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# Our Summer 2002 Books

**T**he *Far Cry* by Emma Smith was published in 1949 and reprinted as a book club edition in 1950 and as a Penguin in 1952; then it was all-but forgotten. Twenty-five years later Susan Hill, who had also published a first novel at a very young age, finally managed to track down a copy in a jumble sale; she wrote about her discovery in the *Daily Telegraph*, in a piece that was reprinted in a volume of her collected reviews in 1987 and is the Afterword to the present edition of *The Far Cry*. She said: 'I expected to find a work of promise which might betray its author's youthfulness, and seem dated. I did not expect to discover a small masterpiece... I began it with growing amazement, deepening admiration. There is nothing 'promising' about it, it is a completely formed, satisfying work of art, rich in human understanding and all manner of subtleties, beautifully shaped, evocative, moving and mature.' Yet, despite this eulogy, *The Far Cry* remained out of print.

In September 1946 Emma Smith, then aged 23, had gone to India for nine months with a documentary film unit; it included Laurie Lee, who was employed by the Tea Board to write the scripts for two films. One day he read aloud the article that would become the first chapter of *Cider with Rosie*: Emma was among those who

encouraged him to turn it into a book, writing in 1951, 'But why oh why don't you write that book about your childhood you started years ago?'

It was on her return to England in 1947 that she wrote her own autobiographical book, *Maiden's Trip*, based on her life during the war working a pair of narrow-boats on the Grand Union Canal. It was published in 1948 and was at once a success; 'financially solvent,' writes Emma Smith in her new Persephone Preface, 'I took up residence, alone with my typewriter, in a tiny room in the Hotel de Tournon, Paris.' Sometimes, during the summer of 1948, she worked outside: hence the picture on the cover of this *PQ*, taken one day by a passing photographer.

*The Far Cry* 'centres round Teresa aged fourteen' (Emma Smith told her original publisher) 'and her elderly father who, in his anxiety to keep her from his second wife, her mother, undertakes a formidable journey from England to his other daughter in the north of India. Teresa's feelings in the matter are not considered, or even discovered by her dominating parent. Himself in search of reassurance and love he is blind to the same need existing beside him in Teresa.'

The departure from England and the voyage out make up the first two sections of the book, and the trip across India by train the third; the fourth and fifth are about India and what happens there. The focus of the novel is on Teresa and her

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Cover: Picture of Emma Smith taken by a *Paris Match* photographer in 1948 while she was writing *The Far Cry*



responses to the people she meets and to India itself; and her maturing from a child into a young girl, mirroring, perhaps, Emma Smith's own change from girl to woman while she was in India.

*The Far Cry* was the new publisher MacGibbon & Kee's first book (twenty years before, Gollancz had launched its own list with *Brook Evans*, Persephone Book No. 26). It received extraordinary reviews. 'A joy to read,' wrote the *Sunday Times*; 'one of the most promising first novels I have read for a very long time' declared the *Daily Mail*; 'a savage comedy with a visionary streak' said Elizabeth Bowen in *Tatler*, comparing Emma Smith with Denton

Welch and commending her for bringing to English fiction 'something too often lacking: superabundant vitality'; while the *Manchester Guardian* commented: 'In *The Far Cry* we recognise from the first sentence an imagination that catches in words both the humour and the poetry of life. For Emma Smith has an unusual gift for being sensitive to the pathos and perplexity of human relations and yet light-hearted and gay. She observes sharply but without malice, and she loves the absurd. . . Altogether it is a novel that continually captivates by its warm intelligence.' American reviewers were just as positive: readers of the *Saturday Review of Literature* were told that Emma Smith, 'an astoundingly young woman, has written a novel loaded with a venerable sagacity. It is brilliant. It

glistens, it commands, and it utterly seduces the senses. With authority and subtlety she probes her characters.'

Our other summer book, Persephone Book No. 34, is the second volume of Mollie Panter-

Downes's short stories. Nearly 3000 copies of the first volume, *Good Evening, Mrs Craven: the Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes* have been sold and are now reprinting (along with Vere Hodgson's *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, which has also nearly exhausted its print run). *Minnie's Room: the Peacetime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes* has all the qualities of its first, companion volume.



Emma Smith in 1949

It is funny, perceptive, touching and outstandingly well written; in fact, partly as a result of the enthusiastic response of Persephone readers, Mollie Panter-Downes is now being increasingly recognised as one of our major writers and has been included in the *New Dictionary of National Biography*.

The growth in her reputation started when her 1947 novel *One Fine Day* was reprinted in 1985. This extraordinary book, which is in our view one of the great novels of the century, is set during one day in the summer of 1946 in a village in England, where Stephen and Laura are trying to come to terms with the enormous changes in their life wrought by the war. 'Wretched victims of their class, they still had dinner. Without the slaves,





they still cherished the useless lamp. . . While Stephen was away Laura had snatched her meals anywhere. But now there was a man in the house again, they faced each other over polished wood, branching candelight, the small ivory electric bell which was nothing but a joke.' But Laura's mother is fossilised. 'Now, darling, said Mrs Herriot, the servants will be coming back, they will be glad to get out of those awful uniforms, out of those appalling huts into a decent house with hot baths. And when they did not, she simply could not understand it. . . So the mahogany continued to reflect the silver polo cups pleasantly, the Herriot world held together for a little longer. . .'

This is the world of *Minnie's Room*, indeed the title story (part of which is reprinted in this *PQ*) was the first short story Mollie Panter-Downes wrote after finishing *One Fine Day*. In all, the volume contains

ten stories written between 1947 and 1965, each of them describing an aspect of life in Britain in the years after the war. 'Minnie's Room' itself is about a family who are unable to believe that their maid wants to leave them to go and live in a room of her own. An elderly couple emigrates to South Africa because of 'the dragon. . . out to. . . gobble their modest, honourable incomes.' The brothers and sisters in 'Beside the Still Waters' grumble because: 'Everything is so terribly difficult nowadays. [We] seem to be slaving. . . trying to

keep the place going.' 'Their Walk of Life' is about a girl who, to her parents' chagrin, becomes engaged to a local boy: 'It was bad luck, Horace had grimly reflected, that the fellow was not confined between four walls for at least part of the day, but he worked under the sky, along the highroad, among the common nettles, always and infernally accessible.'

Each story is very much of its period, which means that, as with all Persephone books, they can

be read for the light they cast on the era in which they were written as much as for the fine writing, the plots or the psychological insight. Hence the reprinting of the *Private Eye* piece on page 13 of this *PQ*. This is not just a wonderfully funny dig at the 1953 coronation celebrations; it is also perceptive about the clichés of social historians. But Mollie Panter-Downe allows one to get behind the clichés to how it really was.



Mollie Panter-Downes

Many of the stories in *Minnie's Room* are about people who once had glorious lives, either because they were more affluent or because they were powerful in India or simply because they had once been young and were now old. In every case they are images of a once-great past brought low. Yet they have a subtle, very English depth of observation: they are revealing of their time, suggestive and funny, beautifully written explorations of the response to change, and of loneliness, loss and self deception.



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# Our Readers Write

**I** have recently finished *The Home-Maker* & found the understanding of human fears & foibles so accurate & surprisingly relevant now. I do hope you will give us some more of Dorothy Canfield – as you did of Dorothy Whipple, whom I had never before come across, & who writes as sensitively as an English watercolourist.' PC, Surrey

'An unexpected day in bed has been transformed by being able to read *A House in the Country*. I adore Miss Ambleside with her hopes and struggles, she is simply hilarious. And the rest rather wonderful too.' PL, Oxford

'I bought *Reuben Sachs*, a riveting read, I find, even if the whole is somehow not quite the success it deserves.' JR, Nice

'I was thrilled when I popped into your shop to find someone who knew & loved books & wanted to talk about them. She recommended *Little Boy Lost* & I am extremely glad she did. I had only been vaguely aware of Marghanita Laski & would probably never have read this wonderful & very moving book if it had not been pressed into my hands.' SJS, Coggeshall

'*A House in the Country* won me over by the beauty of its writing and the sincerity of its thought. I am half-way through *The Carlyles* and finding it compulsive reading. . . . My other reason for enjoying it is the painting on the endpapers.' RH, Coventry

'I have now read and thoroughly enjoyed *Consequences*, *Few Eggs*, *Mr Knight*, *Someone at a Distance*, *The Home-Maker* and *Family Roundabout* – all other books are just fillers between Persephone classics!' LW, Stockport

'Just got round to reading *Fidelity*. I can't put

it down. It "hurts" at times as the feelings are described so very clearly, with no pathos and a good deal of understanding. Thanks you for reprinting such a memorable book!' SL, Germany

'I thought *Consequences* was very interesting, and my book club has read *Little Boy Lost* and found it moving & full of ideas to discuss.' AW, London SW13

'We are reading *The Children who Lived in a Barn* to our six year-old granddaughter with considerable success – she loves the detail of it – at one point I found her tidying up her bedroom – she said "I am being Susan"!' HC, Truro

'What a wonderful discovery your books are! I found my first two acquisitions compulsive reading – the characters in *The Home-Maker* are so compelling, it is a book to read again and again; and *Kitchen Essays* is an absolute treat, mouth-watering and humorous.' WG, South Wirral

'I have just finished *Marchioness* and I must tell you that I have not been able to put it down all day. It gripped me like *Miss Pettigrew* did. I cannot quite understand it.' EAW, Winchester

'If asked to choose a favourite Persephone book, I'd have to pick *Good Evening, Mrs Craven* for the simple beauty of the writing and the keen observation.' KH, Edinburgh

'On a recent trip to Milan I was interested to see copies of the diaries and letters of *Etty Hillesum* translated into Italian. It is interesting that Italian publishers think her work worthwhile reproducing for sale in mainstream bookshops while in England we have to rely on a small, mail order publisher to supply us with such fine writing! Keep up the good work.' VT, Burton-on-Trent



# How We Read Then (Part 1)

By the second half of the C17th there were a few dozen booksellers in London and the chief provincial cities and, by the early C18th, 150 in London and 300 in country towns. The main trade in the country was in stationery – paper, quill pens, almanacks – but London booksellers dealt mostly in books. The ‘bookshop’ streets were Paternoster Row, Little Britain and Duck Lane; they continued to exist until the Blitz in 1940.

New stock was unbound and lay about in loose sheets. If the customer liked the look of a book he could sit down in the shop and read it on the spot (stools were provided for this purpose) or buy the loose sheets and get them bound later; hence the uniformity of old libraries – the owner had the books bound in the way he chose (cf George III’s library at the British Library). Unbound sheets were used as advertisements and unsuccessful books were sold off as wrapping paper or pie cases. The bookseller was also the publisher.

Circulating libraries began to flourish from the second half of the C18th. Even though the education of girls was beginning, there was very little for them to read: a girl named Harriet Brown went away to be educated, when she returned to her home in the country ‘I proposed to spend part of my time in my favourite amusement of reading.’ But the only books in the house were a bible and a book about farming ‘and the only books my mother was possessed of were *The Domestic Medicine* and *The Complete Housewife*.’

A mass market began in the middle of the C19th, and the bestseller phenomenon began, for example with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Mrs Beeton’s husband Sam ran serials in *The Englishwoman’s*

*Domestic Magazine*, his 32-page book-sized magazine (what we would nowadays call a ‘section’ of a book); thus in 1858 he reprinted Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, first published in 1850, which featured an unfaithful wife as its heroine and questioned the structure of a society based on the subordinate role of women.

All Dickens’s major fiction was published serially in the 1840s and 1850s, in 32-page sections with two illustrations, each instalment usually consisting of two or three chapters and costing a shilling a month for nineteen or twenty months. Sometimes twelve readers contributed a penny to buy the part; enterprising landlords would provide tea (for a fee) on the first Monday of every month and a free reading of the latest instalment. These monthly and weekly parts were a democratising force, putting new writing into the hands and homes of everybody.

In 1842 Mudie’s Circulating Library opened in Southampton Row (round the corner from Lamb’s Conduit Street). A guinea a year allowed the subscriber one volume at a time, two guineas two volumes at a time and so on. Soon Mudie’s was patronised by practically every middle-class woman in London. It was successful because it was much cheaper than the other circulating libraries then in existence, and it was called ‘select’: Charles Mudie carefully excluded certain books for ‘moral’ reasons. No longer would the head of a Victorian family need to spend time scanning circulating library books to see if they were suitable for his daughters – the Mudie’s novel, in its bright yellow cover, lay on every parlour table, respectably.

**To be continued in PQ No. 15**



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# Our Reviewers Write

The *Sunday Telegraph* Magazine published a four-page article by Maureen Cleave about the 'delightful' *The Carlyles at Home*, illustrated with beautiful photographs of Carlyle's House as it is today. The *Independent on Sunday* gave the book four stars: "It is not the purpose of this book to explore the Carlyles' marital relations," claims Thea Holme in her 1965 study. Thankfully, the author betrays this promise, and we see a good deal of their married life; the picture which emerges is one of huge tenderness. However secluded their life may now appear, it was replete with incident, whether in the form of difficult, demanding neighbours, sullen maids, itinerant geniuses or constant artistic and financial worries. Here were two people utterly unable to detach themselves from either internal or external pressures, babbling in glorious, garrulous prose: two thinking hearts.' In the *Independent* Jan Marsh said that the book 'provides an amusing, chatty picture of domestic tribulations.' And the *National Trust Magazine* wrote about the book, and about the painting used as the endpaper: 'When Tait painted the Carlyles he told them his work would be "amazingly interesting to Posterity a hundred years hence." The double portrait, which can be seen at the Trust-owned Carlyle's House in Chelsea, is often cited as a classic example of Victorian middle class tastes. . . fifty pence from every book sold will go to the House.'

The *Daily Mail* reviewed *A House in the Country*: 'Set in 1942 at the time of the fall of Tobruk, this elegant elegiac romance captures the fading splendour of an England dragged into ugly modernity by the brutality of war. On the home front is Cressida - beautiful, self-contained, and

carrying an emotional burden that threatens to swamp her even as she cheerfully entertains guests at her country estate. And all the while the object of her passion is fighting for his life in battle. It's an arresting comparison: social niceties, petty squabbles, self-restraint, all played out in a rural idyll, while abroad thousands die defending that very way of life. And it's a touching love story, of the woman with a sadness behind her smile, and the man who cheats death to come back for her.'

John Whale in the *Church Times* found the argument in *Little Boy Lost* 'rigorous and gripping: between the general good and the particular good; between duty to the dead and compassion for the living; between purposeful work and an open heart. And the suspense lasts till the last page.'

There have been many reviews of *Kitchen Essays*. *Country Living* wrote: 'Three cheers to Persephone Books for publishing a new edition of *Kitchen Essays* by Agnes Jekyll DBE (sister-in-law of the more famous Gertrude). A witty, sharp writer, housekeeper *par excellence* and society hostess, whose Saturday essays for *The Times* include topics as varied as 'Luncheon for a Motor Excursion in Winter', 'Supper after the Play', 'Food for the Punctual and the Unpunctual' and 'For the Too Thin'. Nostalgic but unsentimental, humorous but precise, erudite and always elegant.' *Home & Family* called the book a 'delightful period piece of great charm. . . entertaining and illuminating anecdotes abound.' The *BBC Food Magazine* commented: 'This exquisitely reprinted period piece consists of short essays about social occasions and recipes to go with them. Read them aloud after dinner - they summon up a lost era.'



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# Persephone Titles in Print

*Many readers have asked us to print a short description of each of our 34 titles*

***William - an Englishman*** by Cicely Hamilton: A prizewinning 1919 novel about the harrowing effect of the First World War on William, a socialist clerk, and Griselda, a suffragette.

***Someone at a Distance*** by Dorothy Whipple: 'A very good novel indeed' (*Spectator*), first published in 1953, about an Englishman's tragic destruction of his previously happy marriage.

***Mariana*** by Monica Dickens: Published in 1940, this famous author's first novel is a delightful description of a young girl's life in the 1930s.

***Fidelity*** by Susan Glaspell: A 1915 novel by a Pulitzer-winning author that describes the effect of a girl in Iowa running off with a married man.

***An Interrupted Life*** by Etty Hillesum: From 1941-3 a young woman living in Amsterdam, who later died in Auschwitz, wrote diaries and letters that are among the great documents of our time.

***The Victorian Chaise-longue*** by Marghanita Laski: A 'little jewel of horror' about a woman lying down on a chaise-longue in the 1950s and waking up frozen in another's body eighty years before.

***The Home-Maker*** by Dorothy Canfield Fisher: Carol Shields has described this unforgettable, ahead-of-its-time book as 'a remarkable and brave 1924 novel about being a house husband.'

***Good Evening, Mrs Craven***: the Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes: Superbly written short stories, first published in *The New Yorker* and never before published over here.

***Few Eggs and No Oranges*** by Vere Hodgson: A detailed diary, written from 1940-45 in Notting Hill Gate, full of acute observation and humour.

***Good Things in England*** by Florence White: This collection of English recipes was published in 1932; it inspired many, including Elizabeth David.

***Julian Grenfell*** by Nicholas Mosley: A portrait of the WWI poet, and of his mother Ettie Desborough, by one of our foremost writers.

***It's Hard to be Hip over Thirty and Other Tragedies of Married Life*** by Judith Viorst: Funny, wise and weary poems about marriage, children and reality, first published in 1968.

***Consequences*** by EM Delafield: The searing 1919 story of a girl entering a convent because she fails to catch a husband, by the author of *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*.

***Farewell Leicester Square*** by Betty Miller: An atmospheric novel, by Jonathan Miller's mother, about the life of a young film-director and his encounters with anti-semitism in 1930s Britain.

***Tell it to a Stranger*** by Elizabeth Berridge: 1947 short stories described by AN Wilson as 'beautifully crafted', which have twice been in the *Evening Standard* bestseller list.

***Saplings*** by Noel Streatfeild: A novel by the well-known author of *Ballet Shoes* about what happens to a family during WWII.





**Marjory Fleming** by Oriel Malet: A novel based on the real life of the Scottish child prodigy who lived from 1803-11; the French translation is to be published by Editions Autrement in October

**Every Eye** by Isobel English: An unusual 1956 novel about a girl travelling to Spain and looking back at her life, highly praised by Muriel Spark.

**They Knew Mr Knight** by Dorothy Whipple: An absorbing 1934 novel, filmed in 1943, about a family man driven to committing fraud.

**A Woman's Place** by Ruth Adam: A survey of women's lives in the twentieth century, very readably written by a novelist-historian.

**Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day** by Winifred Watson: A delightful 1938 novel about a governess and the night-club singer who employs her. Persephone's bestseller, recently re-read on R4.

**Consider the Years** by Virginia Graham: Sharp, funny WWII poems by Joyce Grenfell's best friend and collaborator, a favourite of Maureen Lipman, who read *Miss Pettigrew* on R4.

**Reuben Sachs** by Amy Levy: A short, fierce 1880s satire on the London Jewish community by 'the Jewish Jane Austen', a friend of Oscar Wilde.

**Family Roundabout** by Richmal Crompton: The author of the *William* books wrote many adult novels; this one is about two families over 25 years, watched over by two very different matriarchs.

**The Montana Stories** by Katherine Mansfield: Collects together the short stories written in Switzerland during Katherine Mansfield's last year, with a new publisher's note, and contemporary illustrations never before republished.

**Brook Evans** by Susan Glaspell: A very readable 1928 novel written in the same year that DH Lawrence wrote *Lady Chatterley*, about the effect of a love affair on three generations.

**The Children who Lived in a Barn** by Eleanor Graham: Jacqueline Wilson writes the preface to this 1938 children's classic about five children fending for themselves while their parents are away.

**Little Boy Lost** by Marghanita Laski: This description of a father's search for his son in post-war France was chosen by the *Guardian's* Nicholas Lezard as his 2001 paperback choice; it will be a R4 'Book at Bedtime' in October.

**The Making of a Marchioness** by Frances Hodgson Burnett: A wonderfully entertaining 1901 novel for adults about a woman who becomes a marchioness, and the ensuing melodrama.

**Kitchen Essays** by Agnes Jekyll: Witty and influential essays about cooking, with recipes, first published in *The Times* in 1921-2.

**A House in the Country** by Jocelyn Playfair: A 1944 novel about the effect of WWII on a group of people seeking refuge in the country.

**The Carlyles at Home** by Thea Holme: A mixture of biography and social history describing Thomas and Jane Carlyle's life in Chelsea.

**The Far Cry** by Emma Smith: A beautifully written and evocative 1949 novel about a young girl's passage to India at the time of Independence.

**Minnie's Room**: The Peacetime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes 1947-65: second volume of short stories first published in *The New Yorker*.

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# Extract from 'Minnie's Room'

One day in May, when the square was alight with lilac and laburnum, the little dog trotted upstairs as usual and bounded to his place on the sofa, but the expected caress did not come. Surprised, he turned his little brindled snout toward the more expressive end of Mrs Sothern, who, taking no notice of him, flung out her hand toward Norah, entering with the shopping basket.

'One might as well talk to a stone!' she cried.

Norah set down her basket. 'You've spoken to her then?' she said.

'Spoken!' Mrs Sothern's plump, ringed hand pawed the air, and emotion worked her flushed face. 'My dear girl, I've been practically on my knees. I put everything up to her - my health, the way you have to slave already, the fondness we all have for her. "Mr Sothern is devoted to you, Minnie," I said.'

'She seems to have made her mind up, all right,' Norah said, calmly enough. She lit a cigarette. There's nothing for it now, she thought, but to close this place and go to live in a hotel. But it will kill them, she thought. Mother will be lost without her big bedroom, with its familiar mahogany bed, the family photographs in silver frames, the curtains blowing out toward the smell of lilac and the sound of a barrel organ playing in the square, and Dusty curled up in his basket by the brass fire-dogs. And poor Daddy, who likes the feeling that he can walk around the house blindfolded and lay his hand on his cigars, his boot-trees, and his Dickens - how can he turn into one of the anonymous old men one sees uneasily drinking tea at little wicker tables in hotel lounges?

'Maurice must talk to her this evening,' Mrs

Sothern was saying. 'She's always adored Maurice.'

'I don't think it will make any difference, somehow,' Norah said. 'After all, she always said this would happen, didn't she?'

'As though one ever took her seriously!' moaned her mother.

Minnie was leaving them. The unbelievable had happened. Her beautiful dinners were long ago a thing of the past, of course, but she was still an artist with what there was to cook. Mr Sothern sometimes observed that when one dined out in restaurants, everything tasted the same and one got up as hungry as one sat down, but at home Minnie managed to make food taste like food. Though the dry, red skin was loose now on Mr Sothern's jaw, he did well enough. The other maids had gone long since, and Minnie and Norah did the work between them. Everyone envied the Sotherns for having Minnie. She had her one little oddity, though, her harmless bee in the bonnet. She had often told Mrs Sothern that if she had not married by the time she was forty-five, she intended to leave private service and take a room of her own somewhere. The family had laughed occasionally about Minnie's room. 'Someone will marry her, confound him, for her apple pie alone,' Maurice had said lazily one Sunday lunch before the war as he poured cream over his second helping. But no man had asked for Minnie. Even during the war and the blackout, when London was full of lonely men thousands of miles from their women and looking hungrily for any waist to circle, any bosom to lean their heads against, Minnie had trotted home on her evenings out with no footsteps





following, halting, and following hopefully again behind her. Fortunately for the Sotherns, no hint of her superb ability to keep a man's digestion tranquil and his temper perfect appeared in her tiny, sad marmoset's face. 'Poor Minnie, we are really her whole world,' Mrs Sothern had said one day to her daughter, sighing with compunction as they paused and listened to the radio floating up from the basement, a vast, Victorian catacomb, in which the solitary Minnie seemed to rattle about.

However, only the night before this lilac-tossing, perfect May afternoon, Mrs Sothern's assumption proved to have been false. It was Minnie's birthday, her forty-fifth, and in the evening, after dinner, she came upstairs and tapped at the door of Mr Sothern's study, where he was sitting doing the Times crossword. It was for fear of upsetting Mrs Sothern's heart that she came to him first, Minnie explained. If it would suit them, she said, she would like to leave at the end of June, when the room for which she had spoken would be empty. She looked at him at one moment as though she were contemplating saying something about her feelings for his family and their long time together, but it was no good; she had no means of expressing herself except through those lyrical meals that she had been creating for

them for twenty-five years. She withdrew to the catacomb. Forgetting Minnie's prudence, Mr Sothern charged upstairs to find his wife, who was already in bed. Norah came up; Maurice came down, attracted by the uproar, from talking to one of his friends on the extension telephone in his bedroom. He was still unmarried, and lived a life of which his family knew very little. 'Good Lord!'

he said. 'So she really meant it!' Hard luck on the parents, he thought. He assumed immediately that, without Minnie, the house must go. He could dig in somewhere; only the other day Miles Carrington had asked him to share a flat with him. But what would the parents do? Hard luck on poor old Norah, too, he thought, looking at his sister's worried face and the grey in her hair under the electric light. She was tied to the old people forever; she hadn't a hope now. 'A room of her own!' Mr Sothern was saying angrily.

'Hasn't she a room here, perfectly decent and comfortable? She must have gone out of her mind!' Yes, wailed Mrs Sothern from the bed, Minnie was plainly demented. How could she keep herself on her own, for one thing? 'By daily cooking,' growled Mr Sothern, and there was a stricken silence. It was an unfurnished room, he added, in a district too far from Bayswater to make



AN ILLUSTRATION BY KATE GREENAWAY TO "THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE"





it even possible that Minnie would come to them by the day. She had been getting things together for it, piece by piece, for years, tucking away every penny and every present they had given her, cherishing every chipped and battered remnant of furniture that had been thrown out from the upstairs world and had found its way down to the basement.

In the middle of the confusion, Dusty began to scratch urgently on the door, as a signal that it was past his time for a stroll to the letter box. Rather glad to escape, Norah went down with him. As she passed though the hall, she heard Minnie's radio playing a dance tune, loud and gay. One knows nothing about anyone, thought Norah. It had been raining lightly. She stepped out into the twilight after the pattering small dog and strolled under the trees, enjoying the quiet and the smell of the damp earth beneath the lilac bushes after the agitated scene in her mother's bedroom.

It was the next morning that Mrs Sothern decided Maurice must talk to Minnie, but it made no difference, as Norah had foreseen. He was perfectly amiable about 'having a try'. He lounged down to Minnie's quarters after dinner, which had been a melancholy meal, but he returned with scant comfort for the gloomy little party in the drawing room. Minnie had said, he reported, that she would be sorry to leave them indeed and that she realised what a fix she was putting them in,

especially Miss Norah. 'Well?' said Mr Sothern impatiently. That, said Maurice, was exactly what he had asked. 'Well?' he had said to Minnie hopefully, and though he did not enlarge on this to his family, through his head had suddenly shot the possible explanation of her decision to leave them. By jove, he had thought, has she got a man somewhere? It seemed incredible. She was such an ugly little devil. But nothing in that line, after all, should surprise one. He had amused himself with his idea as he sat there on the edge of the kitchen table, listening to Minnie's

answer, which he later translated for the benefit of his relations. If a woman got to a certain age without finding a husband and kids, Minnie's philosophy stated, she ought to have something of her own, even if it were only one

room that belonged to nobody else. She had made up her mind to it ever since she could remember. 'I wouldn't never respect myself again if I didn't stick to it, Mr Maurice,' she had said. He had nodded, still playing with the notion that it might be a man, after all. Though he knew it was really preposterous, it made him feel somehow warm and friendly toward Minnie, and his smile was almost knowing as he said, 'Well, good luck, whatever you decide,' and went upstairs again with his tidings to the desolate outpost in the drawing room. . .



A Boots library in the 1920s



# 1953 - The Way We Were

**(B**lack and white footage of grim Northern-style town with factory chimneys, men in cloth caps and street urchins playing hop-scotch on cobbled streets.)

**Narrator** (for it is some terrible actor): Britain in the post-war years was a very bleak and austere place.

The war had left the country bankrupt and exhausted. The average wage was 18/6 a week in old money and most families could barely afford to eat. *(Shot of very old man wearing yellow socks sitting in armchair in London club.)*

**Lord Deedes** (for it is he):

Everyone sheemsh to forget that there wash still cheeshe rationing in 1953. You were only allowed half an ounce of cheeshe a week, per pershon. Thatsh not a lot if you're fond of cheeshe, which I am.

*(Old newsreel footage of women in headscarves queuing outside shop with notice: 'SORRY NO CHEESE TODAY')*

**Pathé-type Commentator:** Housewives queued in vain all over Britain as cheese deliveries from America failed to materialise. So for the ladies, it was a case of 'hard cheese'! But never mind, soon the King will be dead and we can have a Coronation to cheer us all up!

**Narrator:** Then in February 1952 came the grim news. *(Shot of black-edged news-placard reading 'THE KING IS DEAD'. Cut to man in pin-striped suit sitting in agreeable book-lined study)*

**Lord Bore** (*Constitutional expert*): The extraordinary thing about the British constitution is that at the very moment a monarch dies, in this case the late King, at that very second his heir becomes King, or in this case Queen. Just like that! In the twinkling of an eye! Amazing! Just

imagine, she went to bed a Princess and, some time in the night, she mysteriously became the Queen! Could I have my fee in cash, please? Spot of bother with the wine merchant, you understand.

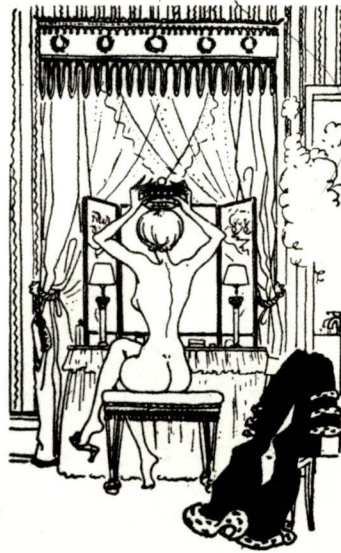
**Narrator:** But it wasn't all fun and games! Sorry, I'll do that bit again. It wasn't all doom and gloom! Suddenly the dark clouds parted, and a dazzling ray of sunshine lit up the bleak landscape of post-war austerity-shrouded. . . oh no, I've done that bit. Suddenly Britain had a new young Queen and everyone agreed that it was the dawn of a new Elizabethan age.

*(Cut to extremely dull-looking academic in library)*

**Famous academic:** It was the dawn of a new Elizabethan age. The dark clouds of post-war austerity rolled away, and suddenly there was something to cheer about.

*(Black and white footage of Coronation. Golden coach, radiant Queen, Westminster Abbey, Peers in robes, Zadok the Priest, you know the stuff. Posh woman in chintzy drawing room with dogs.)*

**Lady Pamela Ghastly** (for it is she): The Coronation was the most tremendous fun. We all had to get up terribly early, to be at the Abbey by half-past



**"Willy, darling, come and see how I'm going to look in the Abbey!"**

Signs of the Times by Osbert Lancaster 1961 © Lady Lancaster

five. And you couldn't go to the loo, even if you were bursting. Some of the peers got frightfully hungry and began to eat their coronets. It was frightfully funny. And then, when we got home, we found all our servants and estate workers had been watching the whole thing on a little television set which we'd bought specially for them. They'd enjoyed it all so much. And, do you know, one of them had been waving at us all day, thinking that we could see him! Ha, ha, ha!

**Narrator:** But it wasn't just the gentry who were able to join in the fun. All along the route of the Coronation procession that June morning were millions of loyal subjects waiting to catch a glimpse of their radiant young Queen. Many of them had been camping out for a week. *(Cut to woman in Old People's Home, surrounded by Coronation mugs, Union Jacks and pictures of Enoch Powell)*

**Mrs Doris Stothard** *(for it is she):* We all camped out for a week. I had my two little girls with me. But the youngest, Sylvia, got lost in the crowd when she went to find the toilet. But then a kind policeman brought her back, safe and sound. And I said to him. . .

**Voice of Producer:** Can you forget the policeman and get back to how it started raining and it didn't dampen your spirits?

**Mrs Stothard:** Oh yes. . . it started to rain but it didn't dampen our spirits. And we were all very excited when we heard that they'd climbed Mount Everest. Is that right?

*(Jerky black and white footage of two men sitting*

*outside tent on snow-covered mountain. Caption: Edmund Hillary And Sherpa Howard Resting At Base Camp After Their Historic Climb. Posh woman in room with even more dogs)*

**Lady Pamela:** We were all so proud. Of course Mr Hillary came from New Zealand. But in those days we thought of him as an Englishman. And the same goes for the little Sherpa, even though he was coloured! Ha, ha, ha!

*(Cut back to woman in Old People's Home)*

**Mrs Stothard:** As I was saying, it started to rain, but in no way did it dampen our spirits. And there was a great cheer when this big black lady went past in a coach. 'That's Winifred Atwell,' said my husband. And, d'you know, it was!

**Voice of Producer:** No, no, no. . . For heaven's sake, Mrs Stothard, it was the Queen of bloody Tonga. How many times do I have to tell you? *(Black and white footage of Winifred Atwell)*

**Narrator:** And then came the very best news of all. It was announced that cheese rationing had come to an end! *(Cut to technicolour archive*

*film showing young William Deedes, aged 63, eating cheese sandwich at East End street party and giving cheery thumbs-up sign to camera)*

**Pathé-style Commentator:** A perfect end to a perfect day! *(Music over: Billy Cotton and his orchestra play 'Zadok the Priest')*

**A BBC12 Co-Production With Television Romania and WT-XCJ Ontario**

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"You know—the size which fits into an earl's coronet and still leaves room for a packet of biscuits and an apple!" 29.v.53



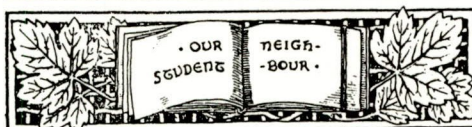
# Our Summer Fabrics

The endpaper for *The Far Cry* is a late 1930s English printed linen which might have been sent for by Ruth, wife of a tea-planter, whom Mr Digby and Teresa travel to India to visit; at her bungalow 'she pored over London catalogues, as a result of which yards of glazed chintzes arrived by post and carrier.' Appropriately, the pattern of stems, leaves and flowers is in the tradition of the Indian chintzes originally made for the European market.

The fabric for *Minnie's Room* was bought at John Lewis in the late 1950s. We are using it because it is beautiful and has both traditional and modernist elements, reflecting the struggles of the people in the stories to cling on to the old while adapting to the new; and the sombre colours are in keeping with the mood of the stories. (Both these fabrics will be displayed in the window of the Persephone Bookshop.)

# Our Autumn Books

Persephone Book No. 35 is *Greenery Street* by Denis Mackail. It is a funny and delightful 1925 novel about the first, very happy year of a young couple's life in a house in Chelsea. Denis Mackail was a grandson of Burne-Jones, his sister was the novelist Angela Thirkell and he himself wrote nearly a book a year between 1920 and 1950. Among his closest friends were JM Barrie, AA Milne and PG Wodehouse; the latter called *Greenery Street* 'simply terrific. . . It's so good that it makes one feel that it's the only possible way of writing a book, to take an ordinary couple and just tell the reader all about them.'



from *A Light Load* (1891) by Dolly Radford

*Lettice Delmer* (1958) by Susan Miles, a novel in verse, was announced last winter but its publication was postponed. We wrote then that instances of narrative verse in Western literature range from Byron's *Don Juan* to Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* but that there is very little by women. Beginning in a comfortable villa in Highgate during the First World War, when Lettice is perhaps 18, and ending about fifteen years later, it describes the Delmer family, Lettice's spiritual journey and life in England at the time. It is funny, moving and utterly absorbing; we cannot recommend it highly enough.



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# Finally. . .

The *Mail on Sunday's* *You Magazine* ran a two-page spread on Persephone books as a publisher for women 'bored with chick-lit and formulaic fiction [who] find the range in high-street bookshops bewildering. . . The fiction is intelligent and beautifully written,' wrote Louette Harding, quoting our remark that 'they are all meant to be books you can't put down': we would be 'mortified if anyone said, "Oh I was bored and stopped halfway through."' "

Rather charmingly the article ended by saying that we imagine our books 'on office desks, beside Agas and hanging in bags from the handles of baby buggies' and that ten per cent of our readers are men, 'sensible men. The best men love these books.'

Persephone lunches: in March Angela Huth talked most interestingly about her novel *Land Girls* and our own Second World War novel *A House in the Country*; we were delighted when one of the guests turned out to have been a land-girl herself! In April Maureen Lipman entertained us hugely by reading from some of her favourite books, including of course *Miss Pettigrew*; by coincidence her reading of what the announcer called 'a joyful and poignant fantasy' was that week being repeated on R4. And in May Charlie Lee-Potter of Radio 4 kindly came at short notice instead of Claire Tomalin, who unfortunately could not be with us. She talked

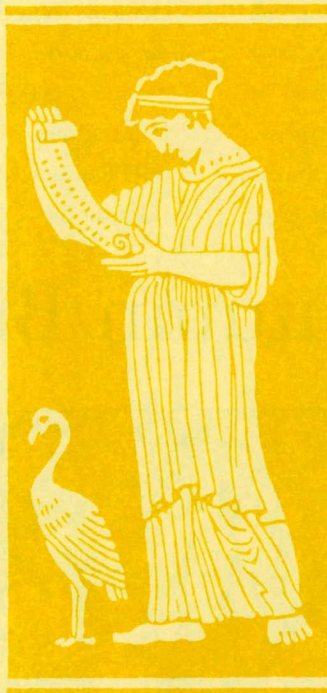
animatedly about her favourite Persephone books and about the recent reprints of early works by writers such as Larkin and Kerouac which they

might prefer had never been republished (the subject of a recent 'Open Book' programme).

Future events: Emma Smith is speaking on June 18th and July 4th. Both lunches are sold out but it is worth putting your name on the waiting list in case people have to cancel. On September 18th we are having the first Persephone event not in our office: by kind permission of the Custodian it will be at Carlyle's House in Chelsea from 6-8, when madeira and seed-cake will be served. The speaker will be Kathryn Hughes, who is working on a major new biography of Mrs Beeton; she will talk about *The Carlyles at Home* and the way Jane and Thomas Carlyle

lived in the house. And on October 17th Oriel Malet will give a lunchtime talk about her novel *Marjory Fleming*, published that week in a new French translation by Editions Autrement in Paris.

In a feature about Village London *Time Out* focused on Lamb's Conduit Street and called us 'a gorgeous enterprise which republishes near-lost books in exquisite style.' The street was given 5/10 for shopping and 8/10 ('pretty yet hip') for 'village aesthetic'. Do come and buy your books from No. 59 - we are open from 9-6 on weekdays and 10-5 on Saturdays - but please ring first to check times in August, since we may close for a week.



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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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