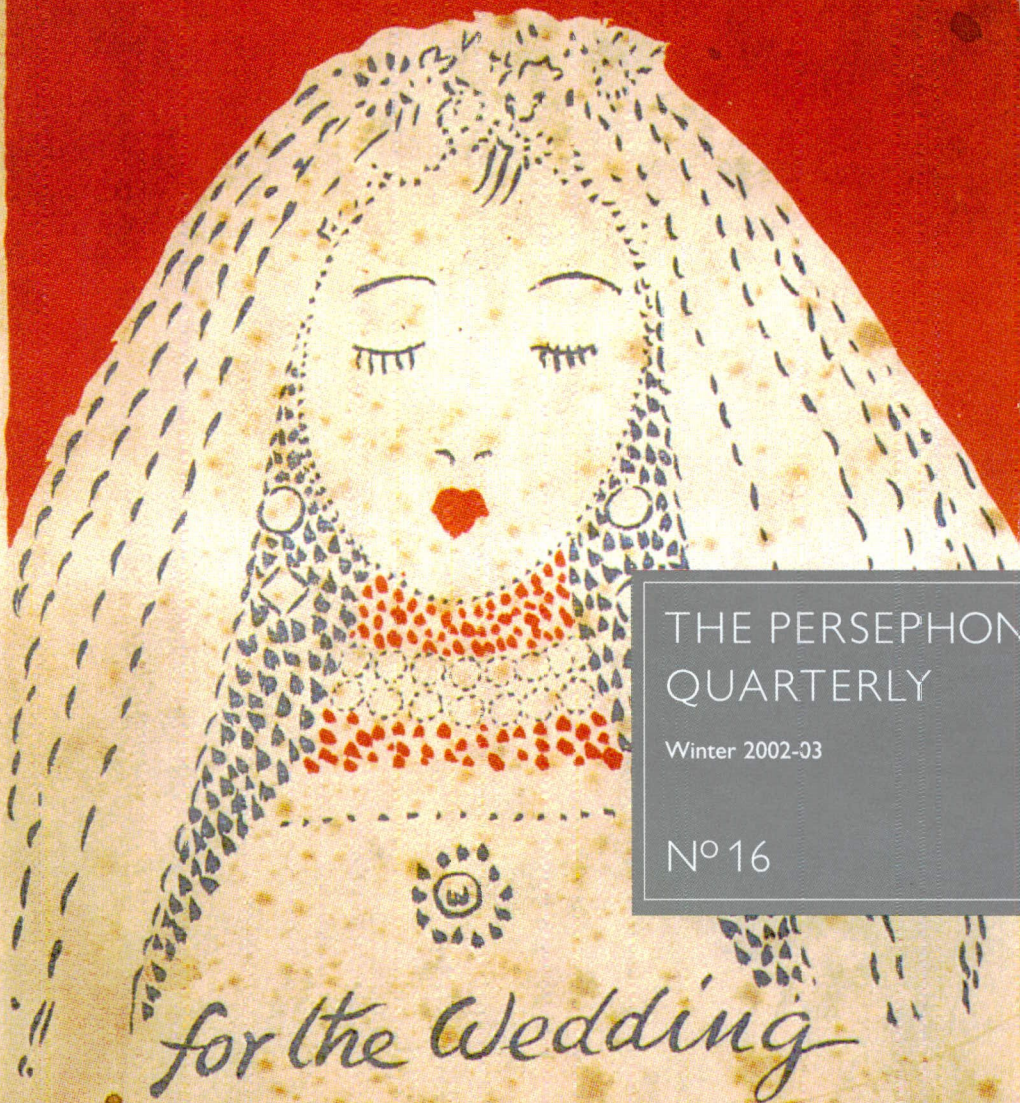


# Cheerful Weather



THE PERSEPHONE  
QUARTERLY

Winter 2002-03

Nº 16



for the Wedding  
by Julia Strachey



# OUR WINTER 2002-03 BOOKS



Our November titles are, we hope, perfect winter reads and perfect presents. They both have Bloomsbury connections: *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* was published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press and originally had a Duncan Grant jacket (here reproduced on the front cover). *The Runaway* is an 1872 novel written originally for children but re-issued in 1936 for both children and adults with over sixty wood-cuts by Gwen Raverat. She is best-known nowadays for her classic family memoir *Period Piece* but *The Runaway* had always been one of her favourite books (indeed she wrote a play based on it when she was only sixteen) and in 1935 she proposed to her publisher that they reissue Mrs Hart's book illustrated by herself. She wrote in the Preface: 'I think that it is the sort of book which must always be liked, because it is such fun... It is not really old-fashioned... Nor is it ever pious, or proper, or sentimental... It is a particularly

good book to read aloud' (as is our other children's book, *The Children Who Lived in a Barn*).

'One reason why wood-engraving makes such a good medium for books,' writes Frances Spalding in her Afterword, 'is that it can be locked in the chase with the type and printed in one fell swoop. Cut in to the end grain of the wood, it is necessarily a severe and disciplined medium, and is also very satisfactory in the way that the taut, crisp results, with their sparkling rich interplay of blacks and whites, can balance the weight and density of the text. Gwen Raverat exploits this cleverly in *The Runaway*: her designs punctuate each new chapter with headings; infiltrate single figures every time a new character is introduced; occasionally slice unexpectedly at an angle across the page, or unfold in a double-page spread [reproduced here]...Text and illustrations transmute this charming, lively tale into a small work of art.'

The author of *The Runaway* was Elizabeth Anna Hart (1822-88), a Victorian writer (and cousin of Lewis Carroll's) who published poetry, novels and children's books; she was best known for *Mrs Jerningham's Journal* (1869), a very funny novel in verse which was described by the *Edinburgh Daily Review* as 'a nearly perfect gem...one of the jewels of contemporary literature.'

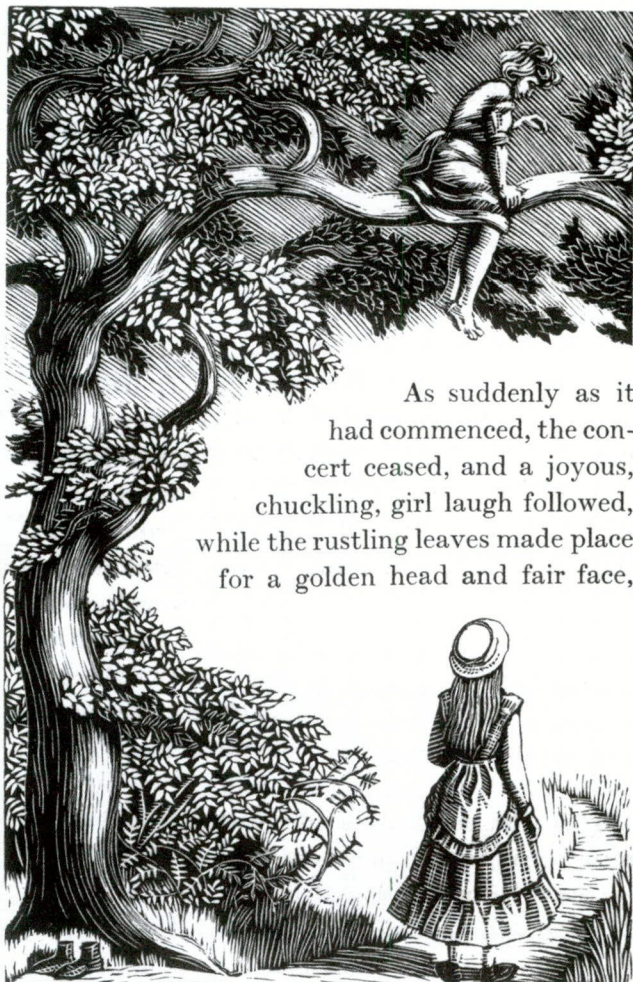
But *The Runaway* is, in the words of the critic Roger Lancelyn Green, Mrs Hart's 'most completely successful book because of its admirable plot' which is 'a brilliant and undeservedly forgotten foretaste of the understanding of childhood which was so near.' And Anne Harvey has also written an Afterword to the 'engaging, moving and funny' *Runaway*, telling us something about the elusive Mrs Hart – elusive because, although she wrote many novels and collections of poetry, very little has so far been discovered about her life.



**T**he *Runaway* is about a girl named Clarice who lives in 'a charming home, at a convenient (railway) distance from the city, where her father repaired every morning, returning to a late dinner. Clarice had no mother and no sisters.' One day she discovers

Olga, a girl of her own age who has run away from school, crouched in the shrubbery and agrees to hide her in her bedroom. The subsequent plot is delightful rather than dramatic, for the joy of *The Runaway* is the way its style and tone pays tribute to *Alice's*

*Adventures in Wonderland* (which had appeared seven years before) and anticipates E.Nesbit. 'It's girls that are kept under and kept down,' says Olga; 'and so there's nothing left for girls but to run away, just as I did; and it would be hard to blame a poor creature for that.'



As suddenly as it had commenced, the concert ceased, and a joyous, chuckling, girl laugh followed, while the rustling leaves made place for a golden head and fair face,



page from 'The Runaway' illustrated by Gwen Raverall

**C**heerful Weather for the Wedding by Julia Strachey (1901-79), our other winter title, is a novella first published in 1932 by a niece of Lytton Strachey. The *Bookseller* has chosen it as a Star Choice for Christmas: 'On her wedding morning a girl knows she is about to make a serious mistake... as delightful and perceptive today as 70 years ago.' And *November House & Garden* quoted from this 'sharp, unsentimental domestic comedy: the weather is something less than cheerful the day Dolly Thatcham marries the Hon. Owen Bingham: "In the furious



March gale, everyone felt as though they were being beaten on the back of the head and on the nose with heavy carpets, and having cold steel knives thrust up inside their nostrils.”

Julia Strachey in 1922



Frances Partridge, a lifelong friend of Julia Strachey’s, who wrote a memoir about her called *Julia*, has now written a Preface for our edition of the book. In it she points out that Julia wrote very little but what she wrote was of outstanding quality. (And in this respect she was very like another Persephone author, Isobel English, who also wrote slowly and painfully but exquisitely.) Julia Strachey was renowned for her sharp,

unusually beautiful prose style. ‘After *Cheerful Weather*’s appearance, the literary editor of *The New Yorker* wrote to Julia saying he would publish anything she cared to send him,’

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said Frances Partridge in *Julia*. ‘It was even said that her book was for a while obligatory reading for his staff.’ Alas, Julia only wrote two novels (the other was published twenty years later) and a few short stories. But *Cheerful Weather* is, we believe, her most lasting work of literature. Virginia Woolf described it as ‘a very cute, clever, indeed rather remarkable acidulated story...I think it astonishingly good – complete and sharp and individual.’

The *Observer*, calling it ‘the slightest but the more perfect’ of her two novels, wrote: “The observer is so sharp-eyed and so delicate-tongued that her book reveals, on one level, the rich absurdity of the participants, on a deeper level the helpless despair which they carry about with them.’ Yet the overall effect of the book is very funny in a Forsterian manner, Dolly Thatcham in *Cheerful Weather* being out of the same stable as Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room with a View* and both the mothers, Mrs Thatcham and Mrs Honeychurch, sharing many appalling similarities.

The humorous tone of the book is one reason why we are so pleased that Miriam Margolyes has read *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* for us as the first Persephone Cassette. Priced at £10, like all our titles, with the same grey cover and ‘fabric’ endpaper on the inside of the cassette inlay, this, we are sure, solves all Christmas present problems. Miriam Margolyes has read Julia Strachey’s book with great subtlety and humour; and because it is short we did not have to cut anything (it fits nicely on four cassette tapes). The music is an atmospheric 1932 waltz by Levitzki, especially recorded for us by Daniel Becker of *Café Music* fame, and the Cassette has been superbly produced by The Story Circle.



# OUR READERS WRITE

‘I write to tell you how much I enjoyed *The Carlyles at Home*... Thank you for giving me a haven of peace every night when I read another Persephone.’  
JW, London SE3

‘*William - an Englishman* is a masterpiece, as is *Fidelity*. *Someone* is fascinating – quite banal on one level, but so minutely observed that the nuances of relationships become all-absorbing. And I think *The Home-Maker* is the most moving thing I’ve read for ages. It has much in common with Glaspell – both liberated, educated women, and both books end on a decidedly modern note of courageous, clear-eyed truthfulness.’  
GS, London NW10

‘*The Far Cry* is full of magical passages.’  
KD, Westerham

‘I was amazed at how uneasy I felt when reading *Marchioness* and how skilful Burnett had been at creating such an atmosphere.’  
HS, Rolleston

‘I just had to write to say what a tremendous book *Lettice Delmer* is. It was totally compelling – an incredible combination of gripping narrative and haunting lyricism. Lettice is a heroine in the great tradition of Hardy’s Tess and James’s Lily Bart but the writing is as intense, and at

times as spiritual, as a Gerard Manley Hopkins poem. But that makes it sound so melodramatic. In her lines on petulant toddler Derick and deferential Briggs juggling his dentures, Susan Miles touchingly captures the intricacies of family life.’  
KB, Harpenden

‘I am much looking forward to re-reading *Greenery Street*. That is the lovely thing about Persephone. It not only introduces the reader to unknown worthwhile books, but sometimes gives an opportunity for re-reading an almost forgotten story of happy memory.’  
MP, Hale

‘*Family Roundabout* was an excellent choice and, again, I couldn’t put it down. It was actually modern in writing style, almost like a soap opera, but just wonderful... What a pity Richmal Crompton’s William books overshadowed her other writing.’  
ST, Brighton

‘I have just finished reading *The Far Cry* and want to tell you how much I enjoyed it. As soon as I finished it I felt like turning back and reading it all over again. The characters and scenes leapt off the page. Some of the thoughts that Teresa felt and are normally difficult to pin down and describe, Emma Smith

captured perfectly. I loved everything about it.’  
PP, Hitchin

‘I thought *The Far Cry* was brilliant – the character studies are really wonderful. Wouldn’t you have loved to have known Miss Spooner?’  
MK, Amersham

‘Thank you for selecting *Family Roundabout*, a beautifully written, well-crafted novel, a work of art.’  
TW, Mansfield

‘Many thanks for *Reuben Sachs* – I don’t think I have ever comes across such a good description of the deadening effect of having to resign oneself to losing love. It’s a magnificent book and so very wise (I’m thinking of the final two paragraphs - was she really only 26 when she wrote that?).’  
CC, London W6

‘I thought *Lettice Delmer* was very profound and I could hardly bear to put it down. I also think it one of the strangest books I have ever read... I fully intend to read it again as soon as I can.’  
JH, Witney

‘If I get home feeling tired and stressed and put on the *Café Music* CD, then I’m completely away from all my troubles.’  
CL-M, Aberystwyth



# OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

In *Minnie's Room*, wrote the *Spectator*, Mollie Panter-Downes 'was able, with intimate perceptiveness and without sentimental inhibition, to describe compassionately the habitats and habits of the middle class in the Home Counties. She was sociologically precise and expert on all sorts of status indicators, sympathetic and gently wry, discomfortingly good at anatomising the crudities and subtleties of snobbery, but never unkind.'

'A second passage to India' was the heading for the *Spectator's* review of *The Far Cry*, 'a small masterpiece' that describes Mr Digby and Teresa who are, 'in today's parlance, dysfunctional: a pair of brilliantly realised sacred monsters quite unable to engage with each other or anybody else, the one comic and tragic by turns, a cross between Evelyn Waugh's Mr Enderby and Captain Mainwaring from *Dad's Army*; the other an all-too-sensitive, grumpy chrysalis with little hope of ever maturing into a butterfly... The most striking character of the book is India itself... I can think of no writer, British or Indian, who has captured so vividly, with such intensity, the many intangibles of the Indian kaleidoscope.'

The *Daily Mail* called *Greenery Street* 'a wonderfully happy book, based on the author's own first year of marriage, when every detail of domestic life – however minor – is treated as a great adventure; much remains familiar and fresh.' It was the *Evening Standard's* fiction 'dark horse' on its bestseller list; the *Guardian* praised its 'unexpected dramatised passages and extensive interior monologues'; and the *Times Literary Supplement* devoted the whole of its back page to a long and very interesting review of 'this period comedy of exceptional charm', calling it 'funnier and subtler than *Three Men in a Boat*, quite as good as *The Diary of a Nobody*, and fit to set beside early PG Wodehouse, who thought *Greenery Street* "simply terrific" and "uncommonly like genius."

The *Times* reviewed *Lettice Delmer* 'by a vicar's wife with a passion for radical politics who is a fascinating observer of the period... combining social realism with elements more common to a Victorian morality tale, this is far from being a straightforward improving story: Susan Miles was writing at a time when the Victorian age was still intimately bound up with her own; she

makes it clear that Lettice's difficulties are partly the result of her mother's efforts to keep her mind "fresh and pure".'

*Petits Propos Culinaires*, a food magazine for food writers, said about *Kitchen Essays*: 'Persephone Books have performed with their usual grace; each essay, though short, is delicately turned, redolent of its period when servants were in shorter supply and American influences (especially on convenience) were gaining ground... It is also interesting because of Agnes Jekyll's urgings against over-elaboration, and her espousal of earthenware *marmites* for getting hot food straight from the range to the table.'

*Le Nouvel Observateur* glowingly reviewed the new translation of Oriel Malet's *Marjory Fleming*: 'Elle sut décrire ses émois, ses caprices et sa soif imprécise d'absolu à l'aube du XIXième siècle victorien... l'on d'irait que l'Alice de Lewis Carroll tend la main aux héroïnes de Jane Austen.' And *Madame Figaro* wrote that Oriel Malet 'a su retracer avec talent, dans ce livre attachant, la vie trop breve d'une petite poétesse précoce et hors du commun.'



# OUR MARCH 2003 BOOKS

Both our March books were published in 1939, *Manja* on September 7th and *The Priory* on July 7th. We are publishing them as a pair because they appeared at the same time, are set against a background of political events, and are domestic in theme. Anna Gmeyner was an Austrian playwright who had come to England with her thirteen year-old daughter in 1935. *Manja* describes the lives of five children conceived in Germany during the same night in 1920 and ends when all five are thirteen, when Hitler has come to power. The theme is a major one: the effect of the cataclysmic upheavals in Germany on family life. *Manja* has been especially translated for Persephone Books by Kate Phillips.

*The Priory* describes political events from a far greater distance. The setting is a large house in the North, where a widowed major lives with his daughters; when he marries a girl much younger than him, life changes enormously for all of them; yet, without their fully realising it, they are all greatly affected by

social changes. One of the strongest themes in the book is the middle-class need for complete retrenchment, anticipated by Dorothy Whipple

‘  
MANJA DESCRIBES  
THE LIVES OF FIVE  
CHILDREN CONCEIVED  
ON THE SAME NIGHT  
IN GERMANY IN 1920  
,’



Margaret Calkin-James

(and also brilliantly written about by Mollie Panter-Downes). ‘Brilliantly original and convincing’ was the critic Forrest Reid’s verdict in the *Spectator*.

## OUR WINTER FABRICS

For *The Runaway* we have chosen a fabric designed in 1936, the year Gwen Raverat did her woodcuts and the novel was reissued. It was designed by Margaret Calkin James and was done for the schoolroom in the house, named ‘Hornbeams, that she and her husband built in Hampstead Garden Suburb. The fabric for *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* is a 1932 design by Madeleine Lawrence for the Silver Studio. We chose it because it is outstandingly beautiful and redolant of its period; and because there is something of the butterfly about the heroine, Dolly, whose wedding day it is.



# FINALLY

In October we had a Persephone stand at the Frankfurt book fair, where there was a lot of interest from, for example, Russians, Croatians and Italians (who also favour a uniform yet distinctive look). We are hoping that more of our books will be translated; and that a French or Italian publisher might decide to do a Persephone Collection of, say, six books, marketing them as being in 'le style Anglais'.

We have just reprinted *The Far Cry* and *Kitchen Essays*, which, last year, proved to be a perfect Christmas present; and have been listening to *Little Boy Lost* on R4's Book at Bedtime every evening for two weeks. We hope some of you were also able to catch four of Mollie Panter-Downes's wartime stories read by Sylvestra le Touzel on R4; it called them 'dramatic, comic and poignant'.

There are still a few tickets for the Persephone lunch on November 27th, when Anne Harvey, author of one of the two Afterwords, will talk about *The Runaway*, and the actress Patricia Brake will read from it. We are having two Persephone Christmas Parties, one on Tuesday December 10th

from 6-8, the other on Tuesday December 17th from 12-2, when it is hoped that Judith Viorst will be present. Mulled wine and mince pies will be served, there will be a short talk about Persephone Books, and of course time to stock up for Christmas. There is no charge, but we would be grateful if you could try and let us know if you are coming. The January 15th lunch, called 'The Turn of the Tide', marks 60 years since El Alamein and the publication of the Beveridge Report: Chris Beauman will talk about how *A House in the Country*, written in 1942-3, anticipates post-war moral and social changes in Britain. On February 12th we will again be showing the film of *They Knew Mr Knight*. And on March 18th we will celebrate the publication of *The Priory*: we hope that the authors of the three Whipple Prefaces, Nina Bawden, the Rev Terence Handley MacMath and David Conville, will be 'in conversation' about her. All lunches cost £25 and include a

buffet lunch and wine; they last for two hours from 12.30.

There will be a Persephone Books stand at the Country Living Fair in Islington from November 13-17th, when we hope to see some of you. And do try and go to a new exhibition at the Imperial War Museum called 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', in which Julian Grenfell is one of the featured 'Twelve Soldier Poets of WW1'.

Finally – you will have noticed that this *PQ* and our third *Catalogue* have been sent out by our printer, Lavenham Press (and that they are both in colour). Now that we have 9000 readers it is too large a mailing to be sent out from the office, even with the kind help of our volunteers. But we want to thank everyone very warmly who has helped in the past – we could not have managed without all you have done for us.

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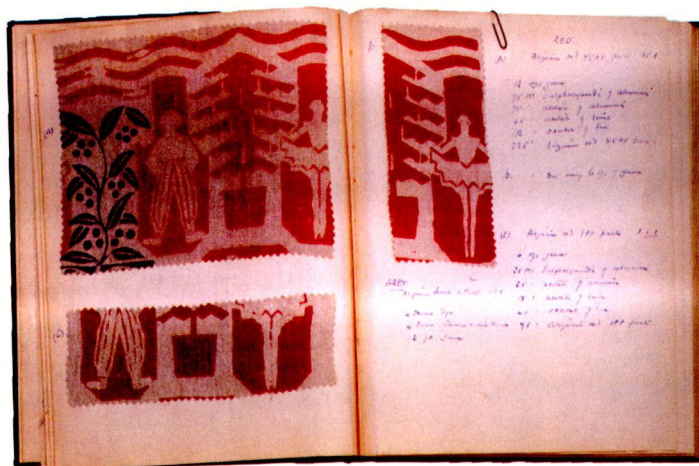
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If we have failed to acknowledge something that appears in *The Persephone Quarterly*, please let us know.

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Margaret Calkin-James's working notebook, 1936