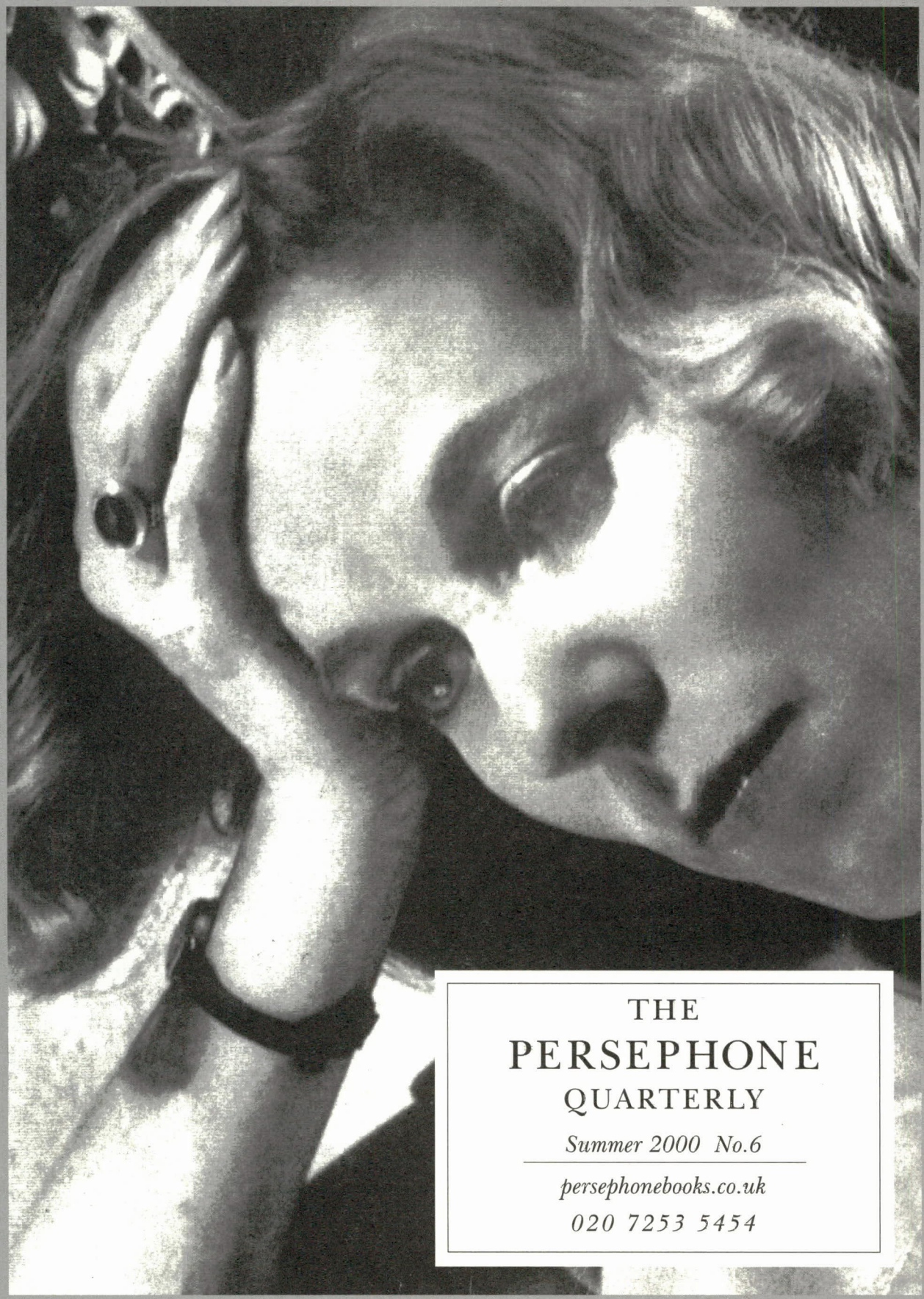

THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

Summer 2000 No.6

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Our Summer 2000 Books

'I didn't know she wrote novels for grown-ups' people remark about ***Saplings*** (1945) by Noel Streatfeild - making those of us who have been secretly enjoying them in our mothers' editions, or in battered copies with the green Boots label, feel very lucky. Indeed, Noel had not thought of writing for children until her publisher persuaded her to re-work the first of her adult novels as *Ballet Shoes* (1936) - a book that would have sold ten million copies by the time she died fifty years later.

Our proofreader wrote about *Saplings*: 'Apart from the Etty Hillesum (in a class of its own) I think I have enjoyed *Saplings* the most of any Persephone book and felt thrilled to be proofreading it. (What sentence could convey details of war-time England as brilliantly as "Nannie unwrapped from newspaper her slices of horse, and put them on a tin plate"?! Not to mention the gardener's marrows on the compost-heap of his kitchen-garden.) Noel Streatfeild's tenderness in chronicling the exact details of the process of the disintegration of the children's feeling of safety I found most moving.'

'I think the Afterword is quite excellent, and correctly placed at the back. To have someone with "eyes able to see below the surface", as Noel Streatfeild would say, ie. a psychiatrist [the author of the Afterword] means that it covers everything I had wanted covered - the child psychology interest, Secure Base theories, etc., and the fact of middle-class children's suffering and wounds of separation. The only disadvantage of not having a Preface is that the first chapter could be off-putting in terms of possible charges of snobbishness, slightness and thin writing.' Dr Holmes responded: 'What a delightful proofreader - I didn't know they were allowed to have opinions! I actually didn't mind the first chapter, which reminded me somehow of an Enid Blyton story, or E.Nesbit - I was half expecting the Psammead to leap up out from under a sandcastle . . . ' (It is in the opening chapter that Noel Streatfeild has slowly and almost cloyingly to establish the complacent happiness of the group of 'saplings' before starting to track its 'disintegration and devastation'.)

Cover: Photo of Isobel English by Eric de Maré 1956

The famous child prodigy Marjory Fleming (1803-11) endured devastation of a different kind. When she returned to her home in Kirkcaldy after spending three years with her cousin Isabella in Edinburgh, she could not console herself for her loss; in her fictionalised biography, ***Marjory Fleming***, a novel that uses real chronology and direct quotation, Oriel Malet strongly implies that Marjory dies of grief as much as from complications brought on by measles. Oriel Malet herself was barely grown-up when she wrote this, her third book - her first two novels had been published in 1943 and 1945 when she was still in her teens - but her insight into Marjory's mind has 'an almost psychic perception' (Elizabeth Bowen's review, reprinted on Page 13).

Here is one of Marjory's most famous poems, which gives an insight into her originality (Pug was a monkey):

O lovely O most charming pug
Thy gracefull air & heavenly mug
The beauties of his mind do shine
And every bit is shaped so fine

Your very tail is most devine
Your teeth is whiter then the snow
Yor are a great buck & a bow
Your eyes are of so fine a shape
More like a christains then an ape
His cheeks is like the roses blume
Your hair is like the ravens plume
His noses cast is of the roman
He is a very pretty weomen
I could not get a rhyme for roman
And was oblidged to call it weoman.

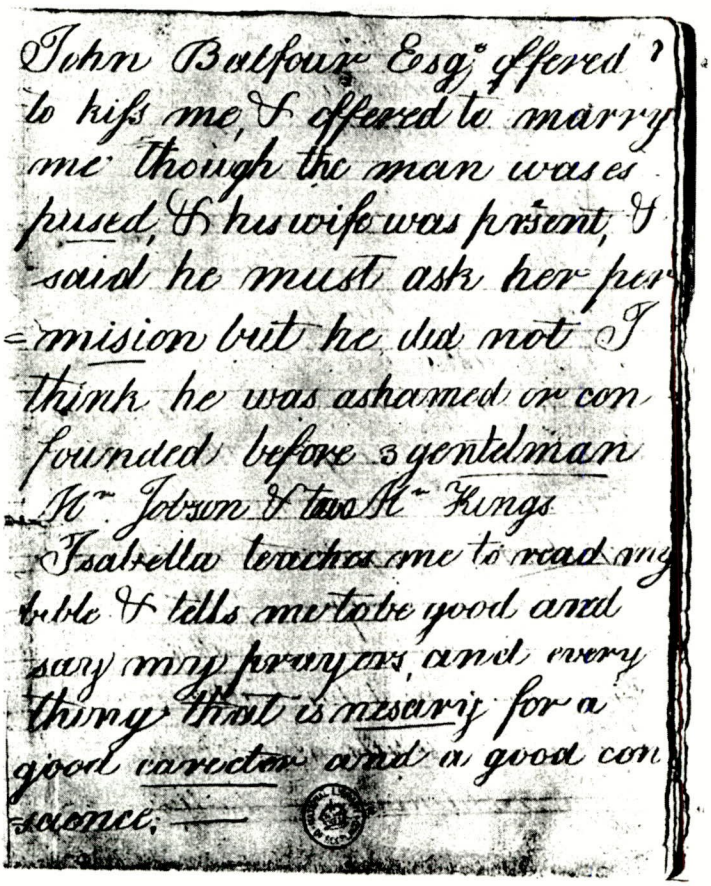
Virginia Woolf's father Leslie Stephen, like his Victorian contemporaries, greatly admired Marjory and he himself wrote her entry for the *Dictionary of National Biography* in 1889. Indeed, anyone reading Virginia's Juvenilia will think it almost certain that her father gave her the Journals to read. In 1891, at the age Marjory had been when she died 80 years before, she wrote in 'Love-letters between Fanny Smith and John Lovegate' in the Stephen children's Hyde Park Gate News:

As I gaze upon thy sweet face
I see with what condescending grace
You look upon your humble lover
And I give him many a qualm to suffer.

This is pure Marjory.

Mark Twain wrote in 1909: 'What an intensely human little creature she was! How vividly she lived her small life; how impulsive she was; how sudden, how tempestuous, how tender, how loving, how sweet, how loyal, how rebellious, how repentant, how wise, how unwise, how bursting with fun, how frank, how free, how honest, how innocently bad, how natively good, how charged with quaint philosophies, how winning, how precious, how adorable . . . ' Oriel Malet's achievement is to bring that creature to life.

Isobel English, the pseudonym of June Braybrooke, wrote ***Every Eye*** (1956) when she was in her mid-thirties. It is a novel about a young girl growing up to what could have been unhappiness but for her marriage to a carefree young(er) man. It is her unsympathetic family, and in particular her sinister uncle Ot, that has made her feel awkward about every aspect of her life; and she has also been rendered an outsider by having a squint. But she manages to make a career by teaching the piano and then, on a spinster's holiday in France, meets


John Balfour Esq. offered
to kiss me, & offered to marry
me though the man was es
pused, & his wife was present, &
said he must ask her per
mision but he did not I
think he was ashamed or con
founded before 3 gentelman
Mr. Jobson & two Mr. Kings
Isabella teaches me to read my
bible & tells me to be good and
say my prayers, and every
thing that is nesary for a
good carecter and a good con
science.

'As we know Pepys or Johnson or Boswell or Scott or Dorothy Osborne, so we know Marjory Fleming': Arundell Esdaile, editor of the facsimile Journals in 1934.

her husband; they travel to Spain not long after they are married and she surveys her life as they make their journey – a long, leisurely journey down through France, in the early 1950s when to climb out of the train at Barcelona station is as exotic as, nowadays, it is to climb out at, say, Calcutta.

Spain was an utterly different world from that of drab, post-war Britain. As Neville Braybrooke writes in his Preface, at the time when he and his wife went to Ibiza in 1954 it was 'the most savage of the Balearic Islands' (page 2 of the novel): 'How savage the island was, we were made aware of on our first evening when we . . . saw an American woman stoned by the villagers because she was wearing trousers . . . ' The Mediterranean came to symbolise all that England was not and was blind to.

It is significant that when Elizabeth David published *A Book of Mediterranean Food* in 1950 her publisher, John Lehmann, suggested calling it The Blue Train Cookery Book because for him, and, as he thought, the reading-public, the romance of countries like France and Spain lay in the great adventure of the train journey to get there. But Elizabeth knew that her book was an innovative 'love letter to the Mediterranean'; 'for someone who had grown up in England during the war, going across the Channel, and the further south you went, where there were piles of aubergines, lemons, peppers, garlic – nobody had *heard* of them in England' (Terence Conran). Indeed, nobody had *seen* them, which is why colour – and especially yellow – is referred to throughout Isobel English's novel as a contrast to the greyness of England and the drabness of Hatty's early life.

The Spanish parts of *Every Eye* anticipate Lawrence Durrell, who published *Justine* in 1957; and the book as a whole is an unusual and telling example of the 1950s modernist novel, moreover one with a spiritual content. 'There have been many novels based on the premise that life is lived forwards but understood backwards,' writes Neville Braybrooke, but 'what distinguished Isobel English's novel from those of most of her contemporaries was a religious dimension.' Sometimes dubbed a Catholic novelist, Isobel English was yet too much of an original to be part of any school. She was completely broad-minded as a person and as a writer, remarking that 'if you say that the Catholic religion is the true faith – this is where I turn off a bit – you imply that all other religions are not true, and I don't believe that.'

Isobel English's previous novel had, in 1954, tied for first place for the Somerset Maugham Award with Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net*, so that the prize went to the runner-up, *Lucky Jim* by Kingsley Amis. (This was also the year of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and Elizabeth Jenkins's *The Tortoise and the Hare*.) In a review of Isobel's novel, *The Key That Rusts*, Stevie Smith had observed that its author 'has a very sagacious and original voice – a voice of our times, ironical and involved, and yet a peculiar voice.'

On the jacket flap we have put some comments by John Betjeman: 'Sometimes, but not often, a novel comes along which makes the rest one has to review, however competent they are, seem commonplace . . . Isobel English has helped to explode the dying myth that the novel is becoming extinct.' And we were delighted when Dame Muriel Spark wrote to us recently to say 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.'

Saplings by Noel Streatfeild

Extract from the Persephone Preface by the psychiatrist Dr Jeremy Holmes

Noel Streatfeild's purpose in ***Saplings*** is to take a happy, successful, middle-class pre-war English family - and then track in miserable detail the disintegration and devastation which war brought to tens of thousands of such families.

Streatfeild's supreme gift was her ability to see the world from a child's perspective. What makes *Saplings* special is her use of that skill to explore a very adult problem - the psychological impact of war and trauma on family life. Here she was and still is in tune with the zeitgeist. In the mid-1940s psychologists, psychoanalysts and child psychiatrists were just beginning to address the very same issues from a scientific perspective. Bowlby had just published his ground-breaking *44 Juvenile Thieves*, showing how adolescent delinquency arises out of loss and separation in childhood. *Maternal Care and Child Health*, his influential W.H.O.-commissioned study of the impact of war on child mental health appeared only a few years later; and at the same time he was also starting to pioneer psychotherapy with whole families. Winnicott wrote and broadcasted about the inner world of the infant, and Melanie Klein and Anna Freud were developing child psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, the latter, with Dorothy Burlingham, running her nursery for orphans, most of whom were psychological casualties of war.

In the first half of the century children's well-being was mainly equated with their physical health. Novelists, among whom Dickens is the obvious example, had long been interested in the working of children's minds, and the impact of adult neglect and cruelty upon them, but science had lagged behind. Psychoanalysis - an area about which we have no evidence that Streatfeild took the slightest interest - had established two essential themes which nevertheless underlie the thrust of her book. First, that children's minds were as vulnerable as their bodies to disturbance and illness, and second, and as a consequence of the first, that children are autonomous beings with their own needs and projects, and are not merely objects to be controlled and manipulated by adults, however well-meaning.

Evacuation was an obvious response to the threat of a war which for the first time in history directly targeted civilians, but the psychological consequences of separating children from their parents was glossed over in the rush to ensure their physical survival. War posed a terrible Hobson's choice for families, and it was only afterwards that the toll it had taken in terms of depression and despair could begin to be recognised. *Saplings* is the literary equivalent of the psychological audit initiated by Bowlby and others. For Bowlby the Secure Base is the key to psychological survival, and the capacity of parents, families and nations as a whole to provide such a secure base is severely compromised at times of war. While psychological illness tends actually to decrease during active periods of conflict, the long-term effects on children are incalculable. It is fascinating to watch Streatfeild casually and intuitively anticipate many of the findings of developmental psychology over the past fifty years . . .

Why men don't iron

Mary Kenny wrote this piece in the The Guardian on 23 March 2000

What an optimistic Pollyanna is Mrs Cherie Blair: 45 years of age, and she still believes that with a little more social engineering, men can be made to take 'equal shares' of housework and childcare. Women, she has complained, still do three times as much housework as men and are twice as likely to look after elderly relatives. A shocking breach of inequality, which must be altered. But hasn't Mrs Blair heard of neo-Darwinism? Hasn't she read Anne and Bill Moir's splendid textbook, *Why Men Don't Iron*, which spells out, with detailed, scientific evidence, just why men never have, and never will, take a 'fair share' of homecraft or childcare? Men's brains are just not wired up that way; they are ill-adapted for carrying out caring and sharing domestic duties at the same level as females.

Mrs Blair, it seems, is basing her protests on outdated, '70s 'social conditioning' feminism. This presupposed that virtually all human behaviour was the result of social conditioning, and that all human behaviour could be altered by social and cultural change. Bring little boys up like little girls and we will have a new generation of men who play with dolls, dress in frocks and prefer consensus to conflict. Bring little girls up in a gender-neutral way and they will stop spending their money on silly things like cosmetics, breast enhancement and Versace handbags. Seventies feminism developed out of Simone de Beauvoir's dictum that 'one is not born a woman - one becomes one'. Post-de Beauvoir, we employed the word 'gender' to replace the word 'sex': sex underlines biological differences, whereas gender implies that the differences between men and women are merely societal.

But de Beauvoir was wrong: one *is*, except in rare cases of chromosome disorder, born a woman. Female-ness is not a 'social construct'. It is biologically determined from an early stage in foetal development. It is not 'society' which makes a girl into a woman, or a boy into a man: it is the structure of chromosomes. Males and females are born not only with different genitalia and reproductive equipment: their brains function differently.

Men will never do the same amount of housework as women (with some exceptions) because their brains are not programmed for domestic detail. Although males virtually always perform better on spatial tests - there is a direct correlation between spatial ability and the male hormone, testosterone - they also have 'tunnel vision' when it comes to the arrangement of domestic space. Men quite literally don't 'see' domestic disorder in the same way, just as, when sent to the cupboard to fetch a packet of sugar, they do not have the same capacity as women have for finding any given item . . .

Of course, it is entirely praiseworthy for Mrs Blair to encourage her husband to take paternity leave and of course we all want the workplace and society to treat mothers kindly . . . But have men share the care of home and the family equally? I don't think so. And most of us, by the time we have reached the age of 45, have accepted the fact.

Our Readers Write

Extracts from some of the first letters we received about our books

'I was so pleased with the first books which arrived from you – for some reason three parcels are more exciting than one containing three books! ***William*** was impressive – so well written and so visual. The matching endpapers and bookmarks are truly chic. Congratulations and good luck.' CD, London SW7

After suggesting, like many others, that we reprint *Harriet* by Elizabeth Jenkins: 'May I also take this opportunity to say what a joy it is to relax with the works published by Persephone so far?' CM, London N8

'I want to tell you how much I enjoyed reading ***Someone at a Distance*** – it is so perceptive and the characters stay in the mind for a long time. . . I love the quality of the production of these books – the quality of the paper and print is splendid and the endpapers are a dream. I look forward with eager anticipation to the next order.' AM, Belfast

'I am enjoying the books so much and living in the "sticks" as I do it is such a treat to have them arrive in the post. I think that ***William*** has been my favourite. . .' PB, Llandrindod Wells

'Thank you for sending me your Quarterly. I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed Etty & will order copies for presents. (And *really* good value.) *Please* be *encouraged* by my heartfelt admiration. Wish I were richer. Please keep going and carry on in the same way. Reading Etty made a difference to my life (no exaggeration).' MBR, Bristol

'The books are a pleasure to look at and to handle – I love the idea of the matching bookmarks and endpapers and the notion of their design reflecting the contents – and the range of the first three titles was, I thought, excellent. The Monica Dickens was a really good read – well-written and perceptive with more than a few echoes of Nancy Mitford and even a bit of Molly Keane...As you predicted in your first quarterly, I was bowled over by ***William***. Comfortable it wasn't – but I was deeply moved by it and would love to read more of Cicely Hamilton. Good luck with Persephone – long may it last and prosper.' JM, London W6

'The discovery of your books has been one of the highlights of my year. More power to your elbow! The *Quarterly* is a joy and gives great pleasure when it is discovered on the hall floor hidden by the usual junk mail!' ML, Poole

'I just had to write to say how much I have enjoyed all the books I have bought from you. My husband and I have especially enjoyed Mollie Panter-Downes's stories, they were simply perfection. . . I do hope you will go from strength to strength; and am amazed that you can produce such beautiful books at such low cost, including postage.' JF, Carisbrooke

'I bought 8 of your books just before Christmas and was absolutely overwhelmed when they arrived the next day. I think they are WONDERFUL especially the endpapers as I worked at Heal's in the '50s in the textile dept.' DM, London SW19

'***Fidelity*** is definitely a classic. Wouldn't it make a brilliant film! You can't imagine the pleasure your books have brought me in rural France with the nearest English bookshop about 400 miles away.' VW, Ploumagoar

Mollie Panter-Downes

This obituary of the author of Good Evening, Mrs. Craven: the Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes appeared in The Guardian on 31 January 1997.

Mollie Panter-Downes was for many years the author of the *New Yorker* magazine's 'Letter from London'; highly respected in America, her work was almost unknown over here. This anonymity well suited her modest personality.

Having discovered her classic and incomparable novel *One Fine Day* (1947) in a jumble-sale bag, I wrote to her about it. She was, I am sure, not dissembling when she replied: 'Frankly, I have not read it or even thought of it for so many years that I do not think I could bring any useful observations about it to the surface.' The only note of *amour propre* was that some of her letters were written on *New Yorker* paper, the crested envelopes perfectly complementing her beautiful handwriting.

Mollie Panter-Downes in the 1940s, photograph by Lee Miller

Mollie Panter-Downes lost her Irish father in August 1914 at the Battle of Mons, when she was eight. She and her mother thereafter lived in straitened circumstances in Sussex with Mollie attending day school, scribbling in lined notebooks and reading widely. At 16, she wrote her first novel, *The Shoreless Sea*, which was published in 1923 and went into eight editions in eighteen months.

Although Mollie ignored it, it remains a very good novel, with echoes of Rosamund Lehmann's *Dusty Answer* - which it preceded by four years - and of the best work of May Sinclair, whose biographer described it as 'one of the miracles of English'.

Mollie now became the bread-winner, continuing to write short stories - mostly for *Cosmopolitan* in America and never published over here - articles, and three more expunged novels, of which she claimed not even to own copies. In 1927, she married Clare Robinson, had two daughters in the early 1930s, and moved to the beautiful house near Haslemere in which she spent the rest of her life. It was Mollie's idea that she should write for *The New Yorker* and although her agent, 'Pearnie'

of Curtis Brown, scoffed, she persevered. On the strength of a reporter-at-large item about Jewish refugee children arriving at Victoria station in 1939 she was asked, at the outbreak of war, to do a regular letter from London. This she did throughout the war years and for many years afterwards.

Hers was writing of the highest possible quality and it is shaming that we, her neighbours and compatriots, rarely had the chance to read it. Yet, I suspect that if Mollie had had to endure the panoply of fame and notoriety, of being singled out as a successful woman journalist, she might have stopped writing. When Virago reprinted *One Fine Day*, and I asked her to look up her 1946 diary to see if there was anything about her 'working methods', all she could tell me was that gooseberries were plentiful that year. It was a kind of feminine anti-convention - against the tug of 'who's in, who's out' - that made one admire Mollie more deeply.

There emerged from the pen of this gentle, kind, intuitive and clever woman writing which, of its kind, has never been bettered, with 'a stubborn egalitarianism' *(New York Times)*. For egalitarian Mollie most certainly was. When she wrote about Laura in *One Fine Day*, trying to make sense of things in an England just emerging from six years of war, she wrote for all women: which is one reason why this novel is, for me at least, one of the very greatest works of prose to have emerged during the last fifty years.

Despite good reviews for this novel (the only one that Mollie did not disown), she never wrote another, but she did write forty short stories for *The New Yorker* between 1938 and 1965, one of which, 'Goodbye, My Love', found new readers in an anthology of second world war stories by women called *Wave Me Goodbye*. But Mollie continued to send Letters from London, and wrote two other books, both commissioned by *The New Yorker*, *Ooty Preserved* (1967) a unique record of an aspect of India - the hill-station British - and the book of which she was proudest, *At The Pines* (1971) about the Swinburne/Watts-Dunton ménage at Putney.

Mollie Panter-Downes is one of those writers who will, without doubt, be rediscovered. In her case, it is perhaps a good thing that fame will be posthumous because nothing could ever shake her from her stance of entrenched privacy. I realise, thinking about her, that *au fond* she was a poet. June 24 1948: 'Have made up my mind to read nothing but poetry until book finished - everything else distracting and uninspiring - work again, went well, made gooseberry jelly.' *Nicola Beauman*

Thursday June 25 1940: 'Last night at about 1 a.m. we had the first air raid of the war on London. My room is just oppposite the police station, so I got the full benefit of the sirens. It made me leap out of bed half way across the room. I shook all over, but managed to get into my dressing-gown and slippers, put my watch in my pocket, clutch my torch and gas-mask, and get downstairs first. I found myself in a little corridor in which Mrs Gray was rearing two mattresses against the door. The others gradually assembled. I did not know them and it was dark. I passed round my few bottled sweets. The people chatted and joked. We could hear no sounds of firing or bombs, so after about a quarter of an hour most of them returned to bed.' The opening of ***Few Eggs and No Oranges***: A Diary showing how Unimportant People in London and Birmingham lived through the war years, by Vere Hodgson, begun in Notting Hill Gate sixty years ago, Persephone Book No.9.

From some recent reviews

In February Francis King commented in *The Spectator* that Nicholas Mosley's 'fine' biography of ***Julian Grenfell*** 'is as much about Julian's mother Ettie as about Grenfell himself' and concluded by saying that 'one of the strengths of Mosley's book is the way in which he shows that for this idle, self-indulgent, gallant, sometimes even heroic caste, war, as they themselves acknowledged even before it had broken out, had become a necessity. . .The other strength of this book lies in its demonstration of the intensity with which most of these men loved their mothers, not their fathers . . .Dying for the motherland, they were also dying for mother.'

In the same month, in the *Jewish Chronicle*, Anne Sebba described the hero of ***Farewell Leicester Square*** as 'a sophisticated, modern man of the 1930s. He is Britain's most highly paid film director, escort of numerous beautiful film stars. . . But he is also a Jew, and it is this central dimension of his life which throws him off balance and acts a a barrier to self-confidence and solid friendships. . . Written, with extraordinary prescience in 1935 by Betty Miller, mother of the more famous Jonathan, the novel explores what she described as "the social and psychological conflict of a Jew in the modern world."'

And in April *The Guardian* commented that the novel, 'lusciously republished in Persephone's trademark silver', 'offers a thought-provoking insight into anti-semitism between the wars - not the violent prejudice of Mosley's fascists, but the discreet discrimination of the bourgeoisie, which has played its part in shaping the intellectual heritage of the UK.'

In the *Charleston Magazine*'s Summer edition Sylvia Brownrigg compared Bloomsbury to the milieu around Susan Glaspell and Eugène O'Neill in Provincetown, describing ***Fidelity*** as a 'compelling' novel which 'enacts an intriguing contradiction, admiring Ruth for her integrity and the power of her brave love, while acknowledging that her break with society all but destroys her. . . Glaspell is not interested in proposing alternatives to conventional society [but] in showing the damage inflicted by its narrowness.'

This is also the theme of ***Consequences***, a plea for Victorian society to allow its women to go free. *The Tablet* reviewer remarked that E.M. Delafield's novels might have been overshadowed by the popular success of *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*. 'This represents a most serious injustice. . . the novel has much of the fine solidity, brilliant attention to detail and character of its great Victorian predecessors, but its atmosphere of explosive passion and protest, mixed with irony, identification with the outsider, and fondness for the one-paragraph sentence, mark it out as modern.'

In May the *Daily Telegraph* reviewer of ***Tell It to a Stranger*** commented that the stories 'strip the period [the 1940s] of its cinematic clichés. . . All are written in a spare, direct style reminiscent of another Elizabeth - Elizabeth Taylor, to whom Berridge bears many similarities. . . [She] wrote these stories when she was in her twenties. She now says that they show all the faults of the young writer. She would have liked to revise them. What a good thing she has not. With the benefit of fifty years' experience, a fresh, vital voice from a complex era might have been muted.'

Dome and Home

One way of defining what Persephone books are not would be to quote the leader that appeared in the *New Statesman* for 29 May 2000: 'The Dome - which has just entered what may be described as the last-chance zone - stands as a monument to the folly of late 20th-century rulers, both political and corporate, and to a society obsessed by image and logo. In our age, almost nothing is sold for its intrinsic value: shoes and clothes depend on designer labels...publishers pay infinitely more attention to a book's dust-jacket than to what's inside it. Marketing and branding, image and concept have replaced content...Increasingly the brand itself becomes the culture...stripped of its inherent value [it] becomes nothing more than a promotional tool. . . "We become collectively convinced not that corporations are hitching a ride on our cultural and communal activities, but that creativity and congregation would be impossible without their generosity" (Naomi Klein in *New Logo*). The Dome. . . created solely as a promotional vehicle not for something of real and substantial value. . . has succeeded, after all, in representing the spirit of the age.'

At Persephone Books our 'branding' has been one of our modest successes: everyone loves the silver-grey jackets, the clear type, the beautiful creamy paper and, in particular, the fabric endpapers, with most people able to appreciate the quiet, almost secret, pleasure of having them inside the books not - brashly - on the cover. And the Persephone concept - carefully chosen, always very readable books for people who do not have time or do not want to browse in bookshops, that fit through the letter box, that are sent out on the day the order is placed, with hype-free promotion, recommendation by word of mouth - all these elements are slowly and gratifyingly making us better and better known.

But, in contrast to the Dome, our true value is in our content: it is what is inside the packaging, the texts, that counts. Nevertheless, although our ambition may be to make ***Fidelity*** recognised as a classic, to ensure Etty is in paperback in this country, to share the pleasure we have long had from reading Dorothy Whipple's novels - yet without some kind of business sense, some harsh reality, we would not be able to outlast the Dome.

It is no coincidence that one of the themes of many Persephone books is the 'real', worldly, outer life contrasted, often brutally, with the secure, family-based, inner life. Thus Ellen in ***Someone at a Distance*** is implicitly criticised by Dorothy Whipple for being too much preoccupied with her home and children, too unaware of lurking dangers just beyond her secure fortress.

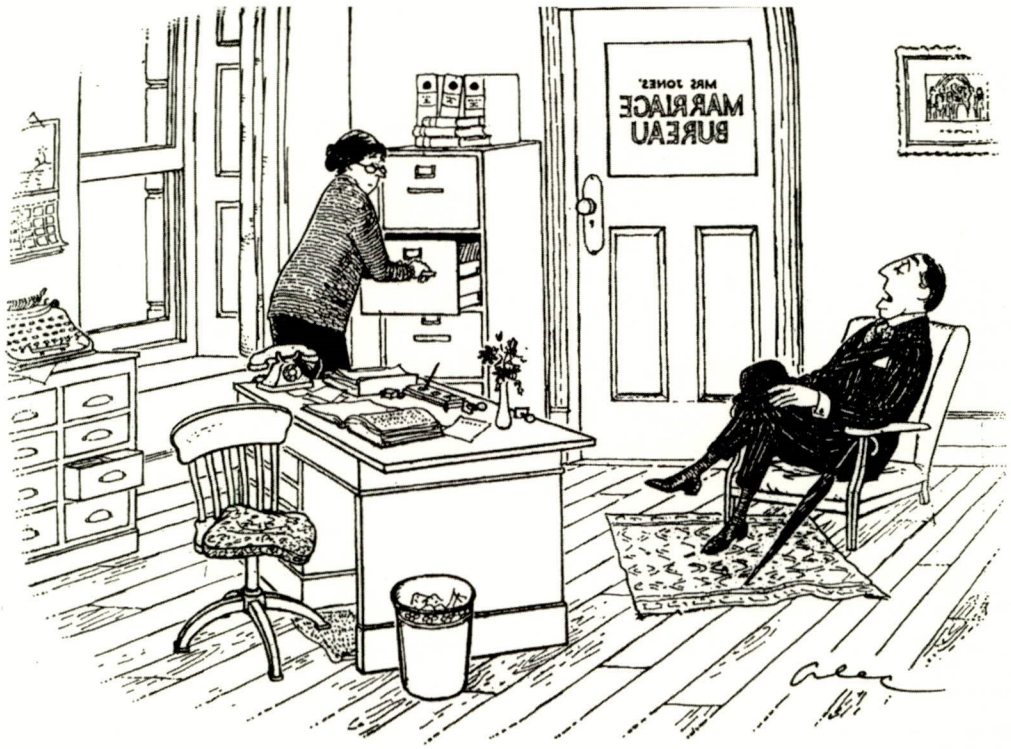
William and Griselda, too, in ***William - an Englishman*** have an innocent attitude towards the larger world around them: their 'socialism' and 'suffragettism' are parochial interests ill-equipping them to cope with the frightening realities of the 20th century. As the Preface-writer comments: 'The reason *William - an Englishman* has the power to move us so deeply is because of the very ordinariness of the young couple and the unexpectedness of their plight. Terrible things happen to them and yet they had imagined nothing more than a life of kindly protest meetings in the Conway Hall, the odd sojourn (it is true) in Holloway Prison and then a quiet idealistic life in a

small house in Bromley or Clapton or Highbury from where they would hope to hand the torch of fervour and protest on to the next generation.'

The Home-Maker subtly and movingly explores the stifling convention that it should be the father who goes out into the world, 'to work', and the mother who stays 'at home'; yet why should one sex 'make' the home and not the other? Even Lady Hayley in one of the short stories in ***Tell It To a Stranger*** prefers to travel in the country 'doing good' for the Red Cross rather than to stay at home devoting herself to her son during his leave.

'Mr Wilcox remembered his wife's even goodness during thirty years,' wrote E.M.Forster in *Howards End* in 1910. 'Her tenderness! Her innocence! The wonderful innocence that was hers by the gift of God. Ruth knew no more of worldly wickedness and wisdom than did the flowers in her garden, or the grass in her field. Her idea of business - "Henry, why do people who have enough money try to get more money?" Her idea of politics - "I am sure that if the mothers of various nations could meet there would be no more wars."'

But at Persephone we know full well that one cannot keep a business going out of innocence. And since we do not have sponsors or corporate backing, Lottery or dot.com money, it is you, dear readers, who buy our books upon whom we depend.



'I WONDER IF YOU WOULD MIND TRYING THE TOP DRAWER FIRST.' From Punch, late 1950s, drawn by E. Alec Wiles, taken from Paper for Books, Robert Horne & Co, 1961.

Elizabeth Bowen in 1946 -

her review of Majory Fleming by Oriel Malet appeared in the Tatler on 12 June.

Until I read Oriel Malet's ***Marjory Fleming***, my ideas about Marjory were of the haziest. The little girl's Journals and her collection of verses, which could have given her substantiality, were unknown to me - possibly I shrank from the sentimental myth surrounding any wonder-child who has died young . . .

However, she was not 'too good for this world', which she loved, during her eight years and eleven months in it, with a sturdy and sometimes troubling passion. Lively, healthy, greedy and gay, though with interludes of savage contrary melancholy, she lived with intensity. . . Such, at least, is the Marjory whom Miss Malet (with what I instinctively feel to be a true, an almost psychic perception) brings to life for us. Or, rather, we are made conscious of the life that was Marjory Fleming's. That *is* Marjory Fleming's - for in these pages, undimmed by mists of the past, we enter the immortal 'now' of a child.

Isabella Keith - first met as the lovely, fashionable, seventeen-year-old Edinburgh cousin who came to visit at Kirkcaldy - was the love of Marjory's life: the separation from Isabella was one of those major tragedies which one cannot write off as a mere childish grief. Marjory was born at Kirkcaldy in 1803; and died there - child to the last, of a childish illness - some months after her return from Edinburgh in 1811. She embraced sorrow with her whole nature, as she embraced joy. She was one of a family of three (a baby sister was born during the three years when Marjory was away with the Keiths in Edinburgh), and her parents were loving, intelligent and wise - though I think one must feel that they failed in judgement in insisting on her return home - being taken from Isabella tore the most delicate fibres of her nature. Mrs Fleming, though she did her best at once to conceal the fact, was jealous of Isabella: and, of course, it could be said that a fascinating young woman with her own life to lead ought not to be giving up all her time to the teaching and charge of a small child. Marjory, for her part, did torment herself with the idea that she was wicked and unnatural in loving Isabella more than her own parents; her terrifying moods, which from time to time swept like tornadoes through the Keiths' Charlotte Square house, were the outcome of what would now be called conflict. Every scene of her happiness with Isabella - most of all Braehead, where the two spent summers visiting the Craufurds - was intensely dear to her. Outside this association, however, was the love for Nature for its own sake - rivers, gardens, woods, windy seashores. The temperament of a poet, the vehemence of a lover, was carried round town and country alike inside the sturdy body of this little girl. No, Marjory, though she had an attractive young-animal grace, was not even pretty. She had a hearty appetite, was a bit of a bully (the terror of nice little girls who were asked to tea), and was, most human of all, by no means above showing off. In fact, it is her charm, to me, that she lacked the outfit of the idealisable 'romantic' child.

Marjory Fleming is a book I recommend to all those who are not afraid to know and love children as they are...I should like to thank Miss Malet: my life seems richer for knowing this little girl.

'The Facts of Life'

This short story by Noel Blakiston, a friend of Cyril Connolly's at Eton, not a Persephone author but one whom we greatly admire, first appeared in The Lecture and other stories (Chapman and Hall, 1961)

'Mother, what's a womb?' said Robin, as they walked away from church. A twittering and fluttering came to Barbara's rescue.

'Look,' she said, 'some long-tailed tits! They're over the hedge now.' And the boy ran to look. When he was back at her side he had forgotten his question. The occasion, however, had impressed itself upon her. It was not the first of such occasions. The Sunday before, at about the same place on the church path, he had asked 'What is meant by "the paps which Thou hast sucked"?' It was clear to her that her son had reached an age – he was eleven – when someone must talk to him. Whose job was that? A father's presumably. But then, Robin's father had died nearly two years ago and not been replaced. The job of an uncle then or the headmaster of his school. It was high time somebody took it on. She was exceedingly reluctant to do so herself, not knowing how she would begin or where to lay the emphasis, and dreading the curtain of embarrassment that would fall between them.

Her brother Micky was the obvious person. It was a pity he lived so far away. Something must be done soon, yet it was only about three weeks since Micky had been to stay, just before Robin's holidays, and he could hardly be summoned again so soon to this distant shire. He, on the other hand, was always pressing her to come up to London for a jaunt. Would it not be the best thing if she went and stayed with Micky for a few days this next week and talked to him about Robin and persuaded him to go down and see the boy at his school early next term and give him the necessary instruction? Yes, this was a good idea. There were certain bits of shopping that she wanted to do in London. Moreover, it was fun staying with Micky. There was always such a lot going on and though she felt out of her depth with his friends, they were never as intimidating as she feared and there were enough of them who did not seem to mind in the least how much out of touch she was with many of the things they talked about. Noticing what she was wearing, men she met with Micky would pay her delightful compliments on her appearance, such as she never got at home. Micky's world was full of mysteries to her, for she had married young and gone off to live in the wilds and her visits to her brother had been rare and fleeting. Since her widowhood, when their mother had come to live with her, it had been incumbent rather on Micky to visit her than her him. She had not now been to London for more than a year.

There was another reason for going to stay with Micky. Barbara was not one of those widows who think it would be a betrayal of a happy love to try to find similar happiness with a new man. To look for the same sort of thing again was, rather, a tribute to the former happiness. Barbara did not care at all for the single state. The wretched cold nights! Both for her own sake and for that of Robin she was anxious to be re-married, and candidates for her hand were not lacking in the neighbourhood, for she was a

rose of beauty, with a gay and friendly giggle and eyes that laughed. She had that kind of innocent and radiant desirability that seems to extend from its possessors not only to what they are wearing but to everything they touch, to the prayer-book in their hands and along the pew in which they sit. One of the candidates was becoming insistent.

Though she had a vague wish to break new ground and not marry a farmer this time, she would probably have accepted him, had it not been for the memory of a certain encounter at a party of Micky's last year. It had been the shortest of meetings. She knew nothing about the man except that he was called Verney. Standing together with cocktail glasses in their hands for two or three minutes, they had said nothing significant to each other. She had just felt that if she were free – and at that time she had hardly yet realised that she was free – he might be the man. She remembered thinking afterwards how strange it was that he should have been almost the only one there who had not complimented her on the glass seahorse Micky had pinned in her hair before the party. Before making up her mind, therefore, about the other, she wanted, if possible, to see this Verney man again. Perhaps Micky and Gerald would give a party for her again and ask him. Gerald was the friend who shared his flat with Micky. When, by the way, was Micky going to get married? Hadn't he been a man about town for long enough?

'I suppose it isn't often,' said Robin, 'that one has the luck to see a whole lot of tits together at once?'

Yes, it was high time something was done. Barbara wrote to her brother that afternoon.

And so, a few days later, she put the finishing touches to her face in front of Micky's looking-glass and came out into the passage, where she met Gerald carrying a tray of glasses.

'Barbara,' he said, 'you look a dream.'

'Can I help at all?'

'No, no, thanks, everything's done now. Oh, Marco,' he called into the kitchen, 'have you got the ice? Now, come along, Barbara, and let's have a little preliminary stoke-up. I expect you need one after your journey, and anyhow I think it's rather hard on you to expect you to be social before you've been half an hour inside the house. At this point in a party I generally feel I'd give anything to call it off, don't you?'

In the room they found Micky placing a vase of jonquils on a bookcase.

'How does that look?' he said, standing back. He turned to Barbara. 'Darling,' he said, kissing her, 'you're perfectly lovely.'

Anyone could tell that they were brother and sister. He too had laughing eyes and teeth that gleamed.

'Come on,' he said, 'a drink.'

She sat upon an *empire* settee and was about to take the glass he offered when he withheld it.

'Just a minute,' he said. 'Put your feet up. So. And this arm like this, the hand loose – yes – and the other arm like this – just a moment, another cushion here – that's it. Oh, and you must take your shoes off. There! Now, look this way. That's it, that's perfect! Look, Gerald, isn't that Madame Récamier herself?'

'It's marvellous,' said Gerald.

They stood looking at her.

'*È bella la signora*,' murmured Marco in the background.

'Who is Madame Récamier?' said Barbara.

Damn! She must remember not to ask questions and just to look as though she knew what everything was about.

'Darling,' laughed Micky, 'it's a woman in a picture. Here's your drink. You may relax now. What are you having, Gerald?'

Barbara sipped. The drink seemed pretty strong. She took a gulp. Unless she was well primed, she would not possibly have the nerve to talk to Micky's friends. A second gulp went to her head. Quite suddenly she felt ready for anything.

'How's Robin?' Micky was saying.

This seemed a good moment to broach her business.

'I want to ask you something,' she said. 'Will you tell him the facts of life?' She giggled. Micky laughed loud.

'Poor little Robin!' said Gerald, with mock concern. 'Has he got to learn those wicked facts?'

'AND THIS I'M AFRAID IS MRS GLOVER'
The English Comic Album by Nicholas Bentley and Leonard Russell (Michael Joseph, 1948) p. 109

'No, but will you?' she said.

Micky thought a moment.

'Which facts?' he said.

'Oh, I don't know. I thought you'd know. Well, I suppose, how babies are born.'

'I'm not much of an authority on that. You mean, don't you, how they get conceived?'

'Yes, I suppose I do. And I'd like him to know the meanings of words he picks up in church, without asking me, words like eunuch and womb and fornication and whore.'

'Eunuch, yes. Womb, as I say, I don't know much about. Fornication and whore I should say he was young to be told about.'

The last of these words was one that Micky could never say without a certain feeling of nausea from the memory of a single disgusting, decisive episode. Ugh, never again!

'Oh,' said Barbara. She had not realised that her request would involve such difficulties. There was a ring at the bell.

'Here they come,' said Gerald. Barbara drained her glass.

'Sword! The sword!' cried Micky. 'I was forgetting.' And from a drawer he took a little silver sword, about two inches long, and clasped it on to Barbara's bosom.

'Oh, Micky, you shouldn't! It's perfectly lovely.'

'Now you can keep them at bay. Hullo, Peter. You met my sister, I believe, once before?'

Yes, Barbara remembered this face.

'Tell her the facts of life, Peter. She's asking.'

Peter looked at her interrogatively. She laughed.

'Well, it's just that I've got a boy of eleven who ought to be told something, and it's a question of who should do it and what he should be told.'

'I see. I was told them by the headmaster of my private school. I think he did it very well. He was quite an old boy. He played it down very much. It was all very remote and off-hand. I remember he began with the words "You may have noticed below the base of your stomach" – '

'Barbara, you remember me?' Without a glance at her companion, a new arrival shook her hand and Peter moved aside. Yes, she remembered this man too, but not his name.

'I adore your sword,' he said. His eye already was wandering and suddenly he was gone. The room was quickly filling with people. What a din they made!

'Barbara,' said Micky, 'I want you to meet –' She did not catch the name, but from the face felt that this was a nice man.

'Don't leave my side,' she said to him as soon as they had been brought together.

'I can't think of any reason why I should want to.'

'Hold out your glass, Barbara,' said Gerald, passing with a shaker in his hand. 'Have you learned the facts of life yet?'

'What did he mean by that?' asked the man.

'It's just that we were talking before the party began about someone having to tell the facts of life to a boy of mine, and what he should be told. The boy's eleven. Have you any ideas?'

'Indeed I have.' The nice man had a thoughtful, rather pedantic manner of speaking. 'There should be three main occasions, each more important than the last.'

'Gosh!' said Barbara, taking a drink.

'At the age of your boy, he should be told something, a few things, not too solemnly; in fact, if he can pick them up from other boys only slightly older than himself, so much the better. Then comes the next stage, the stage when – may I speak frankly? If I can't, we'd better talk about something else.'

'Of course, of course,' laughed Barbara. 'That's what I'm here for.'

'Well then, the stage when the boy should lose his virginity. This often gets left much too late in England, with the result that they either become irredeemably queer or permanently immature, like Shaw. You wouldn't want that, would you?'

'Of course not,' said Barbara, hoping her expression looked intelligent.

'This age,' he went on, 'should, in my opinion, in England as it now is, be not later than nineteen. There should be a little preliminary instruction. Lastly, and far the most important, the stage when they think of getting married. At this occasion there should be a most solemn and comprehensive lecture, which should on no account be given by a man whose wife is under fifty. It should be of the utmost seriousness and pitiless realism.' He stopped. This must be the end of what he had to say.

'Thank you,' she said. 'I will remember what you have told me. You've certainly given me some ideas. Now, tell me who all these people are. Who's that little man with bright beady eyes?'

'That's Miles Fantock.'

'Oh, is it?' she said interestedly. This was a literary name that she, even she, knew a little about.

'And the grey-haired man behind him is his brother, Julius, the scientist, and that lovely girl with Julius is Elspeth Campbell and the man they're talking to is Bunny Campbell, her father by his first marriage. They're all rather tied up because Miles's wife, Rachel, was Bunny's second wife. His

(Bunny's) third wife, Anna, is now in a nursing home having just had a baby and that woman with him is Anna's sister who is taking the opportunity to run away with him.'

'Goodness!'

'It's going a bit far, don't you think? They're quite open about it. Apparently they walked into the nursing home together and told Anna about it while she was feeding the baby. I must say it shocks me. So, just a little, does Julius and that girl. Quite apart from the incestuousness of her being his brother's wife's first husband's daughter, she has only just left school.'

A handsome man came in at the door and stood gazing around the room with an air of complacent authority.

'Who's that?' she asked.

'He's called Basil Wheeler.'

'He looks rather – ' she was going to say 'wonderful', but changed it to 'striking'.

'He does that certainly. He's a bit of a dog. *Cave canem*, I say. Beware that privy paw.'

'You two have been together long enough,' said Micky. 'I'm going to break you up. Here's someone to give you all the advice you want, Barbara. She's had experience. She's got a boy of her own.'

The woman's face certainly looked as though she had experienced a good deal. She was fitting a *Gauloise* cigarette into a holder, which she then lit from a lighter. After blowing out some smoke, she gave Barbara her attention.

'The principal thing,' she said, 'is to warn them about the queers.'

Again that word. Had it some special meaning?

'I suppose,' Barbara ventured, 'it's all right if they're not too queer?'

The woman shook her head.

'No. There's no such thing. I mean, if there's the least doubt, there's no doubt at all.'

'How can one tell?' asked Barbara, beginning to twig.

'Well, in the first place, anyone unmarried of thirty-five or over.'

So that was it! Micky was thirty-seven. To say that this revelation gave her a knock would be untrue. Her consciousness, being carried along, as it was, on the mid-flood of the alcoholic stream, was hardly in a way to make impact with a solid object. Moreover, the revelation was perhaps no more than the confirming of a suspicion. Still, so far as she was able, she noted that something important had been said.

'Barbara,' said Gerald, 'I want to introduce you. Mr Fantock. Miles, this is Micky's sister, Barbara. Penelope, angel!' he went on, putting his arm round the waist of the woman with the *Gauloise*, 'I want to hear all about the Seychelles. Oh, Miles,' he said, looking back and laughing, 'Barbara wants to be told the facts of life.'

The bright, uneasy eyes in the long, large head opposite her played indecisively over her face for a moment or two. They were tiny craters down which you had a glimpse of the cauldron within. Then he looked away, saying in a dry voice:

'The subject is not one I know anything about. In fact, every day I seem to learn something new.' And with that he turned his back on her.

'Don't mind him,' said a tall man who had overheard. 'He's terribly touchy. You see, he thinks we're trying to get at him *à propos* of his wife.'

'Rachel?'

'That's it, his wife Rachel. Do you know about her?'

'Not much.'

'About her and Wanda?'

'No.'

'Well, of course, we've all known what Wanda is like for years. I think it's very odd he should have

left them together. He presumably never imagined anything of the kind was possible with Rachel. Anyhow, he did leave her, to stay on a few days with Wanda in Paris. The few days have turned out to be several weeks. Apparently they've gone off to the Pyrenees and there's no news of any heads being turned for home or anything. Miles is understandably sour. He's particularly sour about the Pyrenees. I mean, that she should be getting all that extra trip abroad, while he has had to come back. He'd almost sooner it was happening right under his eyes.'

Gwenda Morgan 'Summer Flowers' , page 156 of Wood Engravings of the 1930s edited by Clare Leighton.

The tall man drank from his glass and talked on, as much to himself as to Barbara. 'Natural? Unnatural? What do the words mean? We seem to have got their meanings reversed. Natural is doing what you want to do. It is good behaviour, not vice, that is unnatural. What is called vice is surrendering to the promptings of nature, not resisting them. If, therefore -'

'You're Micky's sister, aren't you? My name's Basil Wheeler. I saw you from the other side of the room. There could be no doubt you are brother and sister. You're the image of each other. He's the most outstandingly good-looking man I know.'

Barbara's new companion gave her an irresistible smile. He stood very close to her and, between his sentences, he hummed. This musical accompaniment to his flirting gave it a kind of continuity, a liquid, flowing quality, as though it were moving effortlessly towards a known destination.

'You're well armed, I see,' looking at the sword - hum - hum - 'pretty well armed myself' - hum - and again that irresistible smile, which an enemy might have described as a leer. Unlike the other people who had talked to her, whose attention she had every moment feared to lose, this man's eyes never wandered from her person. She now felt that she preferred the former way.

'What's this' - hum - 'Micky tells me about your wanting to be told the facts of life?' - hum - hum - 'I should have thought you knew a thing or three' - hum -

'It's my boy who has to be told.'

'Ah, your boy' - hum - 'I'll bet he's good looking' - hum - 'and, therefore, the principal thing is to keep him away from the b-rs.'

Bump! A solid object. Suddenly Barbara was

sobered. Nothing she had said – indeed she had hardly spoken – and no look of hers, had given this seducer the right to use that word without her permission.

'The nuisance is,' he was saying, and his knee was rubbing against hers, 'the nuisance is' – hum – 'that I have got to leave now. I wonder whether you will lunch with me tomorrow?'

Barbara drew back.

'I'm b–d if I will!' she said and turned and moved to the window where she looked out at the April sun setting over the roofs in a gusty sky. She watched the hurrying clouds. Poor little Robin! Must he really learn the facts of life?

'Hullo,' said a voice at her shoulder. 'We met before. My name's Verney.'

Some two hundred and fifty miles away, Robin had been spending the afternoon, in the company of two boys from the village, digging out a badger's hole in a bank on the edge of a wood. They had not got down anywhere near as far as the badger, but the afternoon had not been wasted for Robin. The boys, who were older than he was, had told him certain things that had interested him very much indeed. He went to sleep that night thinking about them, and thought about them the next morning as soon as he awoke and, with hardly any intermission, throughout the day. The next day was a Sunday, and there, as soon as he awoke, these new things were with him again. As he sat in church with his grandmother behind Mr and Mrs Bateson, it seemed to him astonishing that a man and his wife should have the face to sit there together like that, as it were advertising their rude secret. This fact, and all the facts the boys had told him, seemed to him quite extraordinary and perfectly fascinating, and were to continue to seem so for many a year.

Good Things in England

Eighty years ago a remarkable woman called Florence White founded the English Folk Cookery Association. She was the first person to broadcast the good news about English food on the BBC and the first ever freelance journalist specialising in food and cookery in England. She believed that 'we had the finest cookery in the world but it has been nearly lost by neglect.' Florence worked as a governess and cook-housekeeper. In 1932 she wrote ***Good Things in England***, republished by Persephone Books. 'There isn't another book like it,' she wrote, 'but I never consider it mine. It is England's.'

She was born in 1863 and on her death in 1940 the English Folk Cookery Association seems to have died with her. She certainly tapped a rich vein in our national folk memory and her book celebrates all kinds of food from the stately home to the country cottage. What she found on her travels was a genuine love of the 'good old English dishes'. One of our duties, she believed, was to ensure that there was a complete collection of our national and regional dishes. They were not necessarily better than the food you might find in France but they were very different and it was the difference we should cherish.

What Florence White did was to advertise in papers like the *Observer* and people from all over England sent her recipes. . . *Good Things* is wonderfully nostalgic. In particular, I like a mouthwatering stew which used to be prepared in the Stoodleigh rectory during the hunting season.

Derek Cooper of BBC Radio 4's The Food Programme writing in Saga Magazine May 2000

Our Autumn 2000 books

In September we publish our second novel by Dorothy Whipple, ***They Knew Mr Knight*** (1934). In some ways it is similar to the extremely successful *Someone at a Distance*, Persephone Book No. 3: it tells an unputdownable story and has a strong moral focus, so strong in fact that we asked a vicar to write the Preface. This is part of what she has written: 'In *They Knew Mr Knight* the theme is avarice - the ancient term for love of money. Dorothy Whipple's people are no mere morality play characters, but the story reworks the folktale of a pact with the devil, the protagonist becoming ever more deeply indebted to the devil until the final reckoning and dénouement.

'The title shows a grim wit: the characters of the book are merely referred to as a shadowy "they" - and the Satanic figure is the one named. The biblical theme of sin is there in the "knew": knowledge and intimacy went hand in hand in the ancient world, always with a sense of ambivalence and danger. Dorothy Whipple shows us the minute steps Thomas takes, almost unconsciously, away from what is upright and honourable, beginning on the very first page.'

One of our readers has written: 'The tragedy of the book is Celia's limitations, her inability to help her husband in his difficult task of saving the family business, and her surrender of influence to the powerful Mr Knight. At the heart of the story is a mismanaged engineering business. . . We can imagine many scores of families who depend on the wages it pays to keep them off the dole. . . But to Celia there is only one family which matters, her own, to which she gives limitless love and attention . . . [even though] with a woman's touch in personnel (such as Flora Solomon was displaying in the Marks & Spencer of the 1930s) productivity might have been transformed. . .'

Whether or not women were encouraged, or wanted, to enter 'the outside world' is one of the strongest themes in Ruth Adam's ***A Woman's Place 1910-75*** (1975), reprinted with a new Preface by Yvonne Roberts covering the last twenty-five years. This witty, intelligent and humane book, possibly the best history of British women's lives in the twentieth century yet written, describes the changes in women's emancipation from the suffragettes to '60s Women's Lib - yet the stance is very much 'plus ça change'. Ruth Adam's final paragraph sums it all up: 'A woman born at the turn of the century could have lived through two periods when it was her moral duty to devote herself, obsessively, to her children; three when it was her duty to society to neglect them; two when it was right to be seductively "feminine", and three when it was a pressing social obligation to be the reverse; three separate periods in which she was a bad wife, mother and citizen for wanting to go out and earn her own living, and three others when she was an even worse wife, mother and citizen for not being eager to do so.' (Philippa Lewis's *Sitting in the Garden,* announced for June 2000, is postponed.)

Joan Hassall: Engravings and Drawings p.42: engraving for the NBL 1948 *Reader's Guide*.

Autre temps, autre moeurs

'Pas Devant' by E.M.Delafield, from As Others Hear Us (1937)

'Tu sais les Robinson?'

'Je sais.'

'Eh bien, crois-le ou pas. . . . La voilà qui revient avec le pouding.'

'Parle français.'

'J'allais. Seulement elle saura les noms.'

'Appelons-les quelque chose autre.'

'Oui, oui. Quelle bonne idée. Les Quoi?'

'Les Brown. Brun.'

'Les Brun. Bien. Alors: Tu sais les Brun?'

'Je sais.'

'Eh bien, ils vont arranger un - Mon Dieu, attends un moment.'

'Pourquoi?'

'Je ne peux pas le dire. Le mot est le même.'

'Comment?'

'En français comme en anglais. C'est la même chose.'

'Je ne comprends pas.'

'Ça ne fait rien. Tout à l'heure. Attends. Riz, ou pommes *stew*-ées?'

'Riz. Comment dit-on *stew* en français, convenablement?'

'Je me demandais juste. Ragôut, je pense. Mais ça parait mal, pour les pommes.'

'C'est vrai. Pommes ragôut? Ragôut de pommes? Ça me parait impossible.'

'Moi aussi. Tout-à-fait impossible. Comme les choses sont difficiles!'

'Maintenant - vite, vite! Elle va pour le sucre ou quelque chose. Les Robinson?'

'Brun.'

'Les Brun, alors. Mais vite.'

'Eh bien, ils vont avoir un divorce!'

'Ma chère!'

'C'est vrai. Mais vite - la voilà. Parlons de quelque chose autre.'

'Mais elle ne comprendra pas. Continuons à dire Brun.'

'Brun. Après quinze années!'

'Est-ce-que monsieur Robinson-?'

'BRUN.'

'Mon Dieu, Brun, je voulais dire. Est-ce-que c'est monsieur Brun qui a tort, ou madame?'

'Quelques-uns disent lui, et quelques-uns disent elle.'

'Où as-tu entendu tout ceci?'

'Eh bien, un peu par l'escalier de derrière.'

'Comment, l'escalier de derrière?'

'Mon Dieu, tu es bête! Le *backstairs*, naturellement.'

'Oh, ça. Escalier de service, on appelle ça.'

'Bon, alors, escalier de service, si c'est ça que tu veux.'

'Continuons à propos des Robin—des Brun.'

'Leur femme-de-chambre est amie avec la cuisinière des voisins de Margery. Alors comme ça je sais tout.'

'Mon Dieu, c'est excitant. . .'

'Assez drôlement, je n'ai jamais été en visite chez madame Robinson.'

'Mon Dieu, attention!'

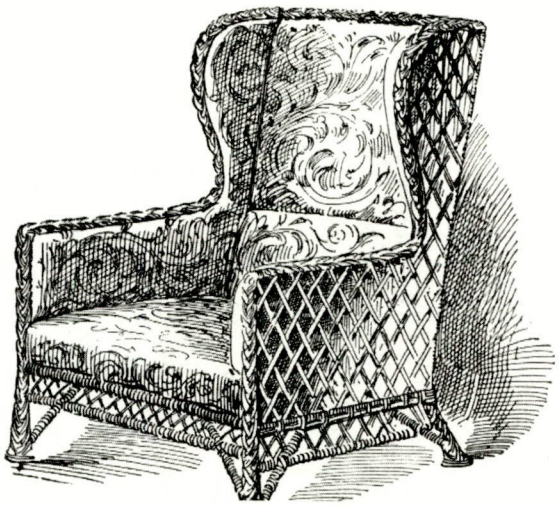
'Quoi?'

'Tu as dit Robinson - c'est a dire, Brun. Tu as dit le nom R. et tu voulais dire le nom B. Tu sais. À cause d'*elle*.'

'Mon Dieu. Nous ferons mieux d'aller dans le salon. . .ce sera beaucoup plus façile en Anglais.'

Our Summer 2000 Endpapers

Persephone Book No. 16, ***Saplings*** (1945) by Noel Streatfeild, describes a family's physical and psychological destruction during the war. The fabric was manufactured in 1938, and was designed by a woman, Marion Dorn, for the Old Bleach Linen Company, Randalstown near Belfast. It is called 'Aircraft' and shows pairs of stylised pigeons in flight on a background of natural linen. We chose it because of the date, and the imagery of aircraft being readied for the approaching war; because the imagery of birds in flight makes an oblique statement about the impossibility of children being allowed to fly freely, and their need for a secure nest; and because the pale green, dark green, pale blue, dark blue and yellow colourway we have chosen (there were five colourways in all) has echoes of saplings (green) and the RAF (blue). This one was used in the liner 'Orcades', launched in 1937 but torpedoed in 1942.



An 1890s wickerwork-chair covered with a tapestry fabric costing about 5s 6d a yard. Recommended as a chair for men in Mrs Panton's From Kitchen to Garrett (1896).

Marjory Fleming by Oriel Malet is No. 17. It was published in 1946 and evokes the life of a little girl in Scotland who lived from 1803-11. There was no question about the fabric – it had to be a shawl that Marjory might have been wrapped in. Cashmere shawls, which took an Indian weaver up to five years to make and cost as much as a London town house, were the model for the cheaper woollen copies that were manufactured from the late eighteenth-century onwards. We have chosen a paisley that, according to the Paisley Museum archivist, would probably have been made in either the Edinburgh or Paisley region in about 1810. Middle-class families in Scotland would invariably have had several simple woollen paisley shawls; when Marjory comes downstairs for the last time, she is 'so wrappped in quilts and shawls she resembled a chrysalis.'

No. 18, ***Every Eye*** (1956) by Isobel English, is about a young woman looking back on her past life during a visit to Spain. The fabric, part of David Whitehead's 1956 Iberia range, is by Louis le Brocquy, an Irish modernist painter who taught textile design at the RCA. Based on sketches he did in Spain the year before, and on photographs by Elspeth Juda, it is a dramatic design for its period; it makes implicit reference to Spain, the black and brown shapes being an image of dry-stone walls and a parched, rocky landscape, while the the bright Mediterranean yellow contrasts with the grey drabness of England, as it does throughout the book: on the bookmark we have quoted the sentence, 'the first meal in the hotel has been entirely yellow: fried eggs on a bank of saffron-coloured rice, and yellow plums whose unripe flesh still clung to the stone.'

Finally...

From this month there will be a few changes. Firstly, for those who are enjoying the *Persephone Quarterly* but not buying our books, we will offer the option of a subscription to the *Quarterly* for £10 a year. At the moment readers receive four free issues; in future we will enclose a letter with the fourth asking them if they want to: buy a book (or let us know if they have bought one in a bookshop); take out a subscription to the *PQ*; or be culled from the list. Back issues will now be £1.50 each. These changes are made necessary by the economic realities of running a small business; but although postal charges have gone up by about 20p a book, we will keep to £10 per book inc. p & p for as long as we can.

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Secondly, we will soon have 'secure ordering' on our website. This means that buyers, and particularly overseas ones, will have the convenience of buying books just by entering their name, address and credit card number. At present they can send an e-mail, or print out and fax an order form; but this does not have guaranteed safety. Don't forget that we send out the books from our office on the day we receive the order; that they make wonderful presents; and that we will wrap them in pink tissue paper for £2 extra or £5 for three, and put in a card.

At the Book at Lunchtime on 22 June the cultural historian Janet Floyd, co-editor of the recent *Domestic Space*, will talk about our cookery book, ***Good Things in England*** by Florence White. On 20 July the author and broadcaster Anne Harvey, an expert on childhood diaries, whose most recent book is *Adlestrop Revisited*, will discuss writing by children with particular reference to ***Marjory Fleming***. And on 22 September the psychiatrist Dr Jeremy Holmes will talk about Noel Streatfeild's ***Saplings***, for which he has written the Afterword.

People sometimes say to us about Persephone books that they cannot 'keep up' with reading them: one book a month has begun to be too much, given that we all have busy lives and have other books we want to read. Yet we rather assume and hope that if someone likes one of our books they will like them all. So we have decided to have a catch-up period and for the next year will publish two books at a time rather than three. But we will keep to our policy of a third book at half price ie. three for £25, and hope Persephone supporters will simply choose a book they have not yet got round to ordering.

Many of you will have talked to Vicky on the phone at some point over the last fifteen months, or met her in the office. Alas, she is going to New York for two years with her husband-to-be. If anyone, of whatever age, would like to take on the day-to-day running of the Persephone Books office – not a lot of money but a great deal of fun – please telephone or write to us.

Our books for Summer 2000 are ***Saplings*** by Noel Streatfeild, ***Marjory Fleming*** by Oriel Malet and ***Every Eye*** by Isobel English. Previous titles are listed on the order form in the centre of this *Quarterly*. The next *PQ*, containing details of our Autumn titles, will be sent out on 6 September.

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