to be Aunt Molly.'

So they did it over again, Priscilla screeching as though she were being flayed alive, and fainting with fat arms and legs outstretched.

'I'd kind o' like to be Uncle Peter,' said Fred.

'Okay by me,' said the student. 'I'll be the cat.'

By the time they had finished it again they were out of breath, what with screaming and running and laughing and acting, and sank down together on the floor. Little by little their laughter subsided to a peaceful silence. Freddy sprawled half over the knobby knees of the tall boy, Priscilla was tucked away under his arm, Caroline leaned against him. From the pantry where, unheeded, the mother washed the dishes, she thought jealously, 'What do they see in him? That story is nothing but nonsense.' And then – she was really an intelligent person – it came over her, 'Why, that is just what they like in it.'

Out of the silence, almost as though she were thinking aloud, little Priscilla murmured, 'Freddy was bad this morning.' There was compassion in her tone.

'What was eating him?' asked the student, not particularly interested.

'He wanted to wear his brown suit. And it was wet, and he couldn't. So he kicked the footstool and was bad.'

'What's the point about the brown suit, old man?'

The question was put in a matter-of-fact tone of comradely interest. But even so Fred hesitated, opened his mouth, shut it, said nothing.

It was Caroline who explained, 'It's got a holster pocket at the back where he can carry his pretend pistol.'

The mother in the pantry, astounded, remorseful, reproachful, cried out to herself, 'Oh, why didn't he tell me that!' But she knew very well why he had not. She had plenty of brains.

'Oh, I see,' said the student. 'But why don't you sew a holster pocket on the pants you've got on, boy? On all your pants. It's nothing to sew on pockets. You girls, too. You might as well have holster pockets. When I was your age I had sewed on dozens of pockets.' He took a long breath, and began to rattle off nonsense with an intensely

serious face and machine-gun speed, 'My goodness, by the time I was fourteen I had sewed on five hundred and thirty-four pockets, and one small watch-pocket but I don't count that one. Didn't you ever hear how I put myself through college sewing on pockets? And when I was graduated, the President of Pocket Sewing Union of America sent for me, and -'

'But you've only just got in to college,' Priscilla reminded him earnestly.

(In the pantry, her mother thought, with a stab of self-knowledge, 'Why, is that *me*? Was I being literal, like that, about rainy-day occupations?')

'Priscilla,' said the college student, sternly, 'don't you know what happens to children who say "go-up-bald-head" to their elders - oh, but -' He clutched his tousled hair, and said, imitating Priscilla's serious little voice, 'Oh, but I'm not bald yet, am I?'

A horn sounded in the street. He sprang up, tumbling the children roughly from him, snatched his books. 'There's my bus.' The door slammed.

The children came running to find their mother. 'Oh, Mother, Mother, can we have some cloth to make pockets out of?'

She was ready for them. 'I've got lots of it that'll be just right,' she said, telling herself wryly, 'I can get an idea all right if somebody'll push it half way down my throat.'

But for the rest of the morning, as the children sat happily exercising their creative instinct by sewing on queer pockets in queer places on their clothes, she was thinking with sorrow, 'It's not fair. That great lout of a boy without a care in the world takes their fancy with his nonsense, and they turn their backs on me entirely. I represent only food and care – and refusals. I work my head off for them - and the first stranger appeals to them more.'

Yet after lunch they put their three heads together and whispered and giggled, and 'had a secret'. Then, Caroline at their head, they trotted over to the sofa where their mother had dropped down to rest. 'Mother,' said Caroline in her little-girl bird-voice, 'wouldn't *you* like to play Uncle-Peter-and-Aunt-Molly-and-the-mouse? You didn't have a single chance to this morning – not once – you were working so.' They looked at her with fond shining eyes of sympathy. 'Come on, Mother! You'll love it!' they encouraged her.

A lump came into her throat again - a good lump this time. She swallowed. 'Oh, thanks, children. I know I'd like to. What part are you going to have me take?'

The secret came out then. They let Freddy tell her, for it had been his inspiration. He looked proudly at his mother and offered her his best. 'Ye gods and little fishes! We're going to let you be the *mouse*!' She clasped her hands. 'Oh, children!' she cried.

From their pride in having pleased her, a gust of love-madness blew across them, setting them to fall upon their mother like soft-pawed kittens wild with play, pushing her back on the pillows, hugging her, worrying her, rumpling her hair, kissing her ears, her nose, whatever they could reach.

But Priscilla was not sure they had been clear. She drew away. 'You don't have to get caught, you know,' she reassured her mother earnestly. 'The mouse wasn't caught - never!'

Dorothy Canfield Fisher's The Home-Maker is Persephone Book No 7

#### Our June 2000 Books

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Persephone Book No 16 will be *Saplings* (1945), a novel for adults by Noel Streatfeild. Although her children's books, such as *Ballet Shoes*, and *White Boots*, have remained in print since they were first published, her dozen novels for older readers have been unjustly ignored.

Saplings shows children's lives destroyed not directly by the trauma of war but by the way adults ignore or fail to understand them. This is the theme of several of our novels. The individual at odds with his family or society, the 'crossed wires' between lovers - these are the staples of literature; what is less usual is to find novels for 'grown-ups' about misunderstood children. The Home-Maker is one (cf. the story in this issue), Someone at a Distance another (although Ellen does the very best she can). And this month we publish Consequences and Farewell Leicester Square, both novels about children betrayed by their rigid upbringing: 'the Clare axiom, as that of thousands of their class and generation, was that parents by Divine Right knew more than their children could ever hope to learn', while Alec in Farewell hears his future wife talk to her father with 'a disrespect positively staggering to the listening Alec, who had never before heard a father addressed as an equal.'

In *Saplings* the children are treated lovingly but not as equals. Without the advent of war they might have been relatively undamaged but, as Dr Jeremy Holmes writes in his Afterword, Noel Streatfeild 'tracks in miserable detail the disintegration and devastation which war brought to tens of thousands of such families.'

The second novel we publish in June is **Every Eve** (1956) by Isobel English, one of only four books by a writer who numbered among her friends Ivy Compton-Burnett, Stevie Smith and Olivia Manning and who might have been as well-known as them but for her inhibiting meticulousness. Through 'flashbacks on a trip to Ibiza,' wrote Philip Oakes in the Evening Standard upon the book's first publication, 'Hatty - now happily married after a childhood made lonely by a squinting eve - sees her life in review and reaches a new perspective by the end of the journey. Precise writing, a brisk wit and a total avoidance of cliché distinguish Miss English's second novel. Agreeably short, it says twice as much in half the usual space.' When Dame Muriel Spark heard that Every Eye was to be reprinted by us, she wrote to Neville Braybrooke that 'the novels of Isobel English were one of the great pleasures of my youth and their re-issue will certainly bring joy to my old age. She is an exquisite writer; her humour is subtle and her thoughts moving.'

Our third June book is our first 'new' i.e. newly-written book. It is *Sitting in the Garden*: A History of Garden Furniture by Philippa Lewis, which describes what people sat on in the garden from medieval times to the twentieth century and has illustrations from sources such as eighteenth-century pattern books, Victorian catalogues, old advertisements and engravings. It shows us thyme-scented turf seats, chinoiserie temples, cast-iron benches, deck-chairs and hammocks (as illustrated opposite). Contemporary fiction quotations are interspersed with the informative and amusing text.

#### Plus ça change

I mogen, along with many others, thought and hoped that 1900 would be a new century. It was not a new century. There was quite a case for its being so. When you turned twelve, you began your thirteenth year. When you had counted up to 100, you had completed that hundred and were good for the next. It all depended on whether you numbered

the completion of a year from the first day when you began saving 1900, or not till last day. its when you stopped saying it. The Astronomer Royal adjudicated that it was on its last day, and that they had, in fact, said 1900 prematurely,

THE "USONA" HAMMOCK STAND AND AWNING.

saying it before the last second of December the 31st. He may have been right. He probably was right. But the disappointment of the young, to whom a year is very long, its end hidden in mists, like mountain tops which you perhaps shall never reach, the disappointment of the young at the opening of the year 1900 was very great.

'At all events,' said Imogen, 'we can write 1900. We can say "It's 1900." But what one could not say was, 'I remember last century, going to the seaside for the holidays....' 'Last century, bicycles and steam engines came in' or 'We, of the twentieth century.' That would have to wait.

The funny thing was that you could not, however hard you thought, lay your finger on the moment when the new century would be born. Imogen used to try, lying in bed before she went to sleep. One

> second you said, 'We of the nineteenth century'; the next second you said, 'We of the twentieth tury.' But there be moment in between, when it neither: was surely there must. A queer little isolated point of time, with no magnitude, but only

position ...The same point must be between one day and the next, one hour and the next...all points in time were such points ... but you could never find them ... always you either looked forward or looked back ... you said 'Now – now – now,' trying to catch now, but you never could ... and such vain communings with time lead one drowsily into sleep.

From Rose Macaulay's Told by an Idiot (1923)

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# Eighteen Months in Clerkenwell

Before we opened Persephone Books our Clerkenwell basement had recently been home to 'Pleatrite', a small factory where bales of material were turned into pleated fabric in three huge steaming machines and finished on long trestle tables. People worked there in rather dank and gloomy conditions; even the three large windows looking out on the basement area were blocked up. We changed everything with a lot of white paint, 1000 square feet of Carpet World's best grey berber, schoolroom radiators (there was no heating before), six large tables, bentwood chairs and two Apple Macs. But we do use Pleatrite's cream-coloured enamel teapot.

Now the day-by-day running of a small publishing company happens there, but instead of having separate departments for invoicing, editorial, sales, marketing and so on we do everything in our one large room. We also act as our own distributor: 1500 books (500 of each of three titles) are regularly delivered by our printer, Biddles, to 28 Great Sutton Street, and from there the books are sent out to you, usually on the day we receive the order.

This happens in a Clerkenwell which is changing week by week, combining the old and the new in the way that Persephone Books tries to combine resuscitated old books with an adventurous new format, old-fashioned meticulousness with modern speediness (our books have always been lastminute).

In Clerkenwell long-established clockmenders (those that remain) sit next to upstart repro houses,

bookbinders next to internet companies, the Italian café on the corner next to the glass and chrome Benugo's, bacon sandwiches on white toast next to goat's cheese on ciabatta, the £35-a-night hotel for Smithfield's lorry drivers next to the wonderful Ruffle and Hook (full of linen and polished pebbles and dried artichoke heads in galvanised buckets). Even the floor above is no longer an office but will soon re-open as a navy blue and sculptured-aluminium art gallery.

But for locals, including us, the changes are too rapid. As the *Evening Standard* observed: 'For centuries Clerkenwell was a gritty, inbetween land peopled by craftsmen and radicals, meat porters and vagabonds...Somehow it remained on a limb, an untouched desert of warehouses, workshops, cheap offices and Peabody buildings...Then change came with a speed which left the locals blinking with disbelief and the estate agents pinching themselves with pleasure.... Now, where Wat Tyler camped during the Peasants' Revolt and Lenin edited an underground newspaper, the craftsmen of Clerkenwell are under threat.'

When, on sunny days, we regret our underground basement, we remind ourselves that the Hogarth Press was in one, not far away in Bloomsbury, and that Virginia Woolf herself packed up books there. We are pleased to have our basement area, with its box plant, its windowboxes and its wicker chair. And each day as we come to work we look at St Paul's looming up to the south and think of people like Pepys and John Betjeman who walked here. And we feel very much part of Clerkenwell.

#### Our March 2000 Fabrics

ur endpapers this quarter are in muted yet beautiful colours, suitable for books which, although they have many moments of humour, have especially strong and thought-provoking themes stultifying Victorian ritual, anti-Semitism, the constraints of 1940s life.

The fabric for Consequences (1919) by E.M. Delafield is a Silver Studio block-printed cotton furn-

ishing fabric which is typical of Art Nouveau in its use vegetable motifs (roots, buds and seedpods) rather than flowers. 'Thistle' was sold as a Liberty's Art Fabric in 1896, the year the heroine of the book is nineteen. It might have hung in the family home in Bayswater; yet, because more than two-thirds of the Studio's work was sold to Europe, could have hung in Belgium, where Alex lives for ten years from 1898. A dress fabric, although more appropriate,

would have been plain at this period and therefore unsuitable for a Persephone endpaper. We also chose this material because there is something oppressive about it; there is the imagery of thick greenery difficult to fight through and of the thistle -Alex herself is prickly, but also ensnared - scratched - by thickets of convention and etiquette.

Farewell Leicester Square by Betty Miller was written in 1935 and published in 1941. 'Black Goose' was designed midway between these two dates, and we chose it because it is very beautiful: it contains the imagery of 'the black sheep' which is

appropriate to a novel about an outsider; and it is by a woman, EQ (as she was always known) Nicholson. who was the wife of the architect Kit Nicholson, the brother of Ben Nicholson and of Nancy Nicholson. Originally hand-printed on cotton fabric using two lino blocks, the pattern was revived in the early 1950s by the Edinburgh Weavers as a screen-printed cotton: and re-revived in 1988 by Courtauld. EQ Nicholson's

> original pencil lines are visible on the fabric: since two of her children were small when she designed 'Black Goose' we can imagine that this is a case of Virginia Woolf's 'always the bell rings and the baker calls' - EQ was interrupted before she could rub the lines out, and then forgot.

Tell It to a Stranger, Elizabeth Berridge's Stories from the 1940s, were published in 1947 (except for one written that year and published in 1949). Graham Sutherland's screen-printed rayon



Elizabeth Berridge in the 1950s. Photograph by Ida Kar

crepe dress fabric, 'Web', was a 1947 design for Cresta Silks, a company specialising in unusual dress fabrics for an affluent market. The pattern has a period austerity, while the jagged web imagery suits stories in which many of the characters are trapped by other people's preconceptions (Ruby) or by the rigidity of their mindsets (Lady Hayley) or by the after-effect of the war (the prisoner). Designed at the time of his large-scale 'Crucifixion' (1946), 'Web' is another variation on the thorn imagery that obsessed Sutherland at this period; only fifty years after 'Thistle', it would have amazed the Silver Studio.

#### 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

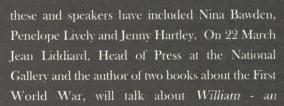
they are 120 pages (The Victorian Chaise-longue) or 620 (Few Eggs and No Oranges) cost £10, or £25 for three. The titles of Persephone Books Nos 1-15 are listed inside this issue of The Persephone Quarterly.

Postage is extra for airmail abroad - details on the order form inside. Please telephone 0207 253 5454 or fax 0207 253 5656 or write to Persephone Books, 28 Great Sutton Street, London ECIV 0DS or e-mail sales@persephonebooks.co.uk or look at our web-site at www.persephonebooks.co.uk

Our books make wonderful presents for any occasion. We will wrap them in pink tissue

paper and tie them with silver ribbon (as on the postcard enclosed with this *PQ*) and, for birthdays, can enclose a card saying 'Happy Birthday' and who the book is from. This wrapping service costs £2 per book or £5 for three.

The Persephone Book at Lunchtime is on the 22nd of each month. We have now had eight of



Englishman and Julian Grenfell. There is no April lunch because of Easter. On 22 May Elizabeth Berridge will talk about Persephone Book No 15, her collection of 1940s short stories Tell It to a Stranger, in discussion with Freda Avkroyd, who was writing short stories at the same time and whose writing career spans a similar period. On 22 June the cultural historian Ianet Floyd, whose specialism is women writing about housework and cookery. and who is the co-editor of the recently published Domestic will talk about Space, Persephone Book No 10, Good Things in England by Florence White.



Our March 2000 books:

Persephone Book No 13 is Consequences by E.M.Delafield; No 14 is Farewell Leicester Square by Betty Miller; and No 15 is Tell It to a Stranger: Stories of the 1940s by Elizabeth Berridge.

The next *Persephone Quarterly* will be sent out on 22 June, when our June books are published.