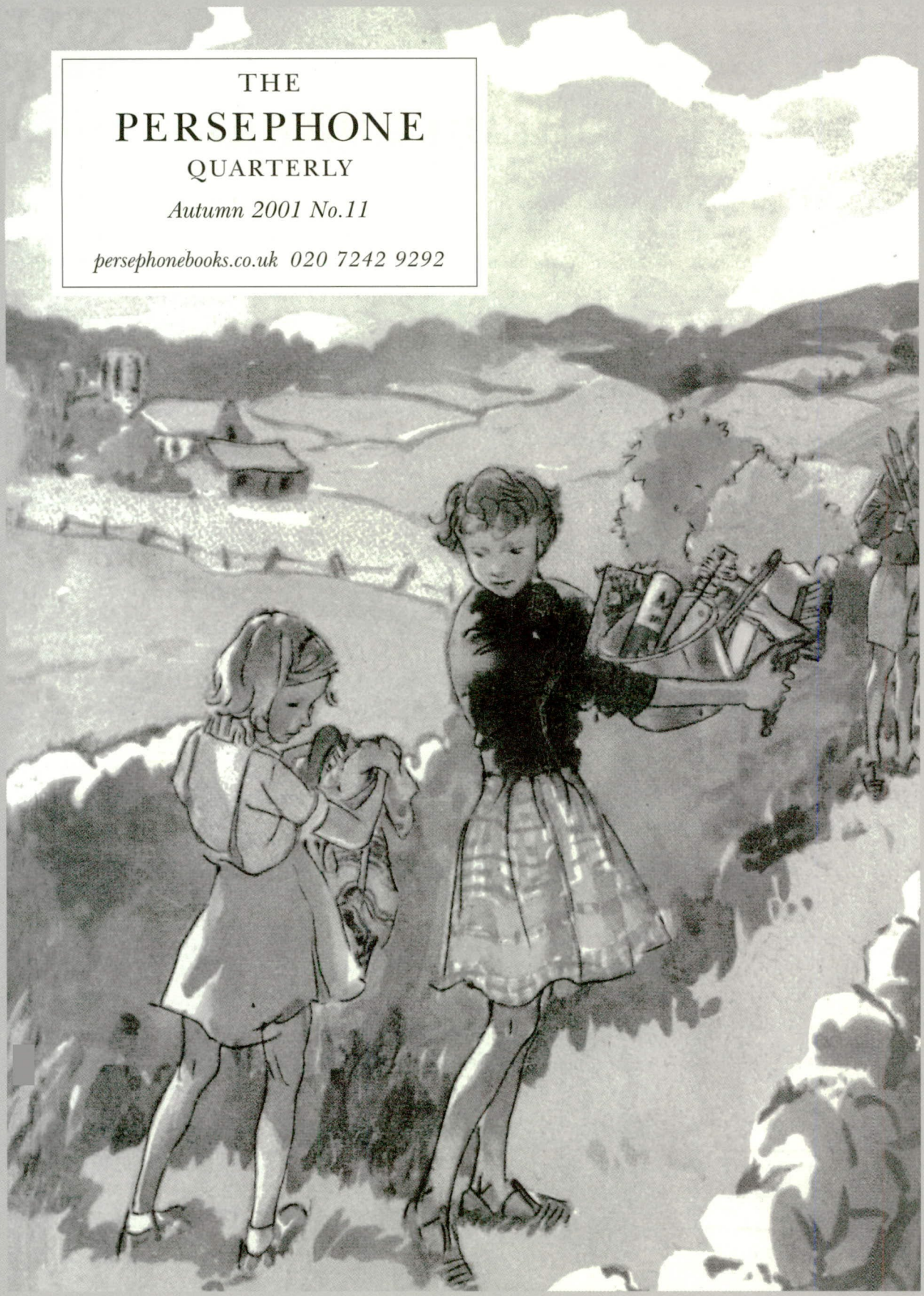

THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

Autumn 2001 No.11

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Our Autumn 2001 Books

'I found I enjoyed ***The Children Who Lived in a Barn*** just as much as an adult reader,' writes Jacqueline Wilson, the bestselling children's author, in her Persephone Preface to our first autumn book, and our first children's book, 'maybe even more because of the curious topsy-turvy attitudes to life and the fascinating period detail. But the book is far more than a curiosity reflecting different times and attitudes. The children leap off the page and into life. They show us how incredibly courageously children can cope in adversity.'

The Children Who Lived in a Barn was first published in 1938, reissued as a Puffin paperback in 1955 and reprinted numerous times over the next twenty years. 'The plot is simple,' continues Jacqueline Wilson. 'Five brothers and sisters aged from seven to thirteen live in the country with their parents who, four pages in to the book, are called away because a relation is ill; they make no provisions for their children beyond exhorting the elder two to look after everything. There is an aeroplane crash, it seems that they are not coming back and the children, evicted from their house by a wicked landlord, realise they must look after themselves indefinitely. This they manage calmly and sensibly and it is how they manage that is the nub of the book. Rather as in ***The Home-Maker*** (Persephone Book No. 7) where, once Evangeline is safely away at the department store all day, the family learn strategems such as putting newspaper down on the kitchen floor and picking it up every evening before she comes home, so in ***The Children Who Lived in a Barn***: the star of the book, and the thing remembered best by all its original readers, is the haybox (hence the extract from *Haybox Cookery* on page 12).

'In the best tradition of Arthur Ransome, Eleanor Graham extols the virtues of self-reliance,' writes the author of the entry in *The Macmillan Dictionary of Twentieth Century Children's Writers*, 'although she differs from him in her relentless emphasis on the unromanticised mechanics of everyday life. Today's readers might envy the children's freedom.' It is this point that makes the book so germane for modern parents. It could be argued that Western culture restricts today's children to a diet of computer games, homework, television and discos; and that their 'freedom' is at the expense of a sense of responsibility and of their own self-worth.

'Back in the fifties ***The Children Who Lived in a Barn*** seemed entirely convincing,' continues Jacqueline Wilson. 'Reading it now *I'm* in my fifties it seems mind-boggling. It didn't seem particularly odd to me that the Dunnett children in the book were deliberately left on their own. *Now* it seems extraordinary. They really don't seem to miss their parents terribly at all and certainly don't have much *time* to reflect on their feelings. When they are forced to move into the barn they start on a housework routine that seems astonishing. . . everything is spelt out in exhausting fashion. . . When Sue has made the first dinner (cold meat and beetroot and tomatoes and hot milk pudding and stewed prunes – an unmistakeably British meal that will have a Proustian affect on many of us) Bob offers to tackle the cutting of the joint because

Cover: Original artwork for the 1955 Puffin edition of The Children Who Lived in a Barn by Eleanor Graham
© Mary Gernat

"men always carve"; poor Sue is so busy I have to go and have a lie down simply reading about her household tasks. [Yet] in spite of all her enormous household responsibilities she experiences a freedom and a sense of achievement not available to most Western teenage girls. She might *look* like a little girl in her short skirt and sandals. . .But she copes with terrifying and exhausting responsibilities with guts and good-humour. She could certainly teach the teenage girls in my books a valuable lesson. She copes because she has to. If she doesn't the dreaded District Visitor and other unpleasant ladies of the parish will split the children up.

'***The Children Who Lived in a Barn*** is interestingly subversive in its dealing with children and adults. The children have to comfort and support each other - all the reponsible grown-ups in authority in the book behave with appalling indifference to the children's emotional well-being and are shown to be callous, even cruel. There are no Child-Lines, no friendly social workers, no teachers who will sit and listen. No-one is interested in the children's view of things. But *we're* interested as readers. . . Eleanor Graham was at Puffin for more than twenty years, determined to publish "the best of the *new* classics of the new generation". She certainly achieved her ambition - and ***The Children Who Lived in a Barn*** should definitely be considered one of those new classics.'

Marghanita Laski

'Classic' is a word frequently used by publishers in their publicity material and we generally try not to follow suit. But ***Little Boy Lost*** is a book to which we feel this word must be applied. Marghanita Laski's 1949 novel, the second one by her that we publish (the first is Persephone Book No 6, ***The Victorian Chaise-longue***), is about an Englishman searching for his son in France in early 1946. Hilary Wainwright had a glimpse of him on the day he was born in June 1940; he learnt that he was lost three years later after his wife had been murdered by the Gestapo. After the war has ended he is able finally to try and find him.

Of all the books we have published, this is the most unputdownable in terms of plot, and only a reader with a heart of stone would think of not finishing it. As well as being a terrific read, it is a subtle and perceptive novel about a man's search for himself, about the effect of the war on the children of Europe, and about post-war France.

'In ***Little Boy Lost***,' writes Anne Sebba in the Afterword, 'Marghanita Laski used France as one of many countries where the war brought society to a state of collapse. Hilary is asked: "What do you think of France now?" and replies, "I think it is horrible - horrible and desperately unhappy. I used to love and admire France more than any country I knew, but coming back to it now, I find it enveloped in a miasma of corruption."

'The image of a deeply divided post-war France, still prostrate from its brutal invasion, is brilliantly and chillingly evoked in ***Little Boy Lost***. Its dramatic capitulation in 1940, leading to the end of the Third Republic and the creation of a collaborationist regime in Vichy, is something with which it is still coming to terms even today, for the humiliations that were endured cut deep and long into the national psyche. Laski's sharp intelligence foretold how difficult the process of restoring French pride would be; yet she remained an optimist. As the *Daily Mail* wrote, the novel "takes in its sweep, without ever halting the story, the whole tragedy of post-war corruption - yet still leaves one with faith."

'Just after the publication of ***Little Boy Lost*** Marghanita Laski sold the film rights, but was 'furious and hurt' (according to the *Dictionary of National Biography*) when, four years later, it was turned into a musical starring Bing Crosby: the serious moral issues were inevitably devalued by a version that focused only on a father's search for his son. For the book is so much more than this; and nowadays a new generation of readers, one that has not been forced to deal with moral choices in extreme circumstances, has to try and answer the imposssible question, "What would I have done?"'

Elizabeth Bowen commented in her review in *Tatler* that the little boy - 'depicted without one single touch of what could be cloying sentimentality - walks straight in to the reader's heart. He is, in one sense, every lost child of Europe' - of which, at the end of the war, there were hundreds of thousands - '50,000 in Germany alone, many of whom had forgotten who they were or where they came from' (Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*).

The *Daily Mail* reviewer concluded that the

Drawing by 'Vicky', especially commissioned for Little Boy Lost in 1949

novel was 'as near perfection as any reviewer has a righ to hope for,' and mentioned the book's beautiful pros style. Marghanita Laski was indeed a wonderful writer The power of that 'little jewel of horror', ***The Victoria Chaise-longue,*** derives in part from the way it is written and ***The Village***, her 1953 novel that we publish in 2003, is written in such a way that it can be both funn and acute about that most difficult of subjects - class.

Elizabeth Bowen ended her review of 'this tender and magnificent story. . .' by saying that 'to miss readin ***Little Boy Lost*** would be to by-pass a very searching and revealing, human experience.'

Persephone in Bloomsbury

Our first three months in Bloomsbury have been enormous fun and we realise daily what luck it was to have moved here. Some Persephone readers are able to come into the shop in person (**59 Lamb's Conduit St WC1**, nearest tube Russell Square, opening hours 9-6 weekdays, but Saturdays as well from September); others will, we hope, receive the new postcard that will be going out to every customer with their first autumn book order - a David Gentleman painting commissioned by us which magically evokes the structure of our early-Georgian building, while conveying a feel of the life of Lamb's Conduit Street.

Pevsner wrote that this is 'a lively local shoppng street, a rarity now in inner London'; we have a newsagent, doctor, dentist, greengrocer, the funeral parlour that 'did' Nelson in 1805, another bookshop, an optician, a bicycle shop, and a café that does lunch for the startling price of £1.75 (small portion) or £2.99 (large), almost next door to the more pricey but extremely fashionable Cigala.

In some ways the streeet's best time is first thing in the morning, when people are having breakfast at Sid's next door, the greengrocer is opening up, nurses are going to the hospitals, and there is an air of traffic-free urban bustle which can only be compared to a stage set. We feel curiously French here and when things were quiet in August pinned up a metaphorical notice saying 'If this was Paris we would be closed'. This is partly because our lunch place does such wonderful croissants; partly because one of our autumn books, ***Little Boy Lost***, is set in France; mostly because we associate this kind of friendly street life with the French - for it is indeed rare in London.

'Bloomsbury,' people say, 'how appropriate,' and we are pleased, though uncertain whether they mean the fact that there traditionally were and are many publishers and bookshops round and about, or the even more flattering comparison with people like the Woolfs and Duncan Grant who, famously, left Kensington in order to come and live the anti-bourgeois life in Bloomsbury.

In *Jacob's Room* (1922) Virginia Woolf wrote: 'The rashest drivers in the world are, certainly, the drivers of post-office vans. Swinging down Lamb's Conduit Street, the scarlet van rounded the corner by the pillar box in such a way as to graze the kerb and make the little girl who was standing on tiptoe to post a letter look up, half frightened, half curious . . . Long ago great people lived here, and coming back from Court past midnight stood, huddling their satin skirts, under the carved door-posts while the footman roused himself from his mattress on the floor. . . and let them in. The bitter eighteenth-century rain rushed down the kennel.' The pillar box is still on our corner.

Until the 1960s our shop was the local grocer's, where Leonard and Virginia Woolf might well have shopped, their flat at 37 Mecklenburgh Square being only two minutes away. Then, sixty years ago last September, 'Meck' (as Virginia called it) was destroyed by bombing. Visiting, they could 'stand on the ground floor and look up with uninterrupted view to the roof while sparrows scrabbled about on the joists of what had been a ceiling; bookcases had been blown off the walls and the books lay in enormous mounds on the floor covered in rubble and plaster.' But Virginia rescued her diaries, '24 vols. . . salved; a great mass for my memoirs.'

Ruined by Reading

From the 1996 Beacon Press book by Lynne Sharon Schwartz subtitled 'A Life in Books'.

Aside from magazine pieces, the authors I read as a child were dead, and I still fancy the dead, a taste nowadays almost dowdy. To read current books, in our age detached from history, is to be forever young, forward-looking, partaking of the merciless energy of daybreak joggers and successful deal makers, rubbing shoulders with celebrity writers. Current books are modishly sleek inside and out; meanwhile the books of the dead stay heavy and dun-coloured, their pages not quite white, their typefaces stolid and ingenuous (except for those fortunate few treated to brand-new paperback attire, like a face-lift or hair implant). Reading the dead is being a meat-eater in a vegetable age, mired in superseded values. When someone at a dinner party asks, Read any good books lately?, *Jane Eyre* or *Pamela* is not a fertile answer. These are closed issues, closed books. . .

The pressure to read the living is moral as well as social. We must know our own times, understand what is happening around us. But I know my own times. I am in them. I have only to walk down Broadway or Main Street to see what is happening. It is the times of the dead I do not know. The dead are exciting precisely because they are not us. They are what we will never know except through their books. Their trivia are our exotica. As writers, transmitters, the dead can be more alive than some of the living.

I can hear the protests: I am romanticising, not even granting the dead their proper context but allowing distance to contour and laminate them. Today's living will someday acquire that fine airbrushed otherness. Why not be daring and appreciate them now? Besides, the dead writers have been pre-selected; no discrimination is necessary. I need not sift through five dozen nineteenth-century Russian novelists and decide, okay, this arrogant, tormented count, this loony gambler with the dubious past, this dapper smooth fellow, that sweet country doctor. I am forfeiting the opportunity to judge, to rank, to shape the tradition.

The question of judgment, of who is worth reading and what constitutes the tradition, has grown difficult and complex. Until lately it was assumed automatically that the writers whose works endured were the most significant. With the spur of feminist criticism, with the freeing of vision to include literatures other than Western and attitudes other than white and male, the idea of the 'canon' has come under cross-examination - not only its contents but the notion of an exclusive body of 'the enduring' or 'the best'. Who has chosen the revered works and by what standards? What has escaped their vision? How do such decisions and rankings encourage some voices and discourage others? Above all, how does a biased literary tradition cramp our present and future reading and writing?

These are not new issues by any means, but they need to be re-examined with each shift in social circumstances. For very possibly the canon of great works does not emerge naturally from history, but our view of history from a fairly arbitrary canon, in which case the way to a truer history is through a more inclusive tradition.

The Foundling Hospital 1746

It is appropriate, but coincidental, that our two autumn books are about children who are in some way orphaned, since memories of the Foundling Hospital (the world's first incorporated charity) linger in the air of Lamb's Conduit Street. The nearby Coram's Fields, named after Thomas Coram, the former sea-captain who worked so hard to 'protect the mothers from ill-repute as much as to provide for the children', *Survey of London* p10, can only be entered by those with children in tow; the original colonnades for the Hospital, as well as the Lodges on the south side, have survived; above all, there is a child-centred feel to this part of Bloomsbury, with children going to Great Ormond Street Hospital and to Coram's Fields and those who live locally playing in the pedestrianised Lamb's Conduit Street after school. The Hospital is at the centre of Jamila Gavin's prizewinning novel *Coram Boy*: the villainous Otis Gardiner pretends to take illegitimate babies to its safe haven. 'On a certain morning, Otis and his son left the stench and smoke and raucous sounds of the city behind them, and made their way northwards towards Lamb's Conduit Fields. They drove alongside cow-cluttered fields and meandered between orchards and pastures to the outskirts of the city... when they arrived at the large wrought iron gates at the head of a long avenue which led to the Coram Hospital as usual there was a throng of desperate women pressing at the gates; begging not to be forced to drop their babies in the street, begging for a chance in the lottery.'

Gwen Raverat (who did the engraving on p13) lived in Caroline Place off Mecklenburgh Square and 'like many other artists protested at the decision to pull down the Hospital. Though in 1927 it appeared to have been saved by public opinion, this dignified Georgian building, with its austere colonnaded wings and rich history, was destroyed in 1928' (Frances Spalding *Gwen Raverat*, 2001).

Our Readers Write

'I should like to say how much I enjoyed Noel Streatfeild's ***Saplings***. I did not read *Ballet Shoes* as a child – I suppose I thought it too much of a girl's book – but I found *Saplings* a deeply moving study of the effects of war on an ordinary family.' TW, Mansfield

'I was a fan of Noel Streatfeild's in childhood, and her psychological insights are so mature and ahead of her time. I *understand now* why I found her children's books so satisfying.' SGS, Birmingham

'Like everyone else I found ***Miss Pettigrew*** wonderful – talk about the feel-good factor. I even persuaded my husband to read it and he loved it too.' VW, Ploumagoar

'***A Woman's Place*** is a delight and I have presented copies to my daughter and daughter-in-law as required reading; ***Saplings*** was a moving chronicle of family life.' RN, Bristol

'I found ***Miss Pettigrew*** absolutely delightful – very much as I had expected, though even more so! It was one of those books you dwell in, relishing every page. I wouldn't have missed it for anything.' SB, Lutterworth.

'I felt I had to write to say how much I enjoyed ***Consequences***. I found it deeply moving and also strangely modern in outlook.' SF, Poole

'The ending of ***Consequences*** also upset me [as it did the reader quoted in the last *PQ*] and I seriously considered writing to you about it. It was unnecessarily pessimistic and tragic. Had I been EM Delafield's publisher I would have insisted on her altering it.' MS, Aylsham

'I have just read ***Farewell Leicester Square*** – a very moving, rather uncomfortable and yet brilliant book.' SG, Woodford Green

'I lent ***Someone at a Distance*** to a friend. The tension in the book was so great that she had to look at the end – something she has never, ever done before. I must admit I too was tempted. What a poignant book.' CB, Salisbury

'I have just read ***Someone at a Distance*** – full of admiration for Dorothy Whipple's step by step charting of a totally unnecessary disaster.' SR, London W1

'You will be pleased to know that it was the design of ***Miss Pettigrew***'s cover that drew me in, placed as it was in Daunt's bookshop window. That done, I took to the outline of the book at *once* and I was not disappointed. Please pass on to Winifred Watson my thanks for such a brilliant book and congratulations on her success.' VK, London W8

'Thanks so much for ***Good Things in England***. Not only is it a marvellous read, but the recipes work brilliantly. So far I have cooked ten of them, which my family have eaten with great speed and enjoyment.' SS, Hertford

'Have just finished ***Saplings***. I wept at a table outside a café in West Hampstead, part of me thinking the book a bit soppy but nevertheless totally unable to hold myself together. It was a lovely book.' SH, London N4

'I want to say how much I enjoy ***Café Music***. They produce such a rich sound it is hard to believe there are only two instruments.' DD, Dover

'I adored ***Miss Pettigrew*** and found ***Someone at a Distance*** very good indeed.' EAW, Winchester

'Having just finished ***A Woman's Place*** I wanted to thank you for publishing it again. . . [the books] really are a joy, clear print, beautiful endpapers, and much appreciated bookmarks.' MM, Cardiff

From Some Recent Reviews

The *Sunday Telegraph* wrote about ***The Montana Stories***: 'Persephone Books are always elegantly produced, and this collection of stories by the New Zealand-born, Chekhov-influenced writer is no exception. Uniquely, it includes fragments, as well the stories completed by Katherine Mansfield while she was staying in a Swiss mountain village, seriously ill with tuberculosis. The psychological penetrations of these writings is remarkable. This edition includes the evocative original illustrations not seen since 1921.'

In the same issue of the *Sunday Telegraph* Helen Osborne chose for her summer reading '***Family Roundabout***, a spiffing pre-war matriarchal saga for grown-ups by Richmal (*Just William*) Crompton. A world away, maybe, but somehow still only on the cusp of yesterday.'

'***Reuben Sachs***, Amy Levy's shrewd observations on nineteenth-century Jewish Londoners, smacks in the face of modern political correctness with its harshly satiric attitudes and mocking voice' wrote Rebecca Abrams for the *New Statesman* and in *Quality Women's Fiction.* 'Using narrative technique popularised by Virginia Woolf, Amy Levy introduces the tightly-knit Leuniger family via Reuben's thoughts; her wickedly accurate portrayal of Londoners obsessed with money and status remains as readable, funny and relevant as it was in 1888.'

'An extremely readable short novel' wrote the *Jewish Telegraph*, which was 'amazed how simple and easy-to-read is Amy Levy's style, without the superfluity usually found in Victorian works. . . There is a Jane Austen feel to the story of the fatal attraction between the hero, a Victorian upwardly mobile Jew, and his beautiful poor relation.'

In *The Tablet* Melanie McDonagh reviewed Florence White's ***Good Things in England*** before then turning to the latest Nigella Lawson. It 'was a labour of love and scholarship: after advertisements were published in the newspapers soliciting recipes, people from all over the country wrote in, with memories and recipes; a trained cook travelled through the country talking to everyone who appeared interested. And in 1932 memories easily went back to the nineteenth century and, given the custom of cooks to preserve good recipes through generations, well beyond that. In any compilation like this, you get gems and peculiarities; what is striking is the regional specificity of the recipes. . . Some are extraordinarily simple, like the recipe for rook pies or suet pudding or caramel cream;some wonderfully rich, like the pie that calls for young partridges, boned quail and twelve larks; some difficult in terms of ingredients, like the recipe for roasting young swan. Many I know to be delicious: the second recipe here for Port Wine Jelly is a dream.'

Finally, the Oxford University Students Union magazine reviewed ***Miss Pettigrew***. 'Some books are very complex little gems. I think of the Psmith books by PG Wodehouse, or *Period Piece* by Gwen Raverat. ***Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*** is a book similar to this. Perhaps it is the time period that it was written in. Perhaps it is the long narrow line drawings: the women tapered by ornate clothes, their hair elegantly waved, the men tailored to swooning point. Perhaps it is Miss Pettigrew. Here is the charm. She has a lovely sense of herself. . .'

Mothers

by Elizabeth Taylor, reprinted here for the first time since its original publication in 1944

Outside the hospital entrance the gravel was bright and unrelenting. She stood with the other mothers and waited for the doors to open. Each had a basket; the clean clothes and picture books, barley-sugar, the bunch of pansies from the garden.

'What will he do?' she wondered. She was prepared for tears and pleading and an appalling scene at the end. Some of the mothers chatted as they waited. These had been before, knew the ropes, knew the way in and the nurses by sight. She stood a little apart, with her back against the warm roughness of the brick wall, feeling immature – she could never overcome the sense that she was too young to have a child and she was uncertain of her voice and of her eyes, always too readily filled with tears.

In the hot sunlight the weather-vane over the clock-tower flashed brightly; the smell of the hot gravel mingled with the other dry mid-summer scents, of crumbling grey earth and geraniums, tar and the brick wall; but little wafts of coolness came occasionally from the hospital windows, little cool dreadful smells which froze her bowels, hollowed her inside.

The rounded, solid notes of the clock struck two. The women sauntered closer and then the doors were opened. As they passed into the vestibule, she was conscious of another smell, the damp sharp sweat of the other mothers in their summer frocks. Then the cold neutral air of the hospital engulfed them as they went forward. She felt like Alice going down the rabbit-hole. They kept passing rooms with half-open doors, but there was never time to look into the rooms; just a glimpse of a nurse writing at a desk, a place filled with strange shining apparatus, flowers in the centre – of a large ward, a white kitchen.

She followed the others into the children's ward.

'Hallo, Mummy.'

She came straight to him, was at once confronted by the brightness of his little face, made strange by the bandage over his brow. He was facing the door – in a draught, she thought immediately.

Their greeting was casual in contrast to the embraces of all the others. Again, she felt her immaturity. She felt that she would never look motherly. In her sandals and blue cotton frock she seemed too young for the part. She did not even have the womanly smell of the others.

'How are you, darling?'

'All right. Better.'

'And what's it like, being here?'

'All right. They think you're very babyish. They give you a plate with Bo-Peep on it.'

'How amusing.'

'And cut up your meat.'

'Perhaps they are afraid you'll spill gravy.'

'One girl has her legs burnt. They paint them blue and she screams like mad. Her mother upset a saucepan over her.'

'How frightful for her mother.'

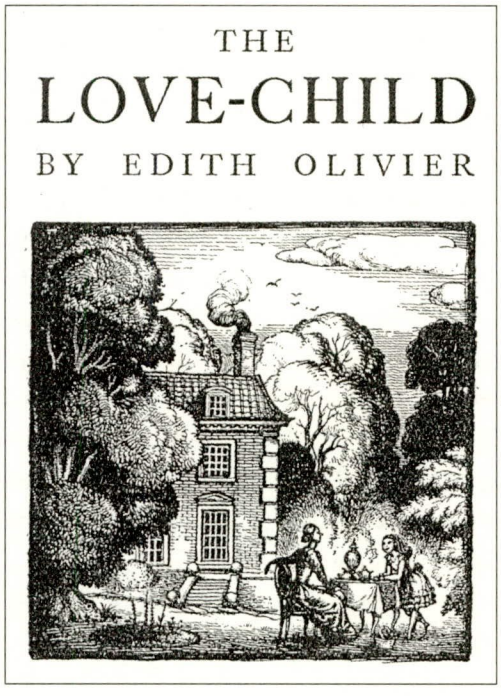
'Frightful for her, you mean.' He laughed excitedly.

She looked round quickly and turned over his temperature-chart. It jagged half-way across the

paper.

'They don't tell you what your temperature is.'

'No. They never do. It *is* nice to see you.' She sat on the bed and took one of his rough warm little paws on her hand. His wrists were impossibly thin, had always been. He kept shoving up the bandage which had slipped over one eye. Cotton-wool and bits of lint stuck out in all directions. Tufts of hair stood up from the top of his head like feathers. His bed was like a battlefield. She tried to straighten the sheets, looking round at the neat children sitting up in tidy cots and beds, while their mothers displayed one thing after another from their baskets.



1927 title page illustration by Rex Whistler

'I brought you a present,' she said, suddenly remembering, and conscious that he waited. 'But I want you to keep it till I go.'

'Why?

'It will be something to think about after I've gone.'

'Oh.'

'What did you have for dinner?'

'Mince and rice.'

'Are you good?'

'Yes. One of the nurses said I'd wet my bed. "Oh, you dirty little boy," she said to me. And I hadn't done any such thing.'

'Oh, darling. So what did you say?'

'I said "Go on! You! Liar! Rat!" To myself.'

She bit her lip. ' What are the others like? The other nurses.'

'Sister's very nice. She's not a bit cruel. She lets me mind that little baby in the corner. If it falls on its back, I ring the bell. Now can I read to you?'

She sat and watched the clock and listened to him reading, stumbling and monotonous. He sat bolt upright in his untidy bed, with the book held high before him. One or two of the other women looked across and smiled at him, then at her. A boy at the end seemed very ill. He stared before him, his face grey and small; his eyes and the way of holding his head, like an old man. His mother sat beside him and watched him. They did not speak.

'"The fox then hid behind the door. . ."' he read on.

'Children's stories are always full of foxes, and they are forever wicked,' she mused. 'How odd, coming to hospital to be read to.'

And then the clock outside in the sunlight struck the hour. Three o'clock. A young nurse came in and stood there smiling in the doorway, waiting for them to go.

'Darling, I have to go now.'

'Oh, I haven't finished the book.'

'Practise it and read the rest next time.'

'I've been practising it since half-past five this morning.'

'I'm sorry, pet.' She bent and kissed him and cords twisted up tightly in her throat as she felt his warm, dry lips on her face. He was sitting up straight on the high, narrow bed, his eyes steady and bright

beneath the bandage.

'Goodbye, my darling. The minute I am gone you shall open your parcel.' He looked excited at that. Other children were setting up a wild howling. The look he exchanged with her showed contempt for this. He waved his thin hand as she turned away. The other was on the string of his parcel.

'Goodbye.'

She walked proudly down the corridor with the other mothers. All their eyes were over-brilliant with anxiety; hers with pride and anxiety.

'He's not spoilt,' she thought. 'When it comes to it, he isn't. He's independent and he adapts himself.'

She stepped out on to the bright gravel.

He laid the parcel unopened on his pillow and lay down and closed his eyes. Tears were red-hot and hard like bullets beneath his lids. 'My darling Mummy,' he said to himself. 'My darling Mummy. My darling . . .'

'Tea, Harry,' said the nurse. 'Tired already?'

He sat up and smiled.

'You haven't opened your parcel.'

'I couldn't – undo it.'

'Oh, it's only a bow, you lazybones. And look at your bed. Let me tidy you up again. Now Sheila, that's quite enough of that. You try to be sensible like Harry.'

Harry looked neither to left nor right, neither at Sheila nor the nurse. He picked up the piece of bread and butter from his plate and took a bite. It hurt his throat going down, but he went on eating. He sat there with his eyelids lowered, looking rather prim and self-satisfied as he ate.

Haybox Cookery

We use a Tate sugar-box measuring 18 in. by 21 in. by 15 in. broad and the wood is 1/2 inch thick. First line the whole box, including the bottom and the lid, with eight layers of strong newspaper and then cover with brown paper, or, better still, calico held in place by tacks. Large boxes to hold two saucepans should have a division in the centre, as this makes it easier to fit in two large saucepans. Then procure sufficient hay (not chopped hay) and pack it in *really tightly*, almost filling the box. Make two calico cushions to fit exactly over each division if there are two divisions, and lastly a thin cushion of the exact size of the lid to put in last and keep all snug. The cushions must be thoroughly stuffed with the hay and not merely loosely filled. The saucepans to be used must have tightly fitting lids, and avoid using pans with lips. Saucepans without handles are ideal, so are casseroles, but a little practice enables anyone to use ordinary saucepans. The closer the cushions fit and the more perfectly the box is filled when the saucepans have been put in their respective nests, the better the insulation. The lid must either be weighted down or secured firmly with staples. The weights can be made of bricks covered with calico or cretonne.In busy households where the mistress has to go out in the morning, it is very useful to be able to put the midday meal in the haybox and return to find all ready; porridge for breakfast can be put in overnight, and next morning will be found cooked to perfection. The haybox 'works' all day and all night at no cost whatever.

From Haybox Cookery by Eleanour Sinclair Rohde (1939)

Tea with Persephone

We are gathered round the battered kitchen table in Persephone's former basement office in Clerkenwell, twelve women; on the table a large yellow teapot and a plum cake baked by Nicola from a recipe in Florence White's ***Good Things in England***. It all sounds very cosy, very middle-class, and the book we are here to discuss, ***Someone at a Distance*** by Dorothy Whipple, seems to fit this ambience. It was published in 1953, although might be set in an earlier decade, and describes the break-up of a marriage against a background of middle England, with its gardens and ponies and children at boarding school; but this is no cosy public library novel.

Camb. Book of Poetry for Children, 1932

It begins slowly and deceptively, as Whipple builds a convincing picture of an idyllic world with her carefully placed details. Unlike many of today's novelists she does not need to describe every room in the house, plant in the garden and meal on the table, but we are soon involved in the sun-filled, charmed life of nice Ellen North and her handsome, indolent husband Avery.

Into this paradise comes the snake. Louise Lanier is a chic, heartless young Frenchwoman on the make, and Ellen and Avery are too polite, too trusting, just too nice to stand up to her. In the key scene of the novel, shocking because so understated, Avery and Louise are discovered on the drawing-room sofa by his wife and daughter. Avery and Louise leave hastily. From then onwards Ellen and Avery do the right thing, according to their upbringing and moral code, and it causes disaster for them and their two children; although it is the children who take the firmer moral stand and prevent their parents from going back.

This is agonising to read. We long to shout at these likeable, civilised people 'No. Stop. Don't do it,' as we see the inevitable creeping up on them while they are looking the other way. But there is no consolation. It just gets grimmer and more painful for them and us. Tough stuff. Against the creamy, comfortable background the moral message seems harder to swallow. No-one is safe. One lapse of judgement, one person's lack of moral rigour, brings about devastation, and there is no conventional novelist's ending either. The good don't end happily, and the bad don't seem to suffer in proportion to their actions. Louise is rejected by her devout Roman Catholic parents and denied her moment of glory, but we know she will survive intact.

Dorothy Whipple was writing in the tradition of English moralists like Elizabeth Gaskell who believed that novels should, among other things, teach us how to behave, and since the Second World War this has been unfashionable. Could this be why Whipple has not been taken up by feminist critics and publishers? We all thought it a fine book, undeservedly neglected, although we differed in our view of the characters and whether Whipple did have a feminist agenda. Was Ellen just a helpless victim? Could she have acted differently? Then the teapot was refilled, the excellent cake handed round, and the conversation turned to other things.

Penelope Hands

How we choose our books

1 Persephone Books arose out of thirty years of being at home with small children: so much time to rediscover twentieth century women writers; and to buy books for 20p, or go to the London Library and come home with an armful of forgotten books. Once the children were older there was time to read in the British Museum Reading Room and to hunt for books in secondhand bookshops. Now there is the new British Library and the internet.

2) some Persephone titles, such as ***William - an Englishman***, were written about in Nicola Beauman's book *A Very Great Profession*: The Woman's Novel 1914-39 (Virago, 1983, repr. '89 and '95) but not reprinted by other feminist presses.

3) this book influenced our choice of titles in other ways, for example in its focus on women's everyday lives; as a result our titles are different from those of other feminist publishers in that they are more accessible, more domestic, the feminism is 'softer'.

4) we have to love every book. It is a cliché of publishing that there is no hope that a book will sell unless someone is passionately behind it.

5) people kindly tell us about books and some of them turn out to be wonderful. ***Miss Pettigrew*** was suggested by Henrietta Twycross-Martin who then wrote the preface; a reader in Yorkshire lent us a novel by Jocelyn Playfair (of whom we had never heard) that we will publish next year; Neville Braybrooke, who very sadly died this summer, sent us his late wife Isobel English's novel ***Every Eye***.

6) sometimes we discover books in rather odd ways. Looking to see if any other Elizabeth Jenkins could be reprinted, apart from the wonderful *The Tortoise and the Hare* (Virago), we found a reviewer had written about her novel *Virginia Water* that she had 'not read anything so really lovely, so tenderly and exquisitely right since Susan Glaspell's ***Brook Evans***.' At that time we had never heard of Susan Glaspell. And we have found a novel in verse that we will publish next year because it was 'puffed' on the flap of a book someone sent us because it was written by their mother.

7) we would prefer to publish more books by American writers - but they are slow to sell if British readers have not heard of them (although our US readership is beginning to expand).

8) occasionally we choose a book and then find that it has an anniversary (eighty years this summer since Katherine Mansfield wrote ***The Montana Stories***, one hundred since the serialisation of ***The Making of a Marchioness***); this does not usually influence our choice of title, but it might mean that we wait a while to publish it, or accelerate the process.

9) we do not in general do books already republished by one of the other feminist houses.

10) we publish mostly women writers and mostly 20th century but within this remit aim for a variety of forms (a love story paired with short stories, a light read paired with something more profound, something fun for Christmas, long books and short) and try to have many different genres - novels that are 'about' something, page turners, cookery books, poetry, a book about the suffragettes and the First World War, four about the Second, a ghost story, a biography by a man (we do not want to appear too rigidly feminist), books about Jews, Catholics, nonbelievers, two diaries, a book for children.

11) ideally 'the novel tells a story' (E.M.Forster)

12) to conclude: each book must have a special quality to justify its republication.

Our Autumn Fabrics

The fabric used on the endpaper for ***The Children Who Lived in a Barn*** by Eleanor Graham was based on a 1938 design by John Little, whose studio was at 101 Park Avenue, New York. Warner bought nine designs from him and this one was adapted by their own in-house designer, R. Artis, to become 'Arrowhead'. We chose it because it has a fresh, pastoral feel appropriate to a book about children living in the country; and the flowers have a columbine-hollyhock quality in keeping with the rural setting of the book. We have greatly reduced the fabric in scale: the flowers on the original are about five inches across.

For the first time we have used a fabric design for an endpaper: the 1946 design for ***Little Boy Lost*** was bought by Warner from the Hélène Gallet studio in Paris – her pencil marks can clearly be seen on the green paint. We chose it because the green is indefinably reminiscent of bourgeois France; the pattern is in the *fleur-de-lis* tradition, yet has primitive stars that a child might have drawn; and both echo the book's decorative rule. Using a design for a screen-printed cotton which was not then put into production symbolises both the collapsed French textile industry (but it began to revive very shortly afterwards), and France itself.

Our Winter Books

One hundred years ago this summer the first part of ***The Making of a Marchioness*** appeared in three consecutive issues of *Cornhill* magazine; by the autumn of 1901 Frances Hodgson Burnett had completed a sequel and both parts were published as a book in America and in England. Although *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *The Secret Garden* brought her fame, ***Marchioness*** has long been an out-of-print favourite of many, for example of Nancy Mitford: "What bliss, I've been looking for that for ages," says a visitor to the Red bookshop in the televised adaptation of *The Pursuit of Love*. *The Bookseller* has made it a 'November choice': 'Not only is this a delightful novel, but the production of the book is beautiful. A sparky sense of humour combined with lively social commentary make this a joy to read and a beautiful item to treasure.'

Kitchen Essays by Agnes Jekyll is our second winter book and our second cookery book (the first being ***Good Things in England***). Lady Jekyll, who was also created DBE for her services to charity, was sister-in-law to Gertrude Jekyll and lived at Munstead House, next door to the famous garden at Munstead Wood. Gertrude's biographer wrote that if she 'was an artist-gardener, then Agnes was an artist-housekeeper'; while Mary Lutyens described her house as 'the apogee of opulent comfort and order without grandeur, smelling of pot-pouri, furniture polish and wood smoke.' Agnes Jekyll first of all published ***Kitchen Essays*** in *The Times* in the winter of 1921-2. They are wonderfully written comments and recipes (the first time recipes had ever appeared in *The Times*) and cover topics such as 'A Little Supper after the Play', 'For the Too Thin' and 'Tray Food'.

Finally. . .

Radio 4 will be reading two of our books in the coming months: during the week of October 1st for four afternoons – the fifth is National Poetry Day - four of ***The Montana Stories*** will be read together with some of our linking commentary. It will of course be exactly eighty years since the stories were first written, in Montana in the last months of Katherine Mansfield's life. Later on ***Little Boy Lost*** will be read as a 'Book at Bedtime'.

'September' from Country Bouquet by P.Nicholson 1947

The other media news is that two well-known actresses are considering the role of ***Miss Pettigrew***, the company that bought the film option having decided to cast her before writing the script. ***Miss Pettigrew*** is the subject of two Persephone Lunches this autumn: since the first one on September 12th sold out almost immediately, Patricia Brake and Henrietta Twycross-Martin will very kindly give a repeat performance on Thursday October 4th. As usual, the lunch will be from 12.15-2.15 and the £25 cost includes a delicious buffet lunch and wine.

On Friday October 26th the Lunchtime speaker will be the children's author Jacqueline Wilson, who will talk about ***The Children Who Lived in a Barn*** and its relevance for today's children and parents. And on Tuesday November 13th Gretchen Gerzina, the author of the biography of the Bloomsbury painter Carrington, will be over from America and will talk about her current subject, Frances Hodgson Burnett, with special reference to ***The Making of a Marchioness***, which we publish on November 8th.

Readers who have been to the Vermeer exhibition will appreciate this comparison a friend of Dorothy Whipple's made in early 1953: 'I think ***Someone at a Distance*** is very, very good. Perhaps through seeing so much of the Dutch paintings lately, it strikes me as a fine example of genre – about everyday things and people, and yet no more prosaic than the pictures of Jan Steen, Mais, de Hooch, Vermeer and the best of that endearing and brilliant bunch. But it isn't a picture. It grows naturally like a tree, root, stem. I appreciate the unerring flight of those arrows of descriptive word or phrase and the economy of words with which you build up your scenes and your story. There is so little apparent effort (but I know better) and so much sheer joy – for the reader, that is.'

Lastly: we want to thank the team of people who come in to send out the PQ, as well as those who kindly offered to help in the future. We pay with books and lunch; but nothing can repay their kindness and efficiency. When we are having quiet nervous breakdowns about other aspects of running a small publishing company (the colour printing, an entire mail bag going missing) we think of the calm supportiveness of our readers – and feel enormously grateful to you all.

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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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