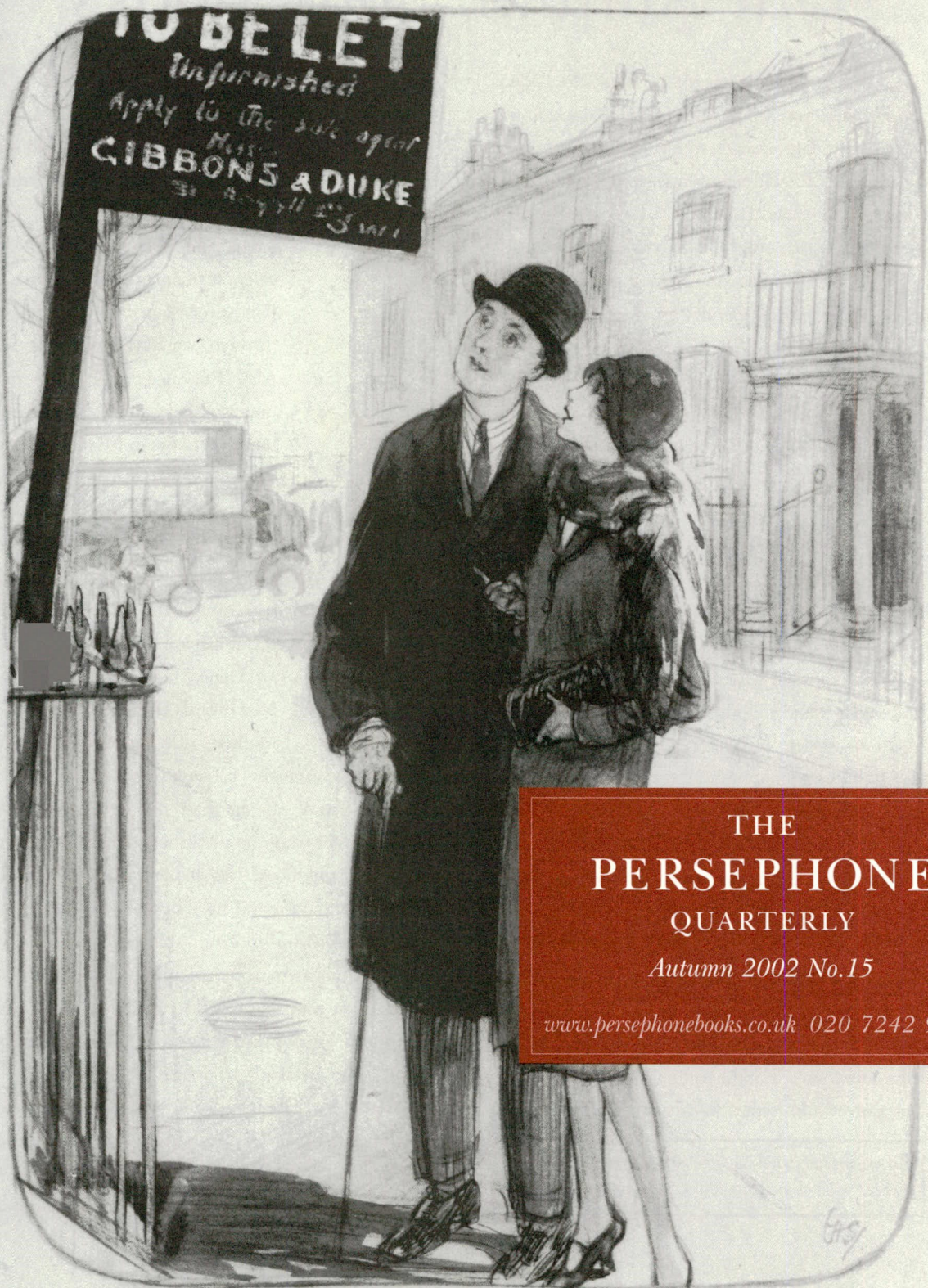


GREENERY STREET



THE
PERSEPHONE
QUARTERLY

Autumn 2002 No.15

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Our Autumn 2002 Books

Greenery Street, Persephone Book No. 35, was written in 1925 when Denis Mackail was thirty-three. It looks back with happiness and a tinge of nostalgia to 1917, eight years previously, when he was twenty-five and had come to live in 'Greenery' Street in Chelsea with his twenty-one year-old wife.

The book can be read on two levels. On the one hand it is a touching description of the first year of married life of a young couple in London; on the other it is a homage – something rare in fiction – to happy married life.

Ian and Felicity Foster are shown as they meet, persuade Felicity's parents that they should be allowed to marry, house-hunt and, after about fifty pages, arrive in Greenery Street – a completely undisguised (and still unchanged) Walpole Street, off the King's Road. It is the first year of the Fosters' married life that is the main subject of the book. The plot is skimpy – they encounter their neighbours, they acquire a dog, they are worried when Felicity's sister philanders, they cannot pay the builder; but plot is unnecessary in a novel that is about the charmingly everyday, contented and timeless.

The Fosters are how all newly-married couples should be and would like to be, and they might be living anywhere. 'For the truth, the real truth,' Denis Mackail would write in a sequel, *Tales from*

Greenery Street (1928) 'is that Greenery Street is wherever you choose to see it. It is anywhere, and it is nowhere. It runs between the main road with the scarlet omnibuses and the tall trees of Paradise Square [in fact Royal Hospital Gardens, SW3], but you will stand a better chance of finding it in the

calendar than on any map that I have ever seen. It is a phase through which the lucky ones pass. But once the phase is over, once you have surrendered those three latchkeys to Mssrs Gibbons & Duke, what is it but a fading picture in your own memory? Where is it but a ghostly, elusive little street that still finds room for newcomers, but no longer has room for you?'

Denis Mackail was a grandson of Edward Burne-Jones on his mother's side and the son of JW

Mackail, the eminent classicist; his sister was Angela Thirkell (however, she had not yet started her writing career when he published *Greenery Street*). His early childhood was happy, but his parents' ambitions for him and his sister's bossiness meant that he grew up morose, diffident and lonely. Meeting and marrying his wife, Diana Granet, was to him almost miraculous, and it is Denis's, and his hero Ian's, joy in his marriage that makes *Greenery Street* so unusual and so delightful.

Greenery Street is subtly profound about marriage and human relations but it is also extremely funny. Just as in the work of Denis's friend PG Wodehouse (who described the book as

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Cover: original jacket for *Greenery Street* (1925) by EH Shepard (who also illustrated the Winnie the Pooh books).



‘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’) the humour is low-key and dead-pan: it is the kind of book that one reads with delighted laughter, not always quite sure why it is funny but certain that somehow it is.

Denis Mackail wrote nearly a book a year between 1920 and 1950; in our view, *Greenery Street* is the best, which was also the view of Allen Lane of Penguin, who reissued it as a very early Penguin in 1937. After his wife died, in 1949 when she was only 53, Denis stopped writing; this book remains as a memorial to their life between 1917, when they came to Walpole Street, and 1923, when they left to move

to a larger house (and, coincidentally, were succeeded by the newly-married Jan Maxtone Graham, the ‘Jan Struther’ who would later write *Mrs Miniver* set in much the same kind of house). ‘Oh dear,’ Denis wrote in 1942, ‘how often I dream that we are back there. For nothing can ever take the place or dull the memory of the first little house, and even *Greenery Street* failed to get it out of my system.’

Lettice Delmer, our second autumn book, is also largely set in London. It is a novel in verse about the tragic drama of Lettice’s short life from, roughly, 1912 when she is eighteen to the later 1920s. It starts when she is the pampered daughter of the house living in Highgate; her mother has been

on her weekly visit to a ‘Special Hospital’ for unmarried mothers and women with venereal disease and her parents decide to bring an unmarried mother to live with them, and also allow her to have her five year-old son with her. From this act of charity, which will turn out to be disastrous for many of the characters in the drama but particularly for Lettice, the novel begins to unfold. Finally, after many harrowing vicissitudes, Lettice’s spiritual journey reaches its conclusion and she finds spiritual redemption.

The author of *Lettice Delmer* used the name Susan Miles as a *nom de plume*. Her real name was Ursula Roberts, she was married to the Rector of St George’s, Bloomsbury and was a

published novelist and poet; in 1920 Harold Monro singled her out in *Contemporary Poets* as one of the fifty most important poets then writing. *Lettice Delmer*, Susan Miles’s only novel in verse, is a quite extraordinary book, not only for the way it manages, in the tradition of other verse novels such as *Eugène Onegin*, *Aurora Leigh* or, more recently, *The Golden Gate*, to be grippingly readable.

We cannot recommend this book highly enough and believe it will be admired and enjoyed by people who would never normally dream of reading a novel in verse. When we sent it out to reviewers in early August the *Guardian* was impressed enough to decide to run an extract. We reproduce on the next page some of the passage they reprinted.



Dennis Mackail in 1925

—○—○—○—

Extract from Lettice Delmer

When Lettice stirs, bodily misery
precedes emotion. Throbbing head, and tongue
thickened and sour, bring acute distress
before her memory stabs her.
The unfamiliar slanting of the light
between the heavy curtains, and the smell
of wine and dying flowers bring her awake.
Bewildered, she stares round, then, terrified,
she wraps her cloak about her, snatches up
her purse, and flees.
She fights her nausea and hails a cab.
Not till she pays the driver does she know
that one half crown is all that she has left.
She prays that she may slink upstairs unseen,
but meets Miss Hobley. In her cubicle
she tears off her white clothes, deep-stained with wine,
and yields herself to nausea.
The Warden comes, stern faced and scandalised.
Lettice lies prone, too wretched to look up.
Hulbert, she learns, has searched for her all night,
and is still searching,
distracted at what enquiries have revealed
of Bois Diego's post-Harrobian years.
Contact is made at last by telephone,
and Hulbert comes. She clings to him and sobs.
Her story tortures him; her shame is his.
The days that follow offer no relief.
Hulbert is forced to rush from this to that,
buying equipment, fitting uniform,
taking instructions, signing documents,
while knowing his young sister is alone,
utterly wretched and disconsolate.
He snatches moments with her when he can;
these do not cheer him.
At last the very day he is to sail,
he takes her for the farewell jaunt – postponed

with such disaster. Tacitly their choice
avoids a concert. At the *matinée*
(chosen by Hulbert with more care than skill)
they sit preoccupied and desolate,
trying to find some respite from their grief,
and failing, while the players strut and mouth
in would-be funny tedium. They adjourn
to an hotel for tea. (The Chelsea rooms
are let for the duration. Hulbert's club
makes no provision for a lady guest.)
The room is vast and chilly, the tea smoked,
and the toast sogged. 'At least we are alone,'
says Hulbert with a sigh. 'We *can* talk here.'
He finds that she has planned a way of life
that horrifies him.
'But can't you see that I should worry less
if I could only leave you among friends...?'
'I simply *can't* go anywhere I'm known.
I must begin afresh.' 'It was *my* fault...'
'It wasn't, Hulbert. If I had explained
I wasn't used to wine...If I'd refused...'
She sees the tickets float in the epergne
and hears her foolish laughter. The tears brim.
'I've had such hours and hours to think and think.
It isn't only being such a fool
that dreadful night, that nightmare night...'
'My *dear*...'
'I've been so vain and selfish all along,
and so conceited.' 'Ah, don't cry, don't cry –'
'I need a new beginning. Let me *work*.
I've *played* at art and music.
And Blackwell's right: those sonnets *are* derived,
and more than *somewhat* stilted...' 'Lettice dear,
one question while we're still alone.' He sweats.
'You're sure you may not need to get advice
from some kind doctor, after that bad night...'

Our Readers Write

I loved *Little Boy Lost* – a marvellous book, and what an ending!’ JP, Colchester

‘*Someone* is immensely readable: Dorothy Whipple has superb plotting & pacing, &, although deployed very sparingly, she is wonderful with extended metaphors & similes.’ TF, Rhode Island

‘When I first opened *A House in the Country* I thought “No, it’s not for me” and put it away. Some weeks later I picked it up again. How glad I am that I did. What a beautiful story – thank you for choosing it.’ JO, Bosham

‘I was so pleased to find *Marjory Fleming*, as I had only known Oriel Malet from her connection to Daphne du Maurier. Definitely my favourite book.’ GG, Goring-on-Thames

‘I first read my mother’s dog-eared copy of *Someone at a Distance* nearly thirty years ago and have read it every year since!’ EM, Liverpool

‘I absolutely loved *Saplings*. It was such a heartbreaking read to get into the minds of those children. (The café music CD is always playing in the background at work.)’ MS, Toronto

‘*Marchioness* was surprising, the first part very Edith Wharton, the second almost Marie Corelli, pure melodrama. What a wonderful ending, so satisfying.’ LB, Victoria, Australia

‘Richmal Crompton must be rated a major undiscovered literary talent – she writes with penetrating irony and with subtle shifts of mood.’ PV, London, SW19

‘*Marchioness* is astonishingly good – I still can’t make out how, though written with such reticence and restraint, it conjures up such a vivid picture of the people, the times, the way of life.’ EH, Princes Risborough

‘May I say that unlike just about everyone else, I loathed *Miss Pettigrew* – I carried on reading it hoping to find out what everyone saw in it but never could. On the hand, I found *Few Eggs* absolutely rivetting.’ PB, Wistaston

‘Having bought most of your books, I think my favourite is the first one I discovered, *Few Eggs*. Next is *William*, which I could not put down.’ DM, Dover

‘*Miss Pettigrew* was enchanting, and once I started *Mr Knight* I could not put it down.’ ST

‘*An Interrupted Life* is imbued with the profundity of Etty Hillesum’s response to the impending terror, to which she stays true to the end – a truly remarkable life. But your resumé in the Catalogue does not do it justice. Maybe you could be a bit bolder?’ AC, London NW3

‘I loved *Marjory Fleming* – it is so very touching, so charming, so sad, and it has stayed with me as only some books do.’ HT, Reading

‘I can’t put *The Far Cry* down – beautiful writing. Love the CD: the happiest music.’ JN, Appledore

‘I have now finished *Someone at a Distance* and have thoroughly enjoyed it. It is so well written and wholly absorbing, with an acute understanding of human nature.’ JH, Bottesford

‘I hugely enjoyed *Farewell Leicester Square* – a marvellous book, of its period but enduringly perceptive.’ JS, London N1

‘*Mariana*, *Miss Pettigrew* and *Marchioness* are my favourites so far; and EM Delafield. But when I lent *Consequences* to a friend she begged me never again to lend her something so sad – we both thought it brilliant nonetheless.’ SB-S, Putney

How we read then (Part II)

The success of Charles Mudie's 'select' and respectable lending library in the 1840s meant that his Southampton Row premises became too small and in 1852 Mudie's moved to a larger building on the corner of New Oxford Street and Museum Street.

They advertised widely, and used their own carts to make daily deliveries; new books were bought in large numbers and were immediately available. During the 1850s alone, half a million volumes of fiction were added to the library which, by the end of the century, consisted of seven million books; 25,000 families had subscriptions and there was now a fleet of vans to deliver the books. There were other libraries, such as Mitchell's and Day's, but none were as successful as Mudie's.

And what did the Victorian reading public read? Even then it read different genres of fiction such as 'silver fork' (posh), sensation, gothic, adventure, detective, courtship and regional. And we know, from the detailed diaries she kept, that Mrs Jeanette Marshall read all the great C19th novelists - but nothing C18th and no Jane Austen: she read Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* in 1882 and HG Wells's *The Time Machine* in 1895, both brand new books.

From the 1820s onwards, most novels were published in three volumes - the 'three-decker' costing a guinea and a half. Then, in the mid 1890s, the three-decker stopped being published: at 31s and 6d it had become too expensive to buy and readers were rebelling against the length. Publishers had liked the high price and Mudie's had liked the small but fully guaranteed market; but cheaper reprints were beginning, and free, 'public' libraries were growing in the provinces.

One of the first novels published in one volume, at 6s, was Rider Haggard's *She* in 1886 - it sold 30,000 copies, a huge amount compared with the numbers sold when three-deckers were borrowed. But the advent of cheap books marked Mudie's downfall, and the bestseller phenomenon began. Readers went to the newsagent 'twopenny libraries' and to the descendants of Mudie's such as Boots and Harrods' Lending Library.

Soon there were paperback editions, for example Albatross, Tauchnitz and Penguin, set up by Allen Lane to convert book borrowers into buyers; all Penguins cost 6d, and were different from previous paperbacks in being better produced, the literature of higher quality and the books written more recently.

During WWII books written by candlelight were again read by candlelight. Critics had often criticised Jane Austen for never mentioning the Napoleonic wars; now this very absence of war gave her work its greatest appeal.

But at the end of 1940 five million books stored in warehouses in the City were disastrously destroyed in the Blitz; a book famine began because of the paper shortage, and cheap reprints of the classics became almost impossible to find. The 15,000 new books published annually at the start of the war went down to 7000 in 1943. (Rather oddly, publishers of new books were not rationed to a proportion of their pre-war consumption, with the result that newly-produced books became easier to buy than classics.)

Smith's lending library closed in 1961 and Boots in 1962; the reason was the explosion in paperback buying dictating the way we read now.

Our Reviewers Write

Good Evening, Mrs Craven and Minnie's Room were twice reviewed as a pair. *The Times* called Mollie Panter-Downes 'an unerring observer, with a stunning gift for economy of description; with a few strokes of her pen she could summon a vivid sense of the odd effects of war or display her gift for elucidating what is eternal in human relationships.' While Peter Parker in the *Daily Telegraph* wrote that Mollie 'is much more than a mere chronicler of English life: these stories are very well-written, acute, funny and poignant.'

Jenny Hartley in the *TLS* commented that the strength of *A House in the Country* 'lies in its evocation of the preoccupations of wartime England, and its mood of battered but sincere optimism. . . it is full of the kind of details that are such an invaluable source for novelists and filmmakers currently reworking WWII.' *The Tablet* observed: 'It wears the guise of a romantic novel depicting the tragedy of an unconsummated love affair but is in fact an evocative tribute to the roles in WWII of those who were left at home. . . Jocelyn Playfair has an enviable ability to evoke a compelling atmosphere with richly apt vocabulary, and a keen sense of humour - some of the lighter moments of social interaction between her minor characters exude comic energy.'

In *The Times* Bee Wilson chose cookery books to take on holiday: 'There is something to be said for having a holiday book that reconciles you to coming back to Britain. For this, there is none better than *Good Things in England*. A much loved collation of traditional English cookery, this soothing book reminds you that if you choose the right things - from Huffkins to green fig jam - the food of

England can seem as exotic as any holiday dish.'

In a long interview for her *Times* Saturday column Valerie Grove described readers at a Persephone Lunch wanting to know more about Emma Smith. 'How did she write such a brilliant and mature novel at 23? And what became of her between then and now? I too wanted to know, since the *The Far Cry* is undoubtedly a small masterpiece.' (We hope to reprint this interview in full in a future *PQ*.)

The 'In My View' column in the *Eastern Daily Press* was devoted to Persephone Books, for which 'Thirty cheers! (That's one for each reborn title.) Persephone has relaunched EM Delafield's sobering autobiographical novel *Consequences*, about the plight of girls on either side of the First World War who were allowed no opportunities apart from marriage. It is a useful reminder of why we're all feminists now. But my favourite title in this silver-covered series was recently read by Maureen Lipman on Radio 4 - I am now absorbed in *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day* - a retelling of the Cinderella saga set in 1930s London. As the plot unfolds over 24 hours, Miss Pettigrew careers gleefully down the slippery slope from fuddy-duddy to flapper. Her delirious day is a total hoot.'

Patrick Marnham, in a review of *Little Boy Lost* in *The Spectator*, wrote: 'Marghanita Laski's description of the scenes in postwar Paris carry the power and simplicity of the best news reporting'; she writes 'in such a dry and controlled style, eschewing all pathos and cheap manipulation, that it uncovers the story's true emotional force. One can only hope that the novel never falls into the hands of a big-budget movie-maker.'

Persephone Titles in Print

Many readers have asked us to print a short description of each of our 36 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 which 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 600-page 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: An unusually absorbing novel, written in the same year that DH Lawrence wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, 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, starring the unforgettable hay-box. . .

Little Boy Lost by Marghanita Laski: This unputdownable novel about 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 is BBC 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 moving 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 1965 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 Partition.

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

Greenery Street by Denis Mackail: A funny and delightful 1925 novel about a young couple's first year of married life in a street in Chelsea.

Lettice Delmer by Susan Miles: A novel in verse about a young girl's tragic and spiritual journey, set in London in the 1920s.

Happy Family by Phyllis Bentley:

the ninth in the Persephone Quarterly Short Story Collection

There were still five minutes before the train started when the door of my compartment was thrown open, and a family of four scrambled in.

It was easy to recognise their characters and roles; they were Auntie, Father, Mother, and little Jack. Auntie was just on the borders of perpetual spinsterhood, thin, dark, with sallow complexion and meek, brown eyes; she was dressed in new black, plain and rather cheap, which did not suit her; she carried a paper parcel or two and a cheap case; obviously she was a poor relation. There had perhaps been a funeral in the family recently, for Father wore a black tie, and had that rather portentous air that sons sometimes assume when they become head of the family group. Yes, that was it, I gathered from their remarks; Grandfather's funeral was a month or two past, and Auntie, who still lived with Grannie, had come over for the weekend to discuss the family finances with her brother. Probably he made some contribution to his mother's weekly budget; yes, from his manner one somehow knew he did. He was younger than his sister, but already inclining to portliness; a slow, well-meaning, man, fleshily good-looking, with heavy eyebrows and large ox-like eyes. Jack, aged five or so, was dark like him, but very small and soft and slender; his large eyes, brown too, gazed out at the world in rather nervous awe. The mind behind those eyes, one felt, was soft and plastic, taking very readily the world's impress for good or ill. He had an eager smile, put his hand on my knee to help himself up the step, and then took it away again with a shocked look for

his misdemeanor in thus trespassing upon a stranger – altogether a sensitive and loveable little creature, I decided. Mother was fair and rather pretty, younger than Auntie and conscious of it; married, not a spinster like Auntie, and conscious of that, too. She looked rather delicate, was not in mourning, but much wrapped up in goodish furs, of which she seemed self-consciously proud; no doubt she had had to take a good deal of care of herself ever since the birth of Jack.

When they all scrambled in, their haste was so great that they left the door open, and it stood so until Auntie's parcels were comfortably settled in her corner; then the grown-ups sat down, and Father drew the door to. Jack, who was leaning against his father's knee, at once started up, and a look of alarm contorted his pale little face.

'What are you shutting the door for, Father?' he cried. His father was talking to Auntie and took no notice of him, so he repeated: 'What are you shutting the door for? What are you shutting the door for? What are you shutting the door for?' in a crescendo of fear which ended in a scream.

'Hush, lovey,' said his mother. 'Sit on the seat – he thinks we're going away with you,' she said to Auntie.

'I don't want to go away with Auntie,' cried Jack in anguish. 'I want to stay at home. I want to get out. Father, I want to get out!'

'Now then,' his father admonished him mildly. 'You be a good boy.'

'Are we going away with Auntie?' wailed Jack.

His mother giggled. 'Yes, oh, yes, we're going

away,' she lied in a joking tone, shaking out her fur. 'We're going away. Aren't we, Daddy?'

'Of course we are,' said Father, heavily supporting the joke. 'We're not going back home, we're going away.'

'I want to go home,' fretted Jack, not quite sure, apparently, whether to believe them or not. 'I'd much rather go home!'

'Yes, Jack,' said Auntie with great sprightliness, leaning forward to him with a look that yearned for love. 'You're all coming away with me to see Grannie. How will you like that?'

'I don't want to go,' cried Jack. (Evidently he had more faith in his aunt's truth than his parents', for his distress deepened.) 'I don't want to go. Mother, I don't want to go!'

'Don't be such a rude little boy, Jackie,' said his mother with false severity, straightening his cap. She was obviously delighted that Jack should thus show what seemed like distaste for his father's relations, for her pleasure betrayed itself in every movement of

her hands, every cadence of her voice. 'We aren't going to see Grannie.' (Thank Heaven she's told him that at last, I thought with a sigh of relief.) 'Only Auntie's going. But you'd like to go too, wouldn't you?'

'No, I wouldn't,' said Jack with desperate sincerity. Tears appeared in the corners of his eyes. 'I want to get out. I want to go home!'

Mother turned to Auntie. 'It's because there's only you going,' she explained with condescension. 'If I was going he wouldn't mind a bit.'

Auntie, her spinsterhood thus stressed by Mother, gave a painful smile and was silent.

'Well,' said Jack's father, taking out a substantial watch, 'perhaps we'd better be getting out, Lucy. We don't want the train to start with us in, you know.'

'No! No!' said Jack fervently. 'Let's get out now, Mother.' He tugged at her hand. 'Let's get out now.'

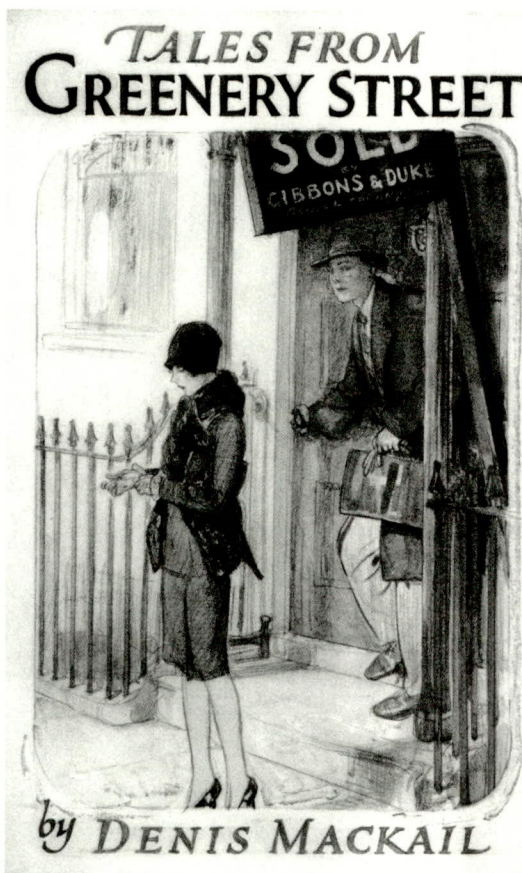
'Be quiet, Jackie!' said his mother with real annoyance. 'I'm talking to your Auntie. . . So if you let it out a trifle round the waist,' she began with gusto, indicating one of the parcels, 'I think it'll do for your mother nicely.'

'I'm sure it will,' agreed Auntie, with the forced heartiness of the poor relation accepting

her sister-in-law's cast-off clothes. 'It's very good of you, Lucy.'

Here the engine slightly jerked the train.

'Mother!' screamed Jackie, beside himself, his eyes dilated with fear. 'Mother! It's going!'



*EH Shepard jacket for Tales From Greenery Street
(1928, a sequel to Greenery Street)*

‘Well, all right, get out then,’ said his mother crossly, a little alarmed herself. ‘Lift him out, John. Be quick.’

In a fluster the trio scrambled down. A passing porter shut our carriage door. Unfortunately, however – perhaps moved by Auntie’s mourning – he paused to let down the window; and family communications

were resumed. Auntie came to my side of the compartment, and timidly stuck out her head.

‘Well, you’ll let me know, John?’ she said in a yearning, anxious tone. Evidently the matter, whatever it was, on which she required information, was one of life and death to her. She had come over on purpose to discuss it, one felt, and still lacked satisfaction.

‘Oh yes, I’ll let you know,’ said John, off-hand. ‘Of course it won’t be just yet, you know, Alice.’

‘No,’ sighed Alice. ‘I suppose not. I understand. Well, goodbye. Goodbye, Lucy. Goodbye, Jackie dear.’

‘Goodbye Auntie!’ piped up Jackie. Now that he was safe on the ground, and holding his mother’s hand, he seemed to feel remorseful about

his aunt, whom doubtless at other times he liked well enough. ‘Give my love to Grannie.’

‘Give me a kiss, lovey,’ said Auntie suddenly.

‘Hold him up, John,’ commanded Lucy, something of sympathy in her tone. ‘Be quick.’

John picked up the child. ‘Why, I could easily put you through the window,’ he laughed as the

child’s lips met his aunt’s cheek. ‘Shall I put you in? Eh? Will you go back with Auntie?’

‘No! No! No!’ screamed Jackie. Panic-stricken, almost mad with fear, he struck out wildly at his aunt’s embracing arms. ‘No! No! No!’

‘Now, John,’ said Lucy in a superior tone. ‘Don’t have him crying. Put him down. Alice can say goodbye to him all she wants on the ground.’

John obediently lowered the child. Alice, rebuffed, drew in her head. Jackie buried

his face in his mother’s skirt and wept bitterly.

‘You silly little thing!’ said his father affectionately. ‘Cry-baby!’

‘He’s such a mother’s boy,’ said Lucy.

Auntie smiled again her painful smile. . . . And just then, to my intense relief, the train moved out of the station.

©Phyllis Bentley 1935



from *The Runaway* by Elizabeth Anna Hart,
illustration by Gwen Raverat

Performativity, intertextuality...

The University of Hull's MA on 'Women and Literature in English' uses *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day* as the key text for two weeks of its course. Week 8 focuses on 'The Single Woman': '*Miss Pettigrew* examines the plight of the impoverished, undervalued and under-educated single woman who has "as usual, very little hope". It takes us into the glamour of the 1930s and away from political intervention. . . as the demure and demoralised Miss Pettigrew is transformed into the worldly and sophisticated Guinevere. Beneath its light-hearted, witty and racy plot lie interesting issues concerning adaptation, change and performativity. . .'

In Week 9 'the relationship between literature and history, or reality, is explored. . . If, as Elaine Showalter has argued, the project of feminist literary criticism is "to plot the precise cultural locus of female literary identity and to describe the forces that intersect an individual woman writer's cultural field" then *Miss Pettigrew* invites us to investigate such an "intersection" of discourses including fairy tales, Victorian "governess novels", interwar "spinster" stories, post-Freudian sexologies and Hollywood films . . . This session will focus primarily on possible ways of using theories of intertextuality in analysing these "intersections". This theoretical foundation can then be used in relation to a much more complex text in the seminar on Woolf's *Between the Acts*.'

Another novel by Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, has been compared with Noel Streatfeild's *Saplings*. In a paper given at the Virginia Woolf Conference this summer Jan Wilkott praised *Saplings* as 'the writer's most powerful analysis of family life. . . In a conventional narrative

style far removed from Woolf's, it investigates many of the same themes.

'My aim in comparing style and method in *Saplings* and *To the Lighthouse* is to help us question the boundaries between women's popular fiction and Woolf's feminist modernism by considering the representation of children's identity and consciousness. How are the literary and imaginative passions of the common reader expanded by these works? And how may we readers, teachers and critics work on behalf of enchantment while keeping our commitment to critical and theoretical analyses that expose the false sentiment supporting inequality?'

In *The Year's Work in English Studies* Lynne Hapgood wrote that '*William - an Englishman*, Cicely Hamilton's award-winning novel, is a particularly valuable addition to the body of women's war writing and an opportunity to link the playwright and social commentator with the novelist. For those trying to understand the relationship of literary innovations to techniques of realism and modernism, this is a text to die for. It moves from a rather obvious satire on the warring ideologies at the turn of the century which obscured for many the imminence of a war of a very different kind looming on the horizon, to a moving account of a honeymoon couple caught in Belgium at the outbreak of war. Hamilton's play with timescale (at times the text seems to move with all the horror of slow motion), with the inadequacy of language (the couple speak no French or German) and with the scale of the individual against the size of armies, of landscapes and of incomprehensible meanings is brilliantly done.'

Winifred Watson 1906-2002

Winifred Watson, the author of *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*, died on August 5th 2002 aged 95. In June 2000 she had written us a beautifully typed letter: 'Thank you for your cheque but I think I thank you more for your interest in a book written so long ago. *Miss Pettigrew* was always rather a pet of mine but my publishers were horrified when they first read it. I had written two rather strong dramas before it so when they received a book that was fun they wouldn't accept it. I can remember to this day looking up at him and saying, "You're wrong: *Miss Pettigrew* is a winner." But he just looked stubborn. I wrote another straight novel and then, when they did publish *Miss Pettigrew*, I was proved right and they were wrong. France published it, Australia and even Germany was going to, only the war came. When it was published in America, Universal Studios bought the film rights and they wrote to me to tell me which

of their star character actresses was to play Miss Pettigrew [Billy Burke of *The Wizard of Oz* fame]. But Pearl Harbour happened and all domestic films were thrown overboard with war-encouraging films taking their place. So it has caused me a kind of nostalgic pleasure that someone has again taken an interest in one of my characters...I thank you most gratefully for your interest in one of my pet creations. I should think that most authors have a special fondness for one of their characters and I

admit I always had a fondness for Miss Pettigrew.'

There was a long and very interesting obituary of Winifred Watson in the *Guardian* by Henrietta Twycross-Martin who wrote the Preface to the Persephone Books edition, in the *Independent* and in the *Scotsman*. The latter said that 'Winifred Watson's humorous and rather risqué 1938 novel

about a governess mistakenly sent to the home of a nightclub singer instead of to a family of unruly children was reprinted in November 2000 and won warm critical praise.

'Winifred Watson wrote six novels in the 1930s and early 1940s, mostly about women changing their lives, flouting convention, and dealing with class tensions and extra-marital sex. They were well-reviewed and popular. But she gave up writing during the Second World War when she was rearing a son and dealing with a bombed home...

She was rediscovered by the small



London company Persephone Books when a reader (Henrietta Twycross-Martin) showed a copy of *Miss Pettigrew*, which had been her mother's favourite rainy-day reading, to the publisher; she searched the Newcastle phone book for Pickerings and kept calling until she found the surprised Winifred Watson, who replied, when asked if it was her, "I am she". "She was extremely modest," says the publisher, "tremendously happy and lovely, and that comes through in this book, which is full of merriment."

Our Autumn Fabrics

There was no question about the endpaper fabric for *Greenery Street* - it had to be something that Ian and Felicity Foster would have used in their house. This 1925 cretonne is, we believe, exactly what Felicity might have bought at 'Andrew Brown's' as material with which to cover her sofa. It shows a beautiful design of red and blue leaves and what might possibly be peonies and clematis, all on a pale linen background.

The fabric for *Lettice Delmer* is 'Plantation' (1958) by Lucienne Day. (This is the second of her fabrics we have used, the first being for *A Woman's Place*.) We chose this design because it is sombre and although modernist and obviously dating from the 1950s, the squares of umber and grey have a timeless quality; there is also a design of what could be faces in a crowd, or flowers on stalks - something both impersonal yet individualistic.

Our Winter Books

On November 7th we publish our two Winter books (although copies will be available from the end of October onwards). The first is *The Runaway* by the C19th writer Elizabeth Anna Hart. It is an intriguing story, originally written for children, about a girl who hides a girl of her own age who has run away from school. It is written in a surprisingly modern style, and is delightful and fun. One of the reasons for reprinting it is that in 1936 Gwen Raverat, the well-known illustrator, suggested to her publisher that they reissue the book with her woodcuts. In the event she did over sixty and these are all beautifully reproduced in our edition. Because of the woodcuts this is a book to be treasured by both children and adults.



Our other book for Christmas is *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* by Julia Strachey; she was the niece of Lytton Strachey, was well-known in Bloomsbury circles and was the subject of *Julia*, a loving memoir by Frances Partridge, who has written a new Preface for our edition. This is a sardonic and beautifully written *novella* about a family in Forster territory (at times one is reminded of *A Room with a View*) on the day Dolly is getting married. We are also issuing the book simultaneously on cassette, read by Miriam Margolyes in a production by the award-winning company, The Story Circle. And those who love our CD *Café Music* will be intrigued to know that the piano music for *Cheerful Weather* has been especially recorded by Dan Becker.

Finally. . .

Four of the stories from *Good Evening, Mrs Craven* are to be read at 3.30 in the afternoon from 7-11th October, the fifth day being National Poetry Day; coincidentally, four of *The Montana Stories* were read in the same week last year by Emilia Fox. And from 14-25th October *Little Boy Lost* will be the Book at Bedtime on Radio 4, read by Jamie Glover.

The Bookseller mentioned us rather glowingly: 'Persephone, with its use of new technology, passion for what it publishes and willingness to take a risk on a niche market, is in many ways the embodiment of the independent publishing ethos.' *Marjory Fleming* is about to be published in French, with a new preface by Oriel Malet that we will be printing in a future edition of the PQ; the website dooyoo.co.uk carries a lovely piece about us headed 'Heaven in a Bookshop', which concludes: 'Persephone is a passion: forget trashy fiction and read some of the most thought-provoking and unputdownable books around'; the website womenwriters.net has a long review of *Kitchen Essays*: 'This publisher claims to publish books that are "guaranteed to be readable, thought-provoking and impossible to forget" and *Kitchen Essays* by Agnes Jekyll is all of that... the aristocratic author writes with eloquence, irreverence and elegance'; and The Good Web Guide tells visitors that the 'charming' *Kitchen*

Essays 'will delight in its simplicity.'

Persephone Lunches: on October 17th Oriel Malet will talk about *Marjory Fleming* and the soprano Morag Atchison will sing four songs by

Richard Rodney Bennett about Marjory. On November 27th Anne Harvey will talk about Elizabeth Anna Hart, the author of our Christmas book *The Runaway*, and the actress Patricia Brake will read from it.

Some of our readers will already subscribe to newBOOKS.mag, an excellent magazine for reading groups. To receive a free introductory copy, send your name and address to: Persephone Offer, newBOOKS.mag, 15 Scots Drive, Wokingham RG41 3LF or email guy.pringle@waitrose.com.

From September 20-21st 2003 we are planning a Persephone Weekend at Newnham College, Cambridge, at which the highlight will be dinner in

College Hall in celebration of the lecture given there by Virginia Woolf 75 years previously, which became *A Room of One's Own*. The weekend will feature a dozen speakers on all aspects of Persephone books, and a reading group about Leonard Woolf's novel *The Wise Virgins* published by us that month. Newnham is an unusual place to stay with delightful gardens and perfectly comfortable bedrooms; the food is rather good and hugely better than in 1928! We have not yet finalised the cost, but hope it will be reasonable; if you are interested in participating please let us have a (refundable) £50 deposit.



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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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