THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

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Our Autumn 2000 Books

They Knew Mr. Knight (1934), Persephone Book No. 19, is about a 'good' woman who may not have 'waved a Suffragette banner or written a novel' but is happily preoccupied with family life. Her husband, Thomas, runs Blake's, a mismanaged engineering business; and Celia and her three children are inexorably bound up with the disaster that follows upon Thomas's meeting with a local financier named Mr. Knight.

This is the Persephone book many of you have been waiting for: having read and loved *Someone at a Distance*, the third Persephone Book and one of our bestsellers, you have scribbled notes at the bottom of the order form, written letters, telephoned, to say - more Dorothy Whipple, please.

But why is she so readable? The first quality is, surely, that she is a superb storyteller. Her books are impossible to put down; the storyline may be simple, and yet - almost mysteriously - one is carried along from first page to last. As the critic St. John Ervine wrote in 1937: 'She is one of the best story-tellers we have,' adding, 'I can say quite confidently that *They Knew Mr. Knight* is a model of story-telling. It has all the virtues that ought to be in a good story; character, good and easy style, a sense of life and people, and, above all, a story. The book moves from the word go, nor does it stop at the words "The End", for the people live so emphatically in the memory that they carry on their lives after the last page.'

Secondly, Dorothy Whipple is unusually good at people, something which was remarked on by almost every contemporary reviewer, who made comments like: 'There is a sympathy and understanding to [her] portraiture that bears the imprint of genius'; 'the author's characterisation stands on an exalted plane of excellence. . . Few authors possess Mrs. Whipple's talent'; and 'the book is a very convincing study of human nature. The reactions of each member of the Blake family . . . are brilliantly portrayed.'

Finally, *They Knew Mr. Knight* is a deeply moral novel; which is one reason why we asked a vicar (and mother) to write the Afterword, but have also added a postscript by an economist to throw a contrasting light on the business side of the book. In the tradition of writers such as Mrs. Gaskell, Winifred Holtby and Lettice Cooper, Dorothy Whipple is painstakingly accurate about the engineering works that is at the book's heart; and she is, alas, sorely topical on the subject of the amoral financier who brings the little people down with him.

As always, Dorothy Whipple is so perceptive about her characters within the context of their social milieu that comparisons with George Eliot are not out of place. A reviewer of the book observed that 'artistic realism makes good literature and Mrs. Whipple's novel is of this type. Here is a family of her own creation, getting up in the morning, eating, drinking, going to business, looking after the home. . .We get to know each of them intimately and understandingly. They are all slightly egoistic, slightly proud, slightly avaricious,

Cover: worker centring the studded tread on motor tyres at Charles Mackintosh & Sons' rubber factory (whence the 'mackintosh' raincoat), Manchester. Photograph taken by G.P.Lewis in September 1918. Source: Imperial War Museum and Working for Victory: Images of Women in WWI (1987) by Condell & Liddiard p.101, and cf. ***A Woman's Place*** *by Ruth Adam pp.54-65.*

and with all the other frailties that beset we imperfect humans.' The words could be applied to a novel that is far greater than *Mr. Knight* but which bears comparison with it - *Middlemarch.*

Dorothy Whipple was the descendant of George Eliot in another respect. *Mr. Knight* had the unusual distinction of reaching number one in the 1934 bestseller list and being shortlisted for the Vie Femina Heureuse Prize: like her predecessor she straddled the popular and the highbrow. Like her, as well, she was a writer whose heart was in the twentieth century, is so unusual is that her novelist's eye (she published twelve novels in all) made her very good at using facts readably: writing historical narrative in a way that is both human and humane is as difficult an art as writing a novel, but in ***A Woman's Place: 1910-1975*** (Persephone Book No. 20) she proved herself an artist of another kind.

To take one example - having referred to the men coming home after WWII, and the statistics of women's work in 1945, she writes: 'Living in

Midlands landscape in which her characters live and work (work is at the heart of all her novels). Fortunately, the makers of the very successful 1945 film of *They Knew Mr. Knight* realised how important it was to get the milieu right - and used 'mufflered young men who roved the streets of Nottingham with their ciné camera for local colour . . . to the delight of the young and the consternation of the modest' (Notts *Evening Post*).

One of the reasons why our second book this autumn, Ruth Adam's history of women in the camps and hostels and eating in canteens had created a passion of affection for the ordinary things of home life, for plushy armchairs by the fire and beds with sheets, and clean curtains fluttering in windows from which the black-out had been joyfully ripped down. . . The young wife who had spent her girlhood as a conscript or a directed worker asked nothing better than the kind of routine which her mother had found so frustrating and imprisoning. She was quite willing to stay at home, while the breadwinner turned out in the

cold morning dusk, and have an extra cup of tea before she started the housework. It was one of the things she had dreamed of, when she had rushed to clock-in herself, or to turn up on parade or clip tickets on the first bus.'

Throughout the book Ruth Adam describes aspects of our grandmother and mother's lives – aspects we think we know about, such as the suffragettes and the Depression and Women's Lib – and yet manages to tell us something quite new about them. She does not use fictionalised case histories as so many writers do nowadays ('Jackie was a 32-year-old housewife who had left school at 16 and now felt imprisoned by domestic chores and the demands of three young children') but generalises about women's lives in a cogent yet delightful way. Thus, in the passage above, she brings things to life by writing about 'a passion of affection' or 'it was one of the things she had dreamed of': unsentimentally but empathetically she relates the historical and economic truth to the way women felt.

Book plate of unknown origin

Ruth Adam was both wise and mildly cynical, as is evident in the marvellous ending to the book which we quote on the jacket flap and also on page 22 of this *PQ*, where she observes that over the century the pendulum has swung back and forth, back and forth, so that at various times it has been first a good thing for a woman to go out to work, and then a bad; that there were 'three separate periods in which [a woman born at the turn of the century] 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.'

For anyone young who does not understand what life has been like for her older female relations, or for anyone older who thinks they do know it all but are slightly doubtful if they really do, this is an indispensable book. Yet why is it so unique and why has it not been superseded by more recent histories of women's lives? (A question even the writer Yvonne Roberts asked us when she kindly agreed to write, as an Afterword, an overview of women's lives over the quarter of the century since Ruth Adam published her book in 1975.) There are, after all, numerous historical and polemical books, both academic and popular, and there are relevant television series. But *A Woman's Place* – even the title is a witty and thought-provoking pun – is exceptional because it combines all these qualities, the academic, the popular, the human, the polemic, the rigorous and the witty, into a work of history quite unlike any other.

The Munition-Girls

Early in ***A Woman's Place*** *Ruth Adam shows how the 'munition-girls' (see PQ cover) transformed not only women's work, but the way women were perceived - leading directly to the defeat of the anti-suffragists, and Votes for Women in 1918.*

The appointment of Lloyd George to the Ministry of Munitions in 1915 was a turning-point in the history of women in industry: he needed to use the only large untapped source of labour, in order to get the munitions made without robbing the army of men. And he knew that, because of the tension in the country, he could now break through union, class and social taboos which were usually immovable. Through him, the girls got their first chance since the Industrial Revolution of getting hold of some of the more skilled and interesting jobs which had up till now been strictly men's jobs, although there was often no physiological reason why one sex should perform them rather than the other. . .

Women's war-work developed in four stages. First, their own customary callings (food, textiles, clothing), which had been cut down at the beginning of the war, picked up again. . .

The second stage was the 'substitution' of women for men, to release the men to the forces; that is, their acceptance into jobs which were traditionally a male rôle, so that it seemed unnatural to see a female in the part. Lord Northcliffe produced a *Handbook of Employment* which listed 'New Occupations for Women', such as tramway conductors, bookstall clerks, ticket collectors, motor-van drivers, milk-deliverers, police. . .

The third stage in women's war-work was their entry into munitions. 'Dilution' was a plan for making the most of skilled craftsmen's particular skills. It consisted of introducing a set of semi-skilled or unskilled assistants, in this case women, into the process he performed, so that he could (so to speak) sub-contract that part of his operation. . . It was very difficult to get the craft unions to consider this scheme. . . The Amalgamated Society of Engineers held out longest, perhaps because, as one munition girl said: 'Engineering mankind is possessed of the unshakeable opinion that no woman can have the mechanical sense. If one of us asks humbly why such and such an alteration is not made to prevent this or that drawback to a machine she is told with a superior smile that a man has worked the machine before her for years and that therefore if there were any improvement possible it would have been made. . .'

The fourth stage of women's war-work was not reached until the increasingly desperate days of 1917-18, when they had to substitute for men in processes and manual work heavier than anything women workers had yet attempted - for instance in forging bullet-proof plates and driving overhead cranes. . .

* * *

From the middle of 1916, the women of Britain were treated with the anxious consideration and flattery offered to an invaluable servant who might otherwise give notice and leave one helpless. Public figures who had been noted anti-suffragists recanted publicly, one by one. . . Asquith now made a dramatic retraction. 'Some of my friends may think that my eyes, which for years in this matter have been clouded by fallacies and sealed by illusions, at last have been opened to the truth.'

Women and the Great War...

As Ruth Adam shows in ***A Woman's Place***, the First World War irrevocably changed women's lives, partly because of the opportunity it gave them for paid work. But immediately after the war the tide turned very sharply: 'Since the middle of 1915 they had been gallant workers, for whom no praise could be too fulsome; admired, with affectionate amusement for "playing the man" like Shakespeare's Rosalind. But now the masquerade was over; it was time to hang up the doublet and hose behind the kitchen door and get back to skirts and aprons, to keep an eye on the clock so that the breadwinner's hot tea could be slapped down in front of him the second he got in.'

It did not, of course, happen like that: the move towards women's right to employment on an equal footing with men could not be reversed. Griselda in ***William - an Englishman*** would have certainly worked as, say, a bus conductress or indeed in a munitions factory in the war and then wanted to go on working at something after the war; and of course one of the things she could not possibly have anticipated as she committed herself to the suffragette cause was that a war provoked by the death of an archduke in whom she took not the slightest interest would result, before long, in women having the vote.

Similarly, Alex in ***Consequences***: although the novel is autobiographical, E.M.Delafield back-dated it so that it did not appear too personal. Therefore, when Alex emerges from the convent it is 1908 and, for women, society has not changed that radically over the previous ten years - the war was still five years away - hence her tragedy. But when E.M.Delafield herself emerged in 1912, she rested in the country for two years but then, in 1914, was able to grasp the completely unexpected but life-changing opportunity to become a VAD. This affected things forever for her because she was able to leave home with no questions asked; gain self-respect; and acquire the emotional equilibrium to begin writing in the evenings. For Alex no such happy ending was allowed.

Even the American heroine of ***Fidelity*** realises, at the end of the book, that her future will be changed because of the war, declaring that 'it seems to me the war is going to make a new world - a whole new way of looking at things. It's as if a lot of old things, old ideas, had been melted, and were fluid now, and were to be shaped anew.'

The poet hero of ***Julian Grenfell*** would have agreed with this - it was what he was hoping for when, as an Oxford undergraduate, he wrote his philosophy book. He himself lived long enough to see his sister Monica become a VAD. 'Having been brought up in a world in which it was held that no girl could be in intimate relationship with a man for five minutes, suddenly,' as Nicholas Mosley writes, 'she found herself, with the approval of that world, dealing with masculine pain and dirt for fourteen hours a day. . . She came to look back on the war as a time in which for once she had been in contact with reality.'

Some of the authors of our books had their lives changed because of what their fathers had suffered in WWI. For example, Mollie Panter-Downes's father was killed in the first months of the war, leading her to live quietly with her mother; she began scribbling in note-books, became a published writer at the age of sixteen, and later on turned into one of our best known chroniclers of the Second World War.

...and the Blitz Observed

The Blitzkrieg began in September 1940 and is described in Persephone books by Mollie Panter-Downes, Elizabeth Berridge, Noel Streatfeild and Vere Hodgson. On the 25th the latter wrote in her 'Diary showing how Unimportant People in London and Birmingham lived through the war years' (***Few Eggs and No Oranges***, Persephone Book No. 9), 'I believe it was the foulest night so far of the blitzkrieg, but I was unaware of much of it. Thank God, I slept! When I awoke at various times, those awful roars filled the sky, followed by violent explosions - & I knew hell was loose. At 6 a.m. All Clear, and I went up the road. What a lovely moon and clear sky!

'We gather greatest damage was in Central London. A land-mine struck T.Court Road. There was not a pane of glass left in Oxford St, Regent St or T.C.Rd. I wonder how long it will be before London is a heap of ruins! St Clement Danes was struck. . . but so far not the Abbey.'

Meanwhile, Mollie Panter-Downes was sending her 'Letters from London'. For readers of *The New Yorker* it was these that made her famous in America. Her name, however, remained very little known in Britain, since her 'Letters' and short stories (***Good Evening, Mrs. Craven***, Persephone Book No. 8) were unknown over here and were also forgotten in the US due to *The New Yorker*'s policy of reprinting so little from the archive.

Several of the stories refer to the Blitz. A short story published in July 1943, 'It's the Reaction', looks back nostalgically to the days when the inhabitants of Miss Birch's London block of flats 'had got really close, like old friends, in those talks in the stuffy corridor, listening subconsciously for the warning scream, the sudden hole in the air, the slow glacier of bricks and mortar slipping into the street below. Now Mr. Masters was only a man who took off his hat politely in the lift and said "Evening" before fumbling for his key, going in, and shutting his front door. Little by little, as normality came back and the passages of Richelieu House were no longer filled with flitting figures carrying torches and pillows, the sense of being neighbours had worn off' (*Good Evening, Mrs Craven* p.139).

In her 'Letter from London' for September 14th 1940, Mollie wrote: 'For Londoners, there are no longer such things as good nights; there are only bad nights, worse nights, and better nights. Hardly anyone has slept at all in the past week. The sirens go off at approximately the same time every evening, and in the poorer districts, queues of people carrying blankets, thermos flasks, and babies begin to form quite early outside the air-raid shelters. The Blitzkrieg continues to be directed against such military objectives as the tired shopgirl, the red-eyed clerk, and the thousands of dazed and weary families patiently trundling their few belongings in perambulators away from the wreckage of their homes. After a few of these nights, sleep of a kind comes from complete exhaustion. The amazing part of it is the cheerfulness and fortitude with which ordinary individuals are doing their jobs under nerve-racking conditions. Girls who have taken twice the usual time to get to work look worn when they arrive, but their faces are nicely made up and they bring you a cup of tea or sell you a hat as chirpily as ever.

'In getting about, one first learns that a bomb has fallen near at hand by coming upon barriers across roads and encountering policemen who

point to yellow tin signs which read simply "Diversion", as though the blockage had been caused by workmen peacefully taking up drains ahead. The 'diversion' in Regent Street, where a bomb fell just outside the Café Royal and did not explode for hours, cut off the surrounding streets and made the neighbourhood as quiet as a hamlet.'

On the 21st she wrote: 'The bombers have turned their attention to the West End for the last few nights and the big stores have suffered heavily. John Lewis & Co. and others were badly damaged, but one gutted building looks much like another, and Londoners, after a brief glance, go briskly on to work. . .'

And on the 29th: 'The courage, humour, and kindliness of ordinary people continue to be astonishing under conditions which possess many of the merry features of a nightmare. . . East Enders, who had suffered most, stuck up paper Union Jacks in the heaps of rubble that used to be their homes. Women pottered placidly in and out of a big Oxford Street store which had been badly damaged but had the usual uniformed doormen standing outside its boarded-up windows, over which stickers had been pasted declaring that all departments were open.

'Things are settling down into a recognisable routine. Daylight sirens are disregarded by everyone, unless they are accompanied by gunfire or bomb explosions that sound uncomfortably near. A lady who arrived at one of the railway stations during a warning was asked politely by the porter who carried her bag, "Air-raid shelter or taxi, madam?" As anyone else here would have done, she took a taxi. To those who live in apartments, a good night is now one in which the whole block doesn't start swaying; if it merely shudders gently, people remark that things are nice and quiet tonight. . .

'The exact whereabouts of bomb damage is concealed with irritating coyness by the censorship bureau, which yesterday admitted playfully that "a church famed in a nursery rhyme" had been hit. Any child who has played oranges and lemons will be glad to step up and give you the answer, which is a sad one for those who have loved the last bits of Wren's London all their lives.'

For a serving soldier's view of the war, cf. the poem by Dirk Bogarde on p.19.

Oxford Street, September 18th 1940, from Peter Lewis's A People's War, p.71, (Popperfoto)

From Some Recent Reviews

We had some remarkable press coverage in June when ***Tell It to a Stranger*** by Elizabeth Berridge (who had been described in the *Daily Telegraph* the previous month as a 'fresh, vital voice from a complex era') appeared as the fiction 'dark horse' in the *Evening Standard*'s list of London best-sellers; a week later it was in at number 5, after novels by Linda Grant, Michael Ondaatje, Philip Roth and Mario Puzo. And in early July the biographer Sarah Bradford made it her choice for summer reading in the *Observer*.

Beryl Bainbridge in the *Daily Telegraph* also picked one of our books. She wrote: 'I have just started ***Every Eye*** by Isobel English. It is perfect holiday reading, a beautiful account of a young woman looking back on her life while on honeymoon in Spain. When it was published in 1956 John Betjeman wrote in the *Daily Telegraph:* "Sometimes, but not often, a novel comes along which makes the rest one has to review seem commonplace. Such a novel is *Every Eye*." The quality of Isobel English's writing is incredible.'

In July Caroline Moore devoted a leading review in the *Sunday Telegraph* to two of our books, ***Every Eye*** and ***Saplings***, and began by - extremely flatteringly - describing our covers as 'an elegantly plain silver-grey, enlivened within by stunning endpapers, chosen for each novel from fabric designs of the right period by someone with an eye of genius', and adding, 'Perhaps, after all, this is something of a drawback: these titles would make perfect bath-time reading, were they not too handsome to maltreat.' Having described the 'immensely readable' Noel Streatfeild ('like a dark inversion of the author's best-known book, the children's classic *Ballet Shoes*') and *Every Eye* ('the more accomplished book [of the two]; beautifully written and coolly crafted') she concluded: 'Not all Persephone's reprints are Great Literature, but all that I have read are brought to life by some distinctively vivid or evocative quality.'

In May ***Few Eggs and No Oranges*** by Vere Hodgson was reviewed in the *TLS*: 'These diaries capture the sense of living through great events and not being overwhelmed by them; a kind of unspoken edict operated to keep people's spirit high, against the odds, since low morale was strongly associated with a want of patriotism. Hodgson describes herself and her associates as "ordinary" and "unimportant", but her diaries display an extraordinary - though widespread - capacity for not giving way in the face of horrors and difficulties. A gift to the social historian, they also, in a general sense, make inspiriting reading.'

In the same month the *Church Times*'s cookery writer told its readers: 'If you are anxious to make nettle haggis, Queen Henrietta's Morning Broth or authentically English pies and puddings of every kind, you need only turn to Florence White's newly reprinted ***Good Things in England***. [She] presented her research into real English cookery in 1932 as "a Practical Cookery book for Everyday use, containing Traditional and Regional Recipes suited to Modern Tastes. . ." Her tiffins, comfits and frumenties plunge us into a world of fiction and history. But for those bored with supermarket cuisine, there is a wealth of characterful recipes.'

Finally, in its July list John Sandoe Books called ***Marjory Fleming*** 'a rare delight', ***Saplings*** 'a fine adult novel' and ***Every Eye*** 'subtle and unusual'.

Margaret Forster & Marjory

Oriel Malet met the novelist and biographer Margaret Forster when the latter was writing her biography of Daphne du Maurier, one of Oriel's closest friends. Margaret Forster, hard at work on her new book *Good Wives*, read ***Marjory Fleming*** (Persephone Book No. 17) and wrote last month: 'What an extra-ordinary story, & how brilliantly you tell it - I found it enthralling & touching & quite creepily accurate about the feelings of such a child as Marjory. You say somewhere that all children like her go through this kind of emotional battle with their sense of self (well, you don't say it in those words, I took this meaning from what you do say) & of course I identified with it because I was certainly like Marjory at that age, to the horror of my family. Page 109 pretty well describes how I remember feeling, & so I had no problem at all empathising with her. I think the *restraint* you show, in the language you use, & the control in the style are/were remarkable for someone of twenty - no hint of the over-writing so much more common in Those of Tender Years.

Oriel Malet, 1945, the year she wrote Marjory Fleming

'And naturally I laughed quite a lot at the poems and especially the entries in the journal. My favourite was 'At perth poor James the first did die/That wasn't a joy and luxery'; but all of them put William McGonagall to shame. I'm sure everything you've imagined about Marjory is true, but it's the bits *known* to be true, like those poems/letter/journals that surprise. I know it was common, but fancy allowing oneself to be parted from a child for three years - incredible, whatever the child was like & whatever the reasons. But I must say that tho' I found Marjory totally convincing, I found it hard to believe in Isa/bella. She's just *too* good, too patient, too pious and worthy. Nancy was much more believable, & all the boys were - loved the teasing of Willie by Nancy especially.

'Anyway, Oriel, such a *pleasure* to read. Were you pleased with Persephone's production? I think it looks so elegant, so how a book should look, quiet & serene, with no brash shrieking cover, the print clear, the paper smooth, the endpapers charming - as an artefact, never mind the content, it is perfect . . .'

And in July a contributor to the *Catholic Herald* had written: 'My favourite Scottish poet is not Robert Burns but Marjory Fleming. . . Like a Jane Austen heroine she cherished romantic notions about admirers ("In my travels I met with a handsome lad named Charles Balfour Esq. & from him I got ofers of marage. . .") If Marjory had been spared to us, I think she might have grown up to be a novelist of comparable stature' - or, at least been the author of a book like Daisy Ashford's *The Young Visiters*. Our extract on the next page is a tribute to both these children.

from: The Young Visiters

Daisy Ashford (1881-1972) wrote The Young Visiters in 1890. Published in 1919, it became 'the book over which half London is laughing, the other half having to wait while more copies are being printed.' Katherine Mansfield reviewed it and wrote that the 'amazing' author may appear very sophisticated but 'remains a little child with a little child's vision of her particular world. That she managed to write it down and make a whole round novel of it is a marvel almost too good to be true. But there it is, and even while the grown-up part of us is helpless with laughter we leap back with her into our nine-year-old self where the vision is completely real and satisfying.' J.M.Barrie, who wrote a preface, encouraged the original publisher, Chatto & Windus, to insert paragraphs; we have removed these. This extract appeared in Stella Martin Currey's One Woman's Year (Nelson, 1953).

Next morning while imbibing his morning tea beneath his pink silken quilt Bernard decided he must marry Ethel with no more delay. I love the girl he said to himself and she must be mine but I somehow feel I can not propose in London it would not be seemly in the city of London. We must go for a day in the country and when surrounded by the gay twittering of the birds and the smell of the cows I will lay my suit at her feet and he waved his arm wildly at the gay thought. Then he sprang from bed and gave a rat tat at Ethel's door. Are you up my dear he called. Well not quite said Ethel hastilly jumping from her downy nest. Be quick cried Bernard I have a plan to spend a day near Windsor Castle and we will take our lunch and spend a happy day. O Hurrah shouted Ethel I shall soon be ready as I had my bath last night so wont wash very much now. No dont said Bernard and added in a rarther fervent tone through the chink of the door you are fresher than the rose my dear no soap could make you fairer. Then he dashed off very embarrased to dress. Ethel blushed and felt a bit excited as she herd the words and she put on a new white muslin dress in a fit of high spirits. She looked very beautifull with some red roses in her hat and the dainty red ruge in her cheeks looked quite the thing. Bernard heaved a sigh and his eyes flashed as he beheld her and Ethel thorght to herself what a fine type of manhood he reprisented with his nice thin legs in pale broun trousers and well fitting spats and a red rose in his button hole and rarther a sporting cap which gave him a great air with its quaint check and little flaps to pull down if necesarry. Off they started the envy of all the waiters. They arrived at Windsor very hot from the jorney and Bernard at once hired a boat to row his beloved up the river. Ethel could not row but she much enjoyed seeing the tough sunburnt arms of Bernard tugging at the oars as she lay among the rich cushons of the dainty boat. She had a rarther lazy nature but Bernard did not know of this. However he soon got dog tired and suggested lunch by the mossy bank. Oh yes said Ethel quickly opening the sparkling champaigne. Dont spill any cried Bernard as he carved some chicken. They eat and drank deeply of the charming viands ending up with merangs and choclates. Let us now bask under the spreading trees said Bernard in a passuinate tone.

from: Random Commentary

In 1966 Dorothy Whipple assembled extracts from her working notebooks and diaries.

I am in despair about *They Knew Mr. Knight.* I have only to start writing a novel to become flat and stale. A short story invigorates me, a novel depresses me during all the weary months I am writing it. I ought to remember that, so far, it has always been all right in the end. But oh! What has to be gone through before an end can be reached.

I went to the Assizes to collect material for Thomas's trial. A dreadful fog outside had got into the Shire Hall, dimming the already bad lights. . . Enter the Judge in a little round wig and red gown, with rather a pantomime air about him - looked somehow like a stage property. A loose, spare man, he sat in unconventional attitudes, his hands in his pockets most of the time. He looked patient and tired. I think all the judges I have seen looked patient and tired. . .

I begin the second draft of my book. The first is very scrappy. I don't see my way with the book yet. . . I don't like having to concoct plots, I like doing people. . .

In the full tide of working happily on my book, my typewriter went wrong. I was two hours without it and my temper was damaged. . .

Having got permission, I went to Deering Street Engineering works to get copy. The place where they were casting was like Dante's Inferno. I looked with respect at the men padding about in the thick black dust on the floors. They were so hot, so dirty, so efficient with the terrifying streams of white-hot metal and the menacing furnaces. I wondered how on earth they stood it, day after day after day. The world of men is so different from the world of women. It is a wonder they speak the same language or even understand one another. Probably they don't. . .

I think I shall begin my book again now that I know what is going to happen to everybody. Yes, I think I shall begin it again - the thought of that fills me with excitement. . .

I feel this novel is spoilt by appearing as a serial. I am irritated by the captions 'The pleasantest novel of the year'. It isn't pleasant and the year is over or not begun. 'An ordinary, everyday family, the Blakes, who found a fairy god-father in the local financier.' Terrible, terrible! Knight is their *evil genius*, not their fairy god-father. . .

But I must get on - the idiocy of letting the early chapters appear in print before the end is finished! I deserve all the worry I get.

The first instalment of *Mr. Knight* appeared in the Christmas number of *Good Housekeeping* today. It reads like an adequate, rather commonplace novel. It reads quite well, but it isn't what I wanted it to be. Stupendous advertisements in newspapers. . .

I am annoyed to get a postcard, through *Good Housekeeping*, from a niggling Scot in Dundee who objects to my saying in the serial that the children 'shrieked silently' at the sight of Freda's perm. 'Why spoil a fine story with such stuff?' he asks. I should like to biff him on the head and waste a good hour looking through Shakespeare for poetic licence, and don't find a single instance!

Our Readers Write

Extracts from some of the letters we received earlier in the year

'I have never written to a publisher before, but I want to let you know how much I appreciated the re-publication of ***Someone at a Distance***. When I was a girl we did know about Dorothy Whipple, but were too intellectually snobbish to read her. . . Now one can see, again, how perceptive and subtle those women authors were. And then your edition is so elegant; after the semolina paper of —— your book was a pleasure to read. . . ' HB, Edinburgh

'Everyone in my reading group found something to enjoy in ***The Home-Maker***. We thought Dorothy Canfield Fisher built the tension extremely well and we spent some time discussing the ending - was it happy, or disastrous? How would they continue to live a lie ("but they'd been living a lie for years already", someone commented). We thought the first two chapters were brilliant - the portrayal of this woman, driven by a sense of duty, destroying her family without realising for an instant what she is doing - it was absolutely chilling.' EM, Norwich

'I much enjoyed "Eighteen months in Clerkenwell", now easily visualising six large tables and an enamel teapot. But what tea do you prefer?. . . So ***The Home-Maker*** has sold fewest copies! That is the one, along with ***It's Hard to be Hip***, that I selected for my daughter-in-law. . . who would never, ever consider staying at home. . . Which are your bestsellers, if one may put it in those terms? ***Consequences*** was unique. ***Farewell Leicester Square*** shifts one's perspective. One is altered by these readings.' DB, Le Touquet

Re ***Farewell Leicester Square***: 'What a wonderful book!! I am so glad to have had the opportunity to read it, as I believe it is unique. Jewish books (excellent though many are) tend to be either of the Almonds & Raisins-folksy type, or the Brothers-B.Rubens, emotion wracking type; but this one is searingly subtle and really does break taboos . . . The refusal of Victor Gollancz is so revealing, particularly with hindsight. As always, Persephone - a brilliant job on your part!!!' TM, Nottingham.

'I have really enjoyed reading ***Good Things in England*** and found my mouth watering. It was like finding a box of delicious treasures and enjoying them all. My first cookery lessons were at school in Leicester during the war; we made jacket potatoes with grated cheese. Our teacher sent things to the men in the Merchant Navy and we sang the last verse of "Eternal Father strong to save."' MT, Bristol

'I picked up ***Fidelity*** late on Saturday night, and finished it last night (if only I hadn't had to go to work on Monday!) I can't believe it ever went out of print. I particularly enjoyed the structure, the way the narrative moved around in time. As soon as I read the first few pages, I was hooked. I also liked the way that Ruth's actions were shown to affect everyone around her, even many years after the elopement. . . Wonderful.' LB, Australia

'I was knocked out by ***Fidelity***. I just can't get over when it was written.' SS, Leamington Spa

'What beautiful books! I would love to buy them all but must ration myself. ***The Victorian Chaise-longue*** was so terrifying & thought-provoking, & ***Someone at a Distance*** excellent.' JSH, London

'After Tea' by Dorothy Whipple

appeared in Cornhill magazine in January 1937 and in After Tea and Other Stories in 1941; it is typical of Dorothy Whipple's irony, perception, humour and compassion.

They had something to say to her, they told Christine. They would say it after tea.

Mr. and Mrs. Berry always fixed the time for everything. They arranged life in time-tables. Perhaps because nothing of importance happened to them, they liked to make unimportant things important. By fixing a walk, say, for three-thirty, the walk and the hour were made significant. One could look forward to three-thirty, refer frequently to three-thirty, get ready for three-thirty, announce that it was just three-thirty and with satisfaction set off. A walk, taken like that, was much more of an event than a mere exit from the garden gate as soon as a wish to walk occurred.

Mr. Berry was a Civil Servant, but if anything of importance happened to him at his office, which was unlikely, he never said so.

While Mr. Berry was at his office, Mrs. Berry stayed at home, looking after herself. Mrs. Berry was devoted to the care of herself and she expected the same devotion from Christine.

The neighbours were sorry for Christine.

'That poor girl,' they said to each other as Mrs. Berry's voice fluted from the garden all the summer long.

'Christine, I'll have my orange juice now.'

'Bring my rug, Christine, I find it rather chilly.'

'Just get my sunshade from the corner of my wardrobe, Christine. Well, if it's not there, it's somewhere else. Don't be stupid, dear.'

'They say an only child is spoilt,' said the neighbours to each other. 'But this one isn't. She can't call her soul her own.'

Mrs. Berry arranged Christine's life in time-table too. Two mornings a week, she sent Christine into town to do the shopping. Mrs. Berry did not care to go into town; it was too fatiguing. She did not care for people, either, and there were, unfortunately, so many of them. So she sent Christine to the shops. On the other mornings, she arranged what Christine should do to help Bertha, the maid, in the house.

In the afternoons, Christine took Mrs. Berry for her walk. Mrs. Berry leaned on Christine's arm, and as she was a heavy woman and a great leaner, she almost sawed Christine's forearm in two.

'I think I'll come round to the other side now, Mother,' said Christine from time to time, letting the other forearm take its turn.

When mornings and afternoons were spent in this way, it seemed reasonable to Christine that she should have the evenings to herself. But in spite of a recent fierce struggle, she could not get them. She could not even get two evenings to attend the French lectures at the University.

'They're free,' she said, with tears of exasperation in her eyes. 'It's not as if I was asking you to pay anything for me.'

'Don't be impertinent, dear,' said Mrs. Berry.

She explained that cost was not the point. The maid Bertha was already out two nights a week.

'But the lectures aren't on the same nights as Bertha's nights,' protested Christine.

'No, but if Bertha is out two nights a week and

you are also out two nights a week, it makes everything very unsettled. Besides, your father likes you to be in when he comes home.'

'I don't know why,' sighed Christine. 'It's not as if we ever did anything.'

'I don't know what's come over you,' said Mrs. Berry. 'You're getting very disagreeable.'

'Can I go to a lecture once a week then?' persisted Christine.

'I don't know,' said Mrs. Berry. 'I shall have to see what your father says.'

So Christine waited with what patience she could. She was determined to improve her French somehow. She was determined to make up the deficiencies in her education of which, at nineteen, she was uncomfortably conscious. How could she keep pace with other girls if she didn't *know* anything, she asked herself furiously.

At school, her progress had been extremely hampered by Mrs. Berry's headaches. Whenever Mrs. Berry had a headache, she kept Christine at home. When Christine returned to school, she found she had lost her place in form. This happened so often that Christine, a clever child, lost heart and gradually relinquished her attempts to keep up. It was no good trying, she felt.

But lately she had been fired with a desire to know something, to be something. Her friend Mary had gone off to London and was living a grand independent life with a flat of her own and a job of her own. When Mary wrote to ask Christine to join her, Christine tore the letter into tiny shreds so that no one should be able to piece together the preposterous, enchanting suggestion. If she could not even get permission to spend two nights a week at the French lectures, how could she hope to be allowed to go and spend her whole time in London? Mary and other girls might go off and pursue careers in London and elsewhere, but she had to stay at home.

She did, however, pursue a career of her own in secret. She entered for competitions in the literary journals. When she went into town to do the shopping, she rushed into the Public Library to see what she could go in for next.

The assistants there were quite familiar with the sight of the one they called 'the girl with the parcels'. Christine always had so many, because Mrs. Berry did not believe in having things sent up. She believed in watching the cutting of the bacon, the weighing of the butter, and though she did not do this herself, she sent Christine to do it. And the bacon being cut and the butter being weighed, she believed in bringing them home there and then, in case the grocer, left to himself, should palm off some other bacon, some other butter.

So Christine, with parcels packed into the basket and dangling also from every finger, visited the Reading Room of the Public Library to go through the literary journals. She put down the basket and untwisted the string from her bleached fingers with relief. She collected the journals and sat down. She turned the pages with haste and excitement. Sometimes there was no mention of her, but sometimes 'Medea' had won a prize of two guineas, one guinea, or ten-and-sixpence for a set of verses, a short story or a Limerick. After such an announcement, Christine collected her parcels and hurried from the Library with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, and for days was down first in the morning to intercept the postman. For these activities must be kept secret. She didn't know exactly why; but secret they must be kept.

'We all have our secrets,' she excused herself to herself.

Her mother, she knew, always had chocolates

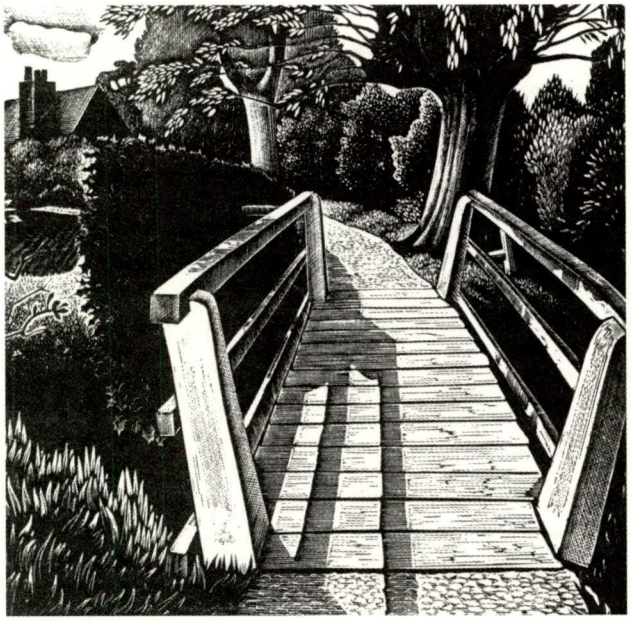
hidden in a corner of a drawer. She never brought them out to hand about. Her mother had chocolates hidden in a drawer and she, Christine, had nine pounds in notes hidden among the neat rolls of her mended stockings. It was the same thing. Human beings evidently were like that.

But although she knew about her mother's chocolates, had always known, she hoped her mother did not know about the nine pounds.

Perhaps it was that, she thought with sudden apprehension, perhaps it was the secreted money they were going to tell her about after tea.

Well, even if it was, she thought, she would have to wait. Nothing would induce them to disclose before the appointed time.

This habit of holding things back, of making them portentous, seemed to her most absurd. So many things about her parents seemed absurd, petty, tyrannical now. She didn't know when or how she had become critical and rebellious, but she was now both.



'Footbridge' (1946) by Barbara Greg, taken from British Wood Engraving of the Twentieth Century (1980) by Albert Garratt

'I'm not treated half so well as Bertha,' she told them. 'I've no wages and I've no time off.'

It was this last outrageous remark that made Mr. and Mrs. Berry decide to tell her what they had intended to keep to themselves for another two years or even perhaps as long as they lived, letting it out only in their wills. But now they would tell her. They would bring her to her senses. Hers might be the accepted behaviour of the modern girl, but they would not put up with it. They would end it by explaining matters. They would tell her after tea.

At tea, Christine felt inclined to giggle. The atmosphere of the drawing-room was heavy with presage. Mr. Berry, fair where he was not bald, small and solemn, sat on one side of the fire. Mrs. Berry, fair and fuzzy, solemn but not small, sat on the other. Christine, slender, dark, glowing, and quite unlike either of them, sat between.

No-one spoke. The clock ticked. The fire fell softly. When Mrs. Berry drank tea, the resultant swallow sounded very loud. It made Christine more than ever inclined to giggle. She suppressed her smiles behind a biscuit. How could they hold things back like this? Why didn't they come out with it, whatever it was? Even if it was about the money, why didn't they come out with it?

'Will you have some more tea, James?' enquired Mrs. Berry.

'Thank you, no,' said James.

'You may clear away, Christine,' said Mrs. Berry.

Bertha was out.

Christine jumped up with alacrity. She seized the three-legged cake-stand and swung with it out of

the room, endangering the Madeira. She came back for the tray and bore it out. She came back to fold up the table and the cloth.

Now for it. Now she would have to tell about her competitions and she didn't want to. She didn't want to at all. She wanted to keep something for herself.

'Close the door,' said Mrs. Berry.

'Oh, must we have the door closed?' said Christine. 'It's hot in here and Bertha's out. She can't listen.'

'Close the door,' said Mrs. Berry.

Yes, it was high time they told her. One could not even have the doors as one wanted them in one's own house without question these days.

'Your father and I have something to tell you, Christine,' said Mrs. Berry when Christine was reseated. 'James, I think you'd better.'

James Berry gave a preliminary cough and pulled down his cuffs. He collected, as it were, Christine's attention. Although that was unnecessary, because he already had it.

'I want you to prepare yourself for something of a shock, Christine,' he said.

Christine smiled. She was prepared, she thought, and it wouldn't be a shock.

'You are a sensible girl, on the whole,' conceded Mr. Berry. 'And I think you will be able to stand it. We did not intend to tell you until you were twenty-one. If then.'

Mr. Berry paused and Christine stared. This could not be about the money.

'We feel now that it would be better if you realised the exact position. You have been somewhat, shall we say, restive and undutiful lately,' said Mr. Berry. 'You have upset your mother on several occasions. I say your mother, Christine, but there I come to the crux of the matter.'

Christine stared intently. What was coming? Something important this time. Something vital.

'She is not your mother, Christine,' said Mr. Berry. 'Neither am I your father. We are not your parents and you are not our child. We took you from a Home when you were two years old. Your own parents were then dead.'

Christine sat quite still, staring at the man she had hitherto believed to be her father. The colour drained slowly from her cheeks.

'You must not take it too much to heart,' said Mr. Berry. 'Everything shall be as before as far as we are concerned. We shall continue to do in the future what we have done for you in the past. But we think a little gratitude on your part would be more seemly. We think it is best that you should know what has been done for you.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Berry.

The colour was coming back now to Christine's cheeks. It deepened to a glow. Her eyes shone. Never had they seen such a lighting up of her face. This, they thought, was gratitude. Visible, satisfactory gratitude. How wise they had been to tell her.

They waited, for she was obviously going to speak when she could master her very proper emotion.

She leaned forward and they leaned forward, too, to accept.

'So you're not my parents after all?' she asked rather breathlessly. 'I'm not your child? I'm no relation to you at all?'

'No,' they said.

'I can't take it in,' she said. 'I can't believe it.'

'It's true,' said Mrs. Berry. 'I just walked through the Home and took the one with curly hair, didn't I, James?'

James signified gravely that this was so.

'You didn't legally adopt me? You didn't sign any papers?' asked Christine.

'No, there was nothing of that sort asked for seventeen years ago,' said Mr. Berry.

'Besides, it meant settling money and so on,' said Mrs. Berry. 'We didn't think it necessary. We always meant to treat you as our own daughter and we always have.'

'Then you are not bound to me in any way and I am not bound to you?' asked Christine.

'Only by such bonds as we have forged,' said Mr. Berry sententiously. 'The bonds of affection.'

The light persisted in Christine's face.

'I ought to have guessed,' she murmured. 'Hiding those chocolates, for instance. No *mother* would do that. And this idea that you ought always to be getting something *out* of me. I felt it, you know – subconsciously. There were hundreds of indications. Why on earth couldn't I see?'

The faces of Mr. and Mrs. Berry were slowly and simultaneously assuming an expression of stupefaction, but she startled it away by throwing her arms up towards the ceiling and bursting into laughter.

They were alarmed. The shock had been too much for her. They had thought she was taking it so well, but it had made her hysterical.

'Christine,' said Mr. Berry sternly. 'You must control yourself.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Berry.

Christine wiped her eyes.

'You're right. I must,' she said. 'But it's so marvellous.'

'Marvellous?' they enquired.

'Yes, marvellous. I'm not your child. You're not my parents. You adopted me for your own pleasure. I suppose you felt out of it because you had no children. I had curly hair. I was ornamental and you thought I'd be useful later. I have been useful. Useful and wretched. You've had quite as much out of me as I've had out of you. I thank you very much for what you've done, but I shan't stay.'

It was their turn to be struck dumb. They gaped.

'No, I shan't stay,' said Christine, getting up and still wiping her eyes. 'When nature provides parents one can't do anything but put up with them. But I can. You chose me when I had no voice in the matter, but now I have and I don't choose you. You are not at all the sort of parents I should choose. By the way, do you happen to know my name?'

They were still too dumbfounded to speak.

'My name,' said Christine. 'I should like to know my name, please.'

'Your name,' spluttered Mr. Berry, suddenly finding his voice, 'is Higgins.'

'Oh,' said Christine. 'Well, it's mine anyway. Now, don't take this too much to heart. You'll probably get someone to do for you what I have done, but I'm afraid you'll have to pay her. I shall go to Mary for the present. I have enough money to keep me until I get a job. I made it in competitions, you know. I shall go into service if all else fails. I've always envied Bertha.'

She made for the door.

'You're not going *now*?' cried Mrs. Berry.

'Yes, I'm going now,' said Christine. 'I'll return these clothes to you as soon as I can get others. Goodbye and thank you so very much for telling me.'

'James!' cried Mrs. Berry.

But what could James do?

'Steel Cathedrals' by Dirk Bogarde, 1943

It seems to me, I spend my life in stations.
Going, coming, standing, waiting.
Paddington, Darlington, Shrewsbury, York.
I know them all most bitterly.
Dawn stations, with a steel light, and waxen figures.
Dust, stone, and clanking sounds, hiss of weary steam.
Night stations, shaded light, fading pools of colour.
Shadows and the shuffling of a million feet.
Khaki, blue, and bulky kitbags, rifles gleaming dull.
Metal sound of army boots, and smoker's coughs.
Titter of harlots in their silver foxes.
Cases, casks, and coffins, clanging of the trolleys.
Tea urns tarnished, and the greasy white of cups.
Dry buns, Woodbines, Picture Post and Penguins;
and the blaze of magazines.
Grinding sound of trains, and rattle of the platform gates.
Running feet and sudden shouts, clink of glasses from the buffet.
Smell of drains, tar, fish and chips and sweaty scent, honk of taxis;
and the gleam of cigarettes.
Iron pillars, cupolas of glass, girders messed by pigeons;
the lazy singing of a drunk.
Sailors going to Chatham, soldiers going to Crewe.
Aching bulk of kit and packs, tin hats swinging.
The station clock with staggering hands and callous face,
says twenty-five-to-nine.
A cigarette, a cup of tea, a bun,
and my train goes at ten.

September

When she gets to **W** *for* **whale**, *something strikes Pippa. She shifts* **Ned** *off her lap and paces up and down the kitchen...*

It's just jolly odd how each picture in the alphabet book, portrays either a **HEALTH HAZARD** *or something threatened with* **EXTINCTION**....

Poor, suspect **apple**, *coated in* **Alar**, *poor* **egg** *and* **ice cream**, *full of* **salmonella**...*poor* **cow**, *with its bovine brain disease* ...*poor, Toxicara-carrying* **Dog**... *poor rabid* **Fox**.. *and radio-active* **Lamb**.....

...*Poor, threatened* **Panda**, **Camberwell Beauty Butterfly**, *and* **Rhino**... *poor* **Tiger**... *poor, sickly* **Seal**, *in its polluted* **Sea**... *poor, wretched* **Whale** ... *poor, extinct* **Quagga**.

There are a number of health hazards in the picture to the left. How many can **YOU** find?

Posy Simmonds in The Spectator, *September 1989*

Good Things in England

Mincemeat

Mrs. Brewitt, The Priory, Melton Mowbray

INGREDIENTS: Apples 4 lb.; finely chopped suet, stoned raisins, currants, 2 lb. of each; granulated sugar 2 lb.; lemon the grated rinds of 3, and juice of one; mixed spice to taste; salt ½ oz.; brandy or wine, or both, to moisten.

N.B.—Do not let any flour of any kind touch the suet, or the mincemeat will ferment.

Modern note: we halve this recipe and use 1lb grated carrots and 1lb grated apples (Bramleys). And add 1lb sultanas to the 1lb each of suet, raisins and currants; 8 oz of flaked almonds and ditto of candied peel; a tablespoon each of allspice and cinnamon; and the juice of two oranges; and we leave out the salt. However, these extras make the mincemeat less economical. A recipe that is well worth making a couple of months in advance, the easiest pastry to use it with is 8oz plain flour beaten or magimixed with 4oz butter, a teaspoon of sugar and some orange juice.

Rhubarb Chutney

Mrs. Newcome

INGREDIENTS: Rhubarb 2 lb.; sugar 2 lb.; sultanas 1 lb.; vinegar 1 pint; salt 1 oz.; ginger 1 oz.; onion 1; pepper 1 teaspoonful.

METHOD

1. Peel and cut up the rhubarb; peel and chop up the onion finely.
2. Bruise the ginger and tie it in a piece of muslin, put all with the rest of the ingredients into a heavy English or Scottish aluminium saucepan or preserving pan and boil till it thickens.

Modern note: 5lb of peeled and chopped apples, pears, tomatoes or plums can be substituted for the rhubarb, and a tablespoon of ground ginger for the ounce of fresh ginger; one onion is only enough if it's huge; and a bit more vinegar or some water may be necessary, depending on whether the preserving pan has a lid. The mixture should simmer for nearly three hours.

Old English Plum Cake

From South Notts.

INGREDIENTS: Flour 2 lb.; butter 6 oz.; lard 4 oz.; cream of tartar 2 teaspoonfuls; bicarbonate soda 1 teaspoonful; currants 1 lb.; raisins ½ lb.; mixed peel ½ lb.; moist sugar ½ lb.; eggs 3; milk ¾ pint.
TIME: 2½ to 2¾ hours to bake.

METHOD

1. Sift 1¼ lb. flour.
2. Rub in butter and lard.
3. Sieve cream of tartar and bicarbonate of soda with the other ¼lb. flour; and
4. Blend all the four together.
5. Wash, pick and stone the fruit, cut peel finely and add to the flour.
6. Whisk the eggs, stir the milk to them, and
7. Use to moisten the cake.
8. Beat it up well and quickly.
9. Have a greased cake tin lined with paper ready, put in the mixture.
10. Bake in a good oven for 2¼ to 2¾ hours reducing the heat towards the end, and putting a folded paper over the top.

Our Winter 2000 books

We publish two books in November: the first is ***Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*** (1938) by Winifred Watson, a light-hearted, funny and touching novel, published in facsimile with the original line drawings and a Preface by Henrietta Twycross-Martin, the Persephone reader who discovered it. The TLS wrote: 'Miss Pettigrew is entirely delightful and her adventures, incredible and impossible in a realistic novel, become entirely convincing in the wild and inconsequent atmosphere created by Miss Watson. The heroine is an elderly spinster almost at the end of her tether; she has governessed a long series of deplorable children and been tyrannised over by their deplorable parents. . . when. . . by a mistake of the agency, she is sent to the flat of a cabaret dancer who asks no questions but involves her immediately in her highly unrespectable and astonishing affairs. Her calm acceptance of the mildly unmoral atmosphere of her new friend does not make Miss Pettigrew any less precise herself, and her tolerance and tenderness add a note of depth to an otherwise deliciously light and frothy story.' We are confident that this distinctly unusual book will be a mainstay of your Christmas present list.

'It was prompt ten when I first rang'

Our second book, also highly suitable as a present, is ***Consider the Years 1938-1946*** by Virginia Graham. We have already reprinted two of her poems, 'Somewhere in England' and 'Aunts' in past issues of the PQ. Joyce Grenfell's close friend, Virginia Graham contributed a great deal to the Grenfell *oeuvre* and was in fact the better poet. In 1960 Joyce Grenfell wrote to her: 'Darling Ginnie, This is me writing you a Fan letter. In this pretty bedroom I have lain in the four poster bed reading the collection of your poems 1938-46 and they are so good. And so moving. It is a most remarkable evocation of a period and a mood - moods - and recalls those difficult days with real power. You are a clever gal. So I write now, fifteen years later, to say thank you darling.' Forty years on we have the same emotion: they are wonderful poems, a few of them touching greatness, a few of them touching sentimentality, but all of them interesting and evocative. The Preface is written by Anne Harvey, who sets them in context and tells us something about Virginia Graham's life and work.

Finally, in November we are bringing out our first CD, eighteen tracks lasting fifty minutes of ***Café Music*** by composers such as Tchaikovsky, Elgar, Kreisler and Drdla. Two talented young musicians, Dominic Moore and Daniel Becker, who are good friends to Persephone, have made the recording. What has it got to do with women? you may ask. Absolutely nothing. Except, perhaps, isn't the point of café music to put women in the mood?

Plus ça change

From A Woman's Place, concluding with the paragraph that appears on the jacket flap.

The home-and-motherhood school of thought acquired some unexpected allies in the late 1940s. Since the earliest days of the Women's Movement, it had been the highly educated young women who fought for their right to a career. Wives' attitudes to going out to work have always been in reverse ratio to the economic necessity to do so. At the top of the pro-work scale were the wives whose husbands were able and eager to keep them in comfort without their stirring a finger to earn money; and at the bottom were those who had to go out, in addition to housework and child-minding, in order to prevent the family from starving.

"I WISH YOU WEREN'T SO MODERN, MOTHER. IT'S TERRIBLY OUT OF DATE."
Punch (1930)

But now there was a change of opinion. The Royal Commission on Population, originally appointed to examine a falling birth-rate, reported, in 1949, that it had discovered a curious change in family building habits, that it was now the top section of the Registrar-General's occupational groups which tended to favour large families, whereas ever since the introduction of birth-control the reverse had been true. . .

It was the graduate wives, making a career of motherhood and setting the fashion for large families, who were mainly responsible for spreading the teachings of Dr. John Bowlby among the general public in Britain. . . His book, *Child Care and the Growth of Love,* described the damage done to babies and infants by early and prolonged separation from mothers or mother-substitutes. Conscientious young mothers who drank it all in became afraid to leave the baby at all in case it developed 'maternal deprivation'...

The demand for women to change their colour, like chameleons, to fit the background of their period was one of the penalties of the speed at which their emancipation had been accomplished...

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.

Our Autumn 2000 Endpapers

Persephone Book No. 19 is ***They Knew Mr. Knight*** (1934) by Dorothy Whipple. The fabric on the endpaper, like the one for *Someone at a Distance* (Persephone Book No. 3), encapsulates both domestic connotations and a hint of menace; the rust brown can be seen as an allusion to industrial machinery and to the brownish smoke that used to pervade Midlands towns such as 'Trentham' (Nottingham), and the black is menacing because it is the dominant colour in a design of the leaves and flowers which are so dear to the heroine of the book. The fabric was designed by Reco Capey, the inspiration behind the Royal College of Art's textile department during the '20s and '30s. He worked almost entirely with block prints: they have an appropriately elemental, manual quality and also necessitate a reliance on tools and precision which suits a novel about an engineering business.

Drawing by David Gentleman in House into Home by Elizabeth Kendall (Dent, 1962)

For ***A Woman's Place***: 1910-1975 by Ruth Adam, Persephone Book No. 20, we decided that the fabric should be designed by a successful woman at the forefront of her profession. So we chose one by Lucienne Day, whose career has displayed the elements that most modern women very much admire - a long and happy marriage (she and her husband Robin Day were a successful 'designer couple') and motherhood, combined with a high-profile professional life.

The name of the fabric, 'Palisade', has overtones of encirclement, fencing-in and out-of-the-doll's-house. The pattern, consisting of abstract grey and red vertical shapes decorated with domestic-looking objects which could be brooms, rakes, mops and whisks, has a *faux-naif* quality typical of 1950s modernism.

The year it was designed, 1952, was a busy one for Lucienne Day: she produced five designs for Heal's, four for Edinburgh Weavers and three, including 'Palisade', for British Celanese. They 'gave her a completely free hand; they made no suggestions whatever as to style and imposed no technical limitations . . . These patterns are boldly original. . . It took courage to commission them; it will need faith and enthusiasm [for Sanderson's] to market them' (*Design* magazine, 1952).

Screen-printed onto an acetate rayon furnishing taffeta (not an especially pleasant or hard-wearing fabric - but cheap to produce), the low price exemplified Lucienne Day's belief that her textiles should be for everybody. She and her husband were unusual in being 'idealists who wanted to produce nice things for ordinary people at reasonable prices' - to add wit and colour and lightness of touch to fabrics that were mass-produced yet at the forefront of modern design.

Finally...

The Winter issue of the *PQ* will be shorter than usual because it will be accompanied by the first *Persephone Catalogue*, containing full details of all our books, as well as information about the fabrics; we hope you like the postcard that accompanies this issue showing the endpapers for nine titles; if you would like its partner do ask for it to be included free with a book order, or send a second-class stamp.

For now, back copies of the PQ are the best way to find out about our books, as well as to enjoy articles and short stories by writers such as Nicci Gerrard and Dorothy Canfield Fisher and 'Plus Ca Change' ('I should have known better than to read the E.M.Delafield extract in your latest Quarterly on a train journey; I could not contain my laughter' wrote GC of London NW3). We charge for old *PQ*s because of postage, and because our stock of back issues is dwindling.

Nicola Beauman, m.d. of Persephone Books, photograph by Mark Gerson

At the Persephone Book at Lunchtime on Friday September 22nd the psychiatrist Dr. Jeremy Holmes will talk about ***Saplings***; on Thursday October 26th Anne Harvey and Simon Brett will read from the poetry and prose of '**Harry and Virginia**' Graham; and on Wednesday November 22nd Nicola Beauman will discuss **E.M.Delafield**.

For some readers the cost of the Book at Lunchtime (£21 & VAT) has been a deterrent. So, we plan to experiment with the Persephone Book at Teatime. This will be more like a reading group in that we will discuss one of our titles each time, over a cup of tea and homemade cake (starting with the one on p.20). Please will potential participants suggest a preferred time - we incline to 3.30-5.30. The charge will be £8.25 plus VAT (£10) and we will begin with ***Fidelity*** on Thursday January 18th 2001.

The next *PQ* will be sent out on November 15th, with the *Catalogue*. Our winter books - ***Consider the Years*** by Ruth Adam and ***Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*** by Winifred Watson - will be published on November 2nd. We are also issuing our first CD , called ***Café Music***; it too will be £10 inc. p&p.

This autumn's titles are ***They Knew Mr. Knight*** by Dorothy Whipple and ***A Woman's Place*** by Ruth Adam; and a reminder that although we are, for the moment, publishing two books a quarter instead of three (to give busy readers time to catch up on our earlier titles) the price remains £10 each or £25 for three; postage is free within the UK. An order form to send off may be found in the centre of this PQ; our phone number is **020 7253 5454 / fax 5656**; and we now have secure ordering on our website.

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