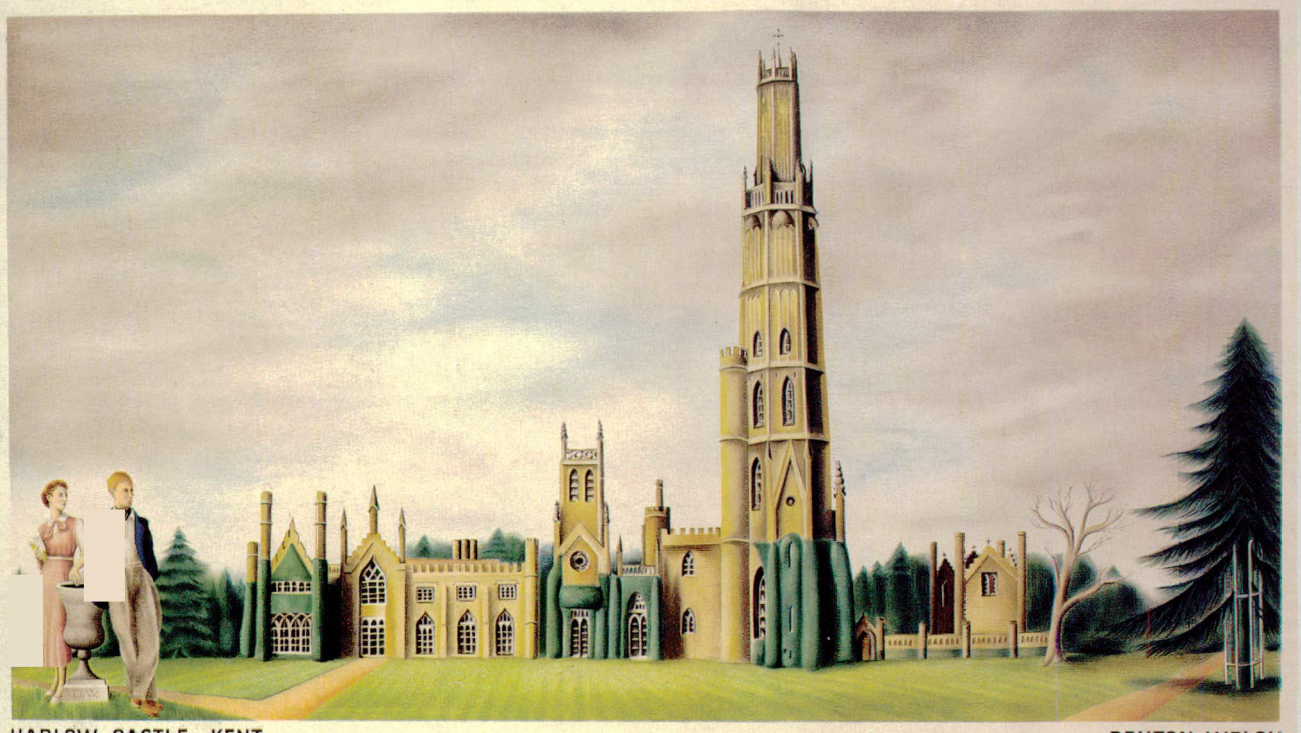


Denton Welch: You Can Be Sure of Shell 1937 © Christie's Images Ltd

THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

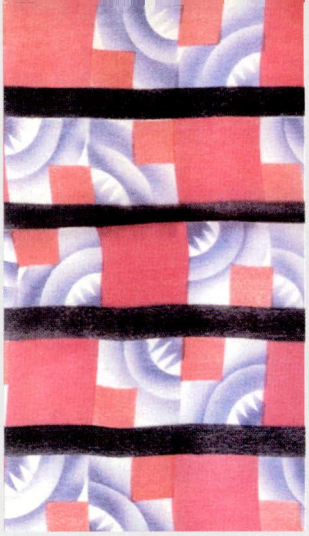
Spring 2003

Nº 17

Frankenthal. Blick zur Adolf-Hitler-Straße

A street in Frankenthal, Germany 1933

OUR **SPRING 2003** BOOKS



'Paul' 1927, a Wiener Werkstatte fabric

'Wychwood' 1939 by Noldi Soland

This spring we publish two long novels about families in the inter-war period, both wonderful, unforgettable reads, both first published in the late summer of 1939. We hope many readers will read them as a pair: together they give such an extraordinary insight into what was happening in Germany and England at the same time. And the one set in Germany is particularly topical since it is seventy years in March since the elections which granted Hitler dictatorial control of Germany.

Manja, a novel about five children was written (in German) in London in 1936-7 by a young Austrian woman in her mid-thirties. It was published in Amsterdam in 1938 (because it could not be published in Germany) and was then published in England on 7th September 1939 as *The Wall* and in the United States in the same month as *Five Destinies*. The translation was by Philip Owens; we have commissioned a new translation by Kate Phillips.

Manja opens with five radical scenes – the conception one night in May 1920 of five German children. The writer Eva Ibbotson, Anna Gmeyner's daughter, writes in her Preface: 'The beginning attracted considerable attention, even criticism at the time. Born two streets away from where Sigmund Freud lived, my mother must have thought it evident that the sexual encounters of the five couples would presage the nature of the children that were conceived.'

The four boys and one girl, Manja, become friends when they are about eight, in the late 1920s. But their companionship, so loyal and innocent and good-natured, is doomed because of the differences between their parents: one father is a left-wing activist, another a Nazi, another a financier, another an idealistic doctor, another a Jewish musician. The book ends in the late autumn of 1933, but everything that will happen in Germany has been foretold: this is a deeply prophetic book.

Yet ***Manja*** is far from being a political novel. Where it is so unusual – indeed it is hard to think of another novel like it – is that the political background is perceived, steadily, from the child's point of view. 'I remember my mother writing ***Manja*** in the sitting-room of a flat in Belsize Park,' writes Eva Ibbotson. 'Its origins were a small piece in a newspaper describing the fate of a twelve year-old girl in a German town.'

One reason for the book's verisimilitude must be that Anna Gmeyner herself had a twelve year-old daughter. And it is curious that Eva Ibbotson's most recent success, the prize-winning *Journey to the River Sea*, is also about a girl of the same age as Manja.

The *Manchester Guardian* wrote on 22nd September 1939: 'Manja's story is one of a heartbreaking poignancy; and although it is

individualised with a truly imaginative vitality, we are convinced that her fate is only too typical of what is happening to hundreds of children in these outrageous times.' And the playwright Berthold Viertel commented: 'Of all the books to date attempting to give shape to modern German chaos, this seems to me one of the richest, the most beautiful, the most life-enhancing. . . What is so beguiling is the way it compares and step by step contrasts, the children's community – in all its idealism, romanticism, innocence, naturalness, profound decency, meaning, enchantment and delight – with the madhouse community of the adults.'

Before she wrote this, her first novel, Anna Gmeyner had been a playwright in Berlin: hence the construction of ***Manja*** in four 'acts'. Although epic in scope, the book is therefore very easy to read: there are lots of short scenes and dialogue, and the novel draws its power from its cumulative – its panoramic – effect.

We have all read about Germany in the 1930s from the historian's angle; and many of you will be familiar with the work of Ian Kershaw, Michael Burleigh or Anthony Beevor. There is, however, no novel we know of which sees German life during the period from the end of the First World War until 1933 in quite this clear-sighted way.

Anna Gmeyner

But in the end, the reason our readers will enjoy ***Manja*** is because it is a novel about people in their everyday surroundings – it tells us how it really felt to be those mothers and those children, at that time and in that place. This, too, is why we have chosen to publish ***The Priory*** as our second spring book – because it also describes the lives of families against the background of a changing society, even though the forces of economics and politics are much further in the background in rural Britain than in small town Germany.

The setting is a large house 'somewhere in England', partly modelled on Newstead Abbey near Nottingham where Dorothy Whipple had a weekend cottage and partly on Parciau, the house on Anglesey where she stayed in 1934. And, as David Conville, who used to stay at Parciau as a child, writes in his Afterword: 'The Parciau inhabitants in ***The Priory*** were hardly disguised.'

At the beginning of the book we see Saunby Priory: its 'West Front, built in the thirteenth century for the service of God and the poor, towered above the house that had been raised alongside from its ruins, from its very stones. And because no light

showed from any window here, the stranger, visiting Saunby at this hour, would have concluded that the house was empty. But he would have been wrong. There were many people within.'

The sentence is typical of the opening of a Dorothy Whipple novel. Gently, deceptively gently, but straightforwardly, it sets the scene and draws the reader in. We are shown the two Marwood girls, who are nearly grown-up, their father, the widower Major Marwood, and their aunt. Then, as soon as their lives have been evoked, we see the Major proposing marriage to a woman much younger than himself; and we understand how much will have to change.

It is a classic plot (albeit the stepmother is more disinterested than wicked) and the book has many classic qualities; yet there are no clichés either in situation or outlook, just an extraordinarily well-written and absorbing novel by the writer who has been called the twentieth-century Mrs Gaskell.

Above all, ***The Priory*** is a very subtle novel, so subtle that, as with all Dorothy Whipple's books, it is very easy to miss what an excellent writer she is. As *Books* magazine wrote in August 1939: 'Because it is so unaffectedly and well written, and because it conveys very effectively a sense of the old house and what it meant to be the various persons connected with it, ***The Priory*** carries a punch out of proportion to its otherwise artless-seeming content.' And Forrest Reid, the Irish novelist and friend of EM Forster, described it in the *Spectator* as being 'brilliantly original and convincing. It is fresh, delightful, absorbing, and one accepts it with gratitude as one did the novels read in boyhood.'

Why, oh why, people ask is Dorothy Whipple not better known? But answer comes there none. However, we have sold three thousand copies of ***Someone at a Distance*** which, we are convinced, will eventually be adapted as the four-part television serial for which it is so ideally suited; and two thousand copies of ***They Knew Mr Knight***. The reasons for Dorothy Whipple's lack of wider recognition are interesting and complex, since everyone who reads her is in such complete agreement as to her merits. Maybe with this re-issue of ***The Priory*** her time will have come?

Porthamel House, Anglesey in the 1930s

OUR **READERS** WRITE

'I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed the delightful ***Greenery Street***. I read it just after my first wedding anniversary and both the similarities (dealing with estate agents, the conversation about going to parties) and the many differences (two careers, a flat that would easily fit on one floor of their house...) made me laugh. It's great to read such a happy book.' GP, London W2

'I went out for a walk this morning accompanied by ***Cheerful Weather for the Wedding*** and Miriam Margolyes. What a treat. I have listened to lots of tapes so I know what I am talking about. She reads it marvellously. You can really feel the settings and all the characters. My only complaint is that it is too short. One more time walking and I will have finished it.' JH, Tel Aviv

'I so enjoyed ***The Children who Lived in a Barn*** – the classic children-doing-it-for-themselves story with grown-ups conveniently absent – but also rather poignant, and so much of its time.' RE-W, Notts

'I was hugely impressed by the power and succinct clarity of ***Brook Evans***. It will remain for me one of the great novels, always there like Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*. And ***Little Boy Lost*** – the book's strength is due to it being totally without false sentiment and one is helpless and awash with tears.' CS, Rye

'I have taken Lady Jekyll as my new role model. True, she likely had servants and a cook but if her house smelled of potpourri and polish and wood smoke, so shall mine. My husband is meanwhile charmed by the sketches in ***The Children who Lived in a Barn***.' MM, Seattle

'I much enjoyed ***Lettice Delmer*** although I bought it with some misgiving – the poetry put me off – but actually it gave a massive economy of style and got straight to the heart.' HC, Truro

'I must say how much I enjoyed both ***The Far Cry*** – I'd love to do that train journey across India – and ***Lettice Delmer***, my first time ever at reading a book in verse. I was utterly surprised how much I enjoyed it. I found it both haunting and unforgettable. I will definitely read it again.' VW, Angoulème

'***Tell it to a Stranger, Good Evening, Mrs Craven*** and ***Minnie's Room*** all brought back memories of my childhood and stories of life passed on by my parents and grandparents. I love short stories of this quality; I can read one story each night to rock me off to sleep. My husband has also thoroughly enjoyed these three. Others I enjoyed immensely: ***Saplings*** – a really good yarn but with a dark side; ***A House in the Country*** – each character is another story waiting to be told, this is the stuff of TV serials; ***Miss Pettigrew*** – I laughed so hard I gave myself a stitch! But the one I enjoyed the most and will read again and again is ***The Far Cry***.' CR, Southampton

'I have been so impressed by the quality of books you're publishing. If you'd published nothing else I'd be forever grateful for ***Farewell Leicester Square***, which was a tremendous book. I note that Betty Miller coined the phrase 'female eunuch' some thirty years before Germaine Greer and was subtly oracular elsewhere in the book. Victor Gollancz was an idiot to reject it.' MM, Texas

'Reading Etty Hillesum's diary was a heart-rending experience but one from which I feel I learnt so much.' K M, Oxford

'I am nearly falling out of bed each night over ***Greenery Street***.' EA, Alcester

'***Mariana*** is like *Bridget Jones* only a million times better.' JB, London E8

THE DEATH OF LITERARY CRITICISM

Whatever happened to literary criticism? Twenty years ago it seemed full of excitement, vibrant. It was where the intellectual energy was. Now, in the words of Martin Amis, it feels 'dead and gone'. Some, of course, is still being published. Traditional scholarship continues to generate monographs on Jane Austen, critical introductions to the Romantics, scholarly editions of Shakespeare. It persists, useful to students and specialists, but passes most of us by. There is also plenty of critical writing by non-academics for the general reader. People want to read literary essays by AS Byatt or James Fenton, many of which are published in broadsheet newspapers or small magazines. Accessible and interesting, this is part of the general cultural conversation.

'English' emerged as a formal university discipline during 'the age of criticism' from the 1920s to the 1970s; it had a core canon of great writers and an accepted method – a mixture of close reading and moral purpose. The criticism which grew up with this new subject took up a place at the heart of British culture, it was discussed in the Sunday papers and around dinner party tables. The intellectual historian Stefan Collini has written: 'By the 1950s, the imperial drive of criticism had become almost commonplace. "English" paraded its claims to be considered a kind of presiding discipline in the increasingly specialised universities, and the literary critic figured as the very model of the modern general intellectual.'

TS Eliot died in 1965, IA Richards, FR Leavis and Lionel Trilling in the 1970s, but the age of criticism did not end then: the expansion of further education in Britain meant that more people than ever were reading critics like Leavis and Williams; and 'theory' took Britain and America by storm. 'English Literature' became a way of talking about psychoanalysis, Marxism, colonialism, anthropology and continental philosophy. That is why mainstream culture in the form of *Newsnight*, Channel 4 and *The Times* dipped its toe into literary criticism in the 1980s.

The 1960s and early 1970s also saw the re-discovery of seminal works by critics from revolutionary Russia, Italy and Weimar Germany. Into the 1980s much criticism was still driven by a sense of historical drama and cultural crisis. Now that drama has gone. The afterglow of 1960s radicalism became increasingly confined to the universities, cut off from larger social movements. In 1968 Roland Barthes, for many years the best-known of the French literary theorists, spoke of 'the death of the author'. Thirty years on, it looks more like the death of the critic.

What happened? Many of the key figures died, some prematurely. A series of scandals also undermined the authority of theory. And academic critics retreated into arcane jargon. But jargon isn't the only problem. Even beyond the small world of literary theory, there has been a larger failure to tell stories or write great prose. How many of today's literary critics have written anything comparable to the chapter on 17th-century Amsterdam in Simon Schama's book on Rembrandt or Roy Porter's evocation of 1950s London?

Judging by book sales readers still want to engage with the world. But not through theory and jargon. Biography has never sold better. 'Big history' has produced Figes on 1917, Beevor on 1945. Case histories from psychoanalysis (Adam Phillips) or neuroscience (Oliver Sacks) have created a new genre.

There are big audiences for science writers who tackle our minds and bodies and the universe beyond.

While the decline of literary criticism highlights a particular crisis in academia, it also belongs to a larger set of cultural changes. The first is a loss of interest in literature itself. This sounds absurd. Fiction is in demand, from Ian McEwan to JK Rowling. But behind the tower blocks of contemporary fiction at Waterstone's and Borders there is a massive loss of interest in pre-20th century literature. How many people today read Chaucer or Pope? How many readers of *Flaubert's Parrot* have read *Madame Bovary*?

There is a break in our culture. Our literary past looks remote, even incomprehensible. Most of us don't know the Bible, can't read Latin or Greek, don't know our ancient history or classical mythology. The kind of criticism which deals with pre-1960s literature is out of step with the larger culture. But as a discipline being formed in the 1920s and 1930s, English literature was in many ways defined in opposition to the facile and popular. It is not a coincidence that 20th-century literary criticism emerged at the same time as the paperback, mass media and mass culture. Allen Lane founded Penguin in 1935, the year before Leavis published *Revaluation*. Literary criticism became a way of talking about values which were felt to be threatened by what Leavis called a 'technologico-Benthamite civilisation'. There was a war going on – between literature and 'life' on the one hand, and commercialism and philistinism on the other.

The core audience for literary criticism comprised students, schoolteachers, autodidacts. Without this sense of a minority culture on the defensive, it is impossible to understand the ferocity of the 'two cultures' debate. As the critic René Wellek wrote in 1982: 'There is a gulf between a minority culture and the mass culture which more and more deserts the written word in favour of television, computers, video-games and spectator sports. It is the duty and the task of the professor to resist this trend.'

Such oppositions no longer trouble us in the same way. Who would now share Leavis's contempt for science and technology? It is not just that science books are popular. There is a larger sense that the sciences are changing our world for the better. And the lines between high culture and popular culture, once so clearly demarcated, have since become notoriously blurred.

There is a final context which has sped the decline of literary criticism in Britain. This is the crisis of Englishness itself. It is no coincidence that studying 'English' has long meant studying English literature. But with American culture dominating, with relations to Europe growing ever-closer, with the creation of a multicultural society, our sense of what England is has changed.

The age of criticism was part of a movement to create an English literary tradition which ran from *Beowulf* to Shakespeare and on to Woolf and 20th-century modernism. Words like 'tradition' and 'community' echoed through mid-20th-century literary criticism. But if those ideas of England and Englishness no longer exist, what does that do to a literary criticism grounded in English literature?

The decline of literary criticism is not something we should celebrate. It is part of a larger story. What does it mean for a society to see the values of Leavis and Williams so completely overthrown? We need, more than ever, a strong and popular criticism, free of jargon, addressing major issues of our past, culture and identity.

From David Herman 'Silence of the Critics' *Prospect* Dec. 2002

LIST OF BOOKS

William - an Englishman by Cicely Hamilton: A prize-winning 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 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 First World War 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 the Second World War.

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 was published by Editions Autrement in 2002.

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 the BBC World Service.

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 was BBC R4's 'Book at Bedtime' in 2002.

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 spiritual journey: a unique and unforgettable book.

The Runaway by Elizabeth Anna Hart is a witty and charming 1872 novel for children and adults illustrated with over sixty woodcuts by Gwen Raverat.

Cheerful Weather for the Wedding by Julia Strachey is a 1932 novella by a niece of Lytton Strachey, highly praised by Virginia Woolf, about a girl on her wedding day.

'SATURDAY AFTERNOON'

by Dorothy Whipple, first published in The New Yorker on 26 September 1953, reprinted in Pick of Today's Short Stories 1955 and Wednesday and other stories (1961)

GEORGE Thorpe had always gone out on Saturday afternoon. His wife and his daughter Muriel expected him to go out – to go to his club, or play golf or watch cricket matches, or whatever it was he did. When he went, they didn't ask where he was going, and when he came back, they didn't ask where he had been. They were comfortably indifferent to what George did, so long as he got out of the way. They liked the afternoon to themselves on Saturday; they liked to settle down in the sitting-room or the garden, according to the weather, and knit and read and eat chocolates in peace.

Lately, however, George had shown a disinclination to go out, and they'd had to get him out in spite of himself.

'You'd better put your coat on today, George,' said Mrs Thorpe at lunch one chilly Saturday.

'I didn't think of going out,' said George, looking at the grey sky.

But after lunch Muriel brought his coat. She and her mother helped him into it and gave him his hat and kissed him.

'Enjoy yourself,' said Mrs Thorpe, as she always did, and when he had gone, Muriel slewed the sofa round to the sitting-room fire for her mother and drew up an armchair for herself.

They looked at George going down the drive – a familiar figure, stooping against the east wind, the fingers of one long, thin hand spread over the crown of his hat to keep it on.

'I don't know what's happened to him,' said Muriel. 'He seems to want to stay at home now on Saturday afternoons.'

'Well, he's not going to,' said Mrs Thorpe, putting her feet up on the sofa. 'Men should go out on Saturday afternoons, after they've been in their offices all week. He'd do nothing but fidget if he stayed in. He must keep up his interests.'

'Oh, I'm all for it,' said Muriel, opening a box of chocolates, although the lunch they had just finished had been hearty. 'Have one ?'

'Thanks,' said her mother.

'I suppose he's feeling a bit old,' said Muriel.

'Old !' said Mrs Thorpe indignantly. 'He's the same age as I am, which is fifty-four. I don't feel old, and what's more I don't think I look it.'

'Oh, you !' said Muriel with affectionate banter. 'You're one of the world's wonders.'

They were great friends – two strapping women, as alike as two peas, except that Muriel was the much younger pea, being half the age of her mother. Both had ginger hair, light eyelashes, solid ankles, and good teeth often fully exposed in laughter. They chivied and chipped each other with the greatest good humour. It was fun to come across them in the town, where they would stand laughing and talking to their friends, with always some tale to tell against each other or poor old George. They made George sound quite funny, though no one else found him so – a quiet, self-effacing man who seemed to live only to provide his wife and daughter with plenty of the best of everything.

In the sitting-room this afternoon, Mrs Thorpe and Muriel were very comfortable. The novel soon slipped from Mrs Thorpe's hand; she dozed. Muriel didn't doze, at her age. She read, a hand going out now and again to the chocolates. The fire flapped softly. On the mantelpiece the clock ticked time away. It ticked to half-past three without notice.

'Bother!' said Muriel suddenly, lifting her head from her book. 'There's a man coming up the drive.'

Mrs Thorpe frowned without opening her eyes. 'A man?' she said. 'What ever for?'

'I don't know,' said Muriel. 'But I suppose I shall have to go and see.'

She pulled herself out of the deep chair, tugged at her creased skirt and went out of the room. Mrs Thorpe had almost dozed off again by the time she came back.

'Mother' said Muriel, 'the man wants to see Father. He says he's a police inspector.'

'Of course he isn't,' said Mrs Thorpe, opening her eyes. 'Don't be taken in by *that*.'

'He's an inspector all right,' said Muriel, 'he showed me a silver badge thing inside his coat.'

'What does he want your father for?'

'He didn't say. He says he'll wait until he comes back. He says he'll walk about the garden, so I've let him.'

'Well, he'll be walking about for hours,' said Mrs Thorpe, punching up the sofa cushions and rearranging herself. 'But that's his lookout.'

'Yes, it is,' said Muriel, taking up her book and another chocolate.

They meant to settle back into comfort, but they couldn't. Although Mrs Thorpe closed her eyes and Muriel had hers on her book, both of them were conscious that something kept moving outside the windows. A homburg hat appeared around the rhododendrons, or crossed the lawn, and passed down the drive, only to reappear around the rhododendrons. 'Oh, drat that man!' said Mrs Thorpe, in the end. She heaved her legs to the floor and sat up. 'It's no good trying to rest with him walking about the garden. It's getting on my nerves. What does he want with your father?'

'I haven't any idea,' said Muriel. 'It'll be nothing much. Car licence, or something at the office.'

'Well, early though it is, let's have tea,' said Mrs Thorpe. 'I feel I could do with a cup.'

'All right,' said Muriel, going out to put the kettle on.

But when she came back with the tea tray, and sandwiches, scones and cakes, they still could not forget the man in the garden. No sooner had they settled to tea than there was a scatter of rain on the windows, and in a moment a heavy shower was falling. 'Drat that man!' said Mrs Thorpe again. 'Now we shall have to ask him in. Go and fetch him, Muriel,' she said with resignation. 'Bring him in here, we'll have to give him a cup of tea.'

'No need to bring him in here,' said Muriel, getting up once more. 'He could have it in the kitchen.'

'No. Bring him in here,' said Mrs Thorpe. 'Then I can find out what he's come for.'

Mrs Thorpe sighed for her Saturday afternoon as she watched Muriel, in the drive, gesticulating at the man, who had taken refuge among the rhododendrons. In a moment, Muriel brought him in through the sitting-room door – a tall, solid man who needed no silver badge to proclaim himself a policeman.

'Good afternoon,' said Mrs Thorpe with dignity. (He ought to realise what an interruption he was.) 'You can't wait out there in this rain. You'd better sit down and have a cup of tea.'

'Thank you, madam,' said the man stiffly, 'but that's not necessary. I'm on duty.'

'There's nothing in the regulations about not having tea, I suppose,' said Mrs Thorpe more amiably.

'No, madam.'

'Sit down, then,' said Mrs Thorpe, pouring tea.

The man looked as if he would rather not, but he took an upright chair near the door and put his hat beneath it. Then he waited with a corrugated brow for Muriel to bring tea to him. 'Sandwich?' asked Muriel.

The man hesitated, then took one and put it on his saucer.

'Well?, said Mrs Thorpe, settling back against the cushions and stirring her tea. 'And what is it you want to see my husband about ?'

The Inspector coughed. 'I'd rather wait till he comes,' he said.

'Oh, nonsense,' said Mrs Thorpe easily. 'He might be another two hours. You can't sit there saying nothing for all that time. What is it? Is it something to do with the office? Has there been a burglary or something?'

'No,' said the Inspector. 'Nothing of that kind.' He put the whole small sandwich into

his mouth at once and chewed stolidly, without looking at her.

'There's no need for all this mystery,' said Mrs Thorpe, helping herself to another sandwich. She always made a good tea. 'If you can tell Mr Thorpe, you can tell me. I'm his wife. I shall know sooner or later, shan't I? So what is it?'

The Inspector looked more uncomfortable than ever. Muriel offered sandwiches, but he shook his head.

'Do,' invited Muriel.

He shook his head again. 'It's this way, Madam,' he said, looking straight at Mrs Thorpe with light, clear eyes. 'I don't think I'd be so welcome if you knew what I've come about.'

'Oh?' said Mrs Thorpe with interest. 'Well, I can't think of anything that would make me grudge you a cup of tea and a sandwich, so help yourself and get this business off your chest.'

'Very well, Madam, if you will have it,' said the man, taking another sandwich as if the consequences must be on her own head now. But still he didn't tell her.

'Come along, man,' said Mrs Thorpe. 'For goodness sake!'

'I'd sooner not in front of the young lady,' the Inspector said.

Mother and daughter burst out laughing. 'You don't need to mind about *me*,' Muriel assured him. 'After all, I'm a big girl now.'

'You're making me downright curious,' said Mrs Thorpe taking a scone. 'Come along now. Out with it.'

'Well,' said the Inspector, coughing again, 'it's about Miss Foxhall.' He glanced swiftly at Mrs Thorpe, as if this must startle her.

'And who's Miss Foxhall?' said Mrs Thorpe, unstartled.

'You've never heard of her?'

Biting into the crumby scone, Mrs Thorpe shook her head.

'Miss Foxhall was a friend of your husband's,' said the Inspector.

'My husband must know a lot of people I don't know,' said Mrs Thorpe. 'And vice versa. But what's so particular about this Miss Foxhall?'

'She's dead,' said the man.

'Poor thing,' said Mrs Thorpe, unmoved. 'But what's that to us?'

'She was found dead about an hour ago. There was a letter to your husband beside her.'

'A letter to my husband?' repeated Mrs Thorpe. 'Did she want him to do something for her?'

'Not exactly that,' said the Inspector. He wished this woman would give him a little help.

'How old was this Miss Foxhall?' asked Muriel, coming to him with the scones.

He shook his head. If they could eat, he couldn't. He didn't relish jobs of this kind. 'She was about forty-two,' he said.

'Why did she kill herself?' asked Mrs Thorpe.

The Inspector drew in his breath. 'Well, as a matter of fact,' he said, debarrassing himself of his cup and saucer by putting them on top of the bookcase, 'your husband had been a friend of hers for a long time, but a week or two ago he broke with her, it seems – and, well, there you are,' he said, turning his hands out.

There was a silence in the room, while mother and daughter stared at him.

'Broke with her?' said Mrs Thorpe.

'Yes, Madam,' said the Inspector.

There was another silence, except for the gusts of rain against the windows.

'Are you trying to tell me,' said Mrs Thorpe, leaning forward, 'that my husband, George Thorpe, had been living with this woman?'

'I'm just stating the facts, Madam.'

'Facts?' said Mrs Thorpe loudly. 'I never heard anything so silly in all my life. Have you, Muriel? Your father living with a woman and her killing herself because he'd broken with her?'

'Never!' said Muriel vehemently. 'I've never heard such rubbish in my life.'

They turned their flushed, angry faces on the Inspector. He said nothing.

'What on earth do you mean by this tale?' demanded Mrs Thorpe.

He looked at her gravely. 'I'm sorry,' he said. 'But it's true.'

His tone carried conviction. They began to believe him. The colour ebbed slowly from their faces. Mrs Thorpe put down her cup and saucer with a sudden clatter, and Muriel went quickly to her.

'Mother!' she said, but Mrs Thorpe thrust her aside, so that

she could look at the Inspector.

'How long had this been going on?' she asked.

'About fifteen years, I should think,' he said.

'Fifteen years!' cried Mrs Thorpe. 'Fifteen years?'

'Well, we've known of it for about that time,' he said.

'You've *known* of it?' she echoed again.

'The police do know these things,' the Inspector said apologetically. 'You see, he'd set her up in a house. At the other end of the town.'

'Oh! A house! A house, Muriel!' cried Mrs Thorpe distractedly. She reached up and clasped Muriel's arm. 'Fifteen years in a house with a woman, and we never dreamed of it! Muriel, can you credit it? George – your father – so quiet, with no life in him at all. Not for *us*, anyhow. And she's killed herself for him –'

'Look,' said Muriel, pointing to the window. 'He's coming back.'

Mrs Thorpe got to her feet and they stared at him, the one who had gone away a few hours earlier so familiar, coming back a stranger. They had never known him, and yet they had gone through him so often, like an old suit, so sure there was nothing in any of the pockets. And for fifteen years he had been living a life they knew nothing of, finding love somewhere else, and was involved now in tragedy and scandal, dragging them into it, too. They watched him come up the drive, holding his hat on, and when he was out of sight, their eyes turned to the door of the room.

He came in, chafing his hands. 'I stopped out as long as I could, but I couldn't stand this wind any longer,' he said, and added with quiet bitterness, 'Sorry to spoil your afternoon.'

Then he saw the Inspector.

OUR **JUNE** BOOKS

'How do we find our books?' is the subject of a new leaflet available in the shop, and of the June Persephone lunch. One criterion is the time of year, with the summer books being chosen for their deckchair potential. Hence the first Persephone thriller (discovered by Alarys Gibson), ***The Blank Wall*** written by the American writer Elisabeth Sanxay Holding in 1947. 'Highly recommended' by *The New Yorker* it is a 'suspense story with a rare and desirable down-to-earth quality in which a suburban matron, harassed by wartime domestic problems finds herself implicated in the murder of her young daughter's extremely unattractive beau.' Raymond Chandler asked his publisher in 1950: 'Does anybody in England publish Elisabeth Sanxay Holding? For my money she's the top suspense writer of them all. She doesn't pour it on and make you feel irritated. Her characters are wonderful; and she has a sort of inner calm which I find very attractive.'

Our second June book is ***Hostages to Fortune*** (1933) by Elizabeth Cambridge, a novel not unlike Dorothy Canfield Fisher's wonderful book ***The Home-Maker***, Persephone book No.7. Catherine is a doctor's wife who is described from 1915, when her first child is born to the end of the 1920s. It is a deeply felt portrayal of a mother struggling to bring up children and accepting both the joys and the disappointments. This is an unpretentious and delightful book but also a brave one; and, as reviewers observed at the time, 'it has an artlessness that conceals art.' Vera Brittain wrote: 'I think ***Hostages to Fortune*** ought to be read by all men and women who have had children, all who may have them, and all who have not had them, in order that they may realise just what it means to be a parent.'

OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

In December the *Financial Times* chose ***Cheerful Weather for the Wedding*** as the ideal present 'for the Materfamilias catching herself wishing she was far away from all the bustle (she loves it really).' It was also reviewed in *The Tablet*'s 'Back in the Bookshops' column: 'In a white bedroom full of light, with long views across a bright but wind-torn garden, Dolly Thatcham, a bride-to-be, drinks half a bottle of rum. Ignoring the maidservants who bustle round her, she contemplates her marriage to the Hon Owen Bingham set for two o'clock. Virginia Woolf thought ***Cheerful Weather*** "astonishingly good – complete and sharp and individual." It is all of those things and more – and richly deserves this reissue by Persephone, with a preface by Strachey's biographer Frances Partridge.'

The same column in *The Tablet* highlighted ***Greenery Street***: 'Denis Mackail wrote elegant, humorous, light romantic fiction for glossy magazines and the once ubiquitous circulating libraries. His modern equivalent, if there was one, might be writing for television – but less elegantly. ***Greenery Street*** was probably his best, certainly his most popular book. The conceit which frames it is that this pretty little street has a special magic which draws and enchants the newly wed, but, after twelve months, as soon as the first pram appears in the hall, certainly when a second becomes imminent, no less ineluctably drives them away to larger, more prosaic houses elsewhere. . . PG Wodehouse thought ***Greenery Street*** a work of something "uncommonly like genius."' And John Bayley chose this 'upper middle-class version of *The Diary of a Nobody*' as one of his three books of the year in the *Guardian*.

The Times's audio book reviewer Lottie Moggach called Julia Strachey's 'short, sharp-witted ***Cheerful Weather*** three parts PG Wodehouse to one part EM Forster. Her deceptively larky, acutely observed prose could teach today's chick-litters a thing or seven.' The *Sunday Times* Audio Book of the Week also picked out 'this sharply modern comedy of manners. . . a gift for the talents of Miriam Margolyes'

Gastropoda.com thought ***Kitchen Essays*** 'one of the best reads outside Elizabeth David, which almost sings with originality. The recipes sound either surprisingly contemporary like *polenta au gratin* or profoundly lyrical, like the *sole à la Dorothea* served with a "suspicion" of tomato sauce and "a certainty" of mushrooms.' And Derek Cooper in *Saga* described Lady Jekyll's essays as 'splendidly irrelevant to modern life and highly entertaining.'

The Runaway 'provides pure and by no means mindless enjoyment' wrote the *Spectator*. 'This Victorian favourite has been reissued by Persephone with a lovely silvery cover and pretty endpapers and the woodcut illustrations by Gwen Raverat make it even more of a visual treat. Rarely can black and white have been used to such colourful effect... The social comedy is exact. It's fresh and funny and it doesn't preach, which is perhaps surprising for 1872.'

Dorothy Whipple was featured in the *Nottingham Post*'s *Weekend* as ' a wonderful writer in an understated way. . . her subtle prose about the frailties of human nature has been compared to George Eliot and Jane Austen.' And *The Times* reviewed ***The Montana Stories***: 'Katherine Mansfield's remarkable ability is to reach, in a few pages, the emotional heart of a matter.'

'A Kitchen Scene' 1929 FW Elwell © The Estate of FW Elwell

'***The Priory*** is an Upstairs/ Downstairs book, an eye-opener about the often heartless pre-war attitudes of the upper classes to their servants. The Marwood girls treat their maids with little consideration and the Major fulminates at his staff's inefficiency.' This comment in the Afterword will remind many of the debate that took place when *The Edwardian Country House* was shown on Channel 4 and viewers discussed whether they had a better time of it above stairs or below. The same unspoken debate runs through ***The Priory***. And it makes the point that one of the reasons for the economic decline of the house is that its status as a valued, indeed essential focus of the community has disappeared – it has been 'withdrawn from life': a Marwood ancestor had 'enclosed the park within a wall and put up the gates and lodges. Thus Saunby was withdrawn from life and brought to its present state.' The beautiful picture above raises all these issues in the mind of the observer…

FINALLY

Persephone Books was delighted to be presented with the 2002 Women in Publishing Pandora award: the judges said that we were 'a brilliant example of how well niche publishing can work.' And we now have a beautiful example of 'Pandora's Box' displayed in the shop, with a scroll listing the previous winners, whom we are so proud to be among.

From September 20th-21st there will be the first Persephone weekend at Newnham College, Cambridge, to celebrate the evening 75 years ago when Virginia Woolf gave the lecture in Hall that became *A Room of One's Own*. The speakers will be Lyndall Gordon, Jenny Hartley, Charlie Lee-Potter, Maureen Lipman, Miriam Margolyes, Julia Neuberger, Pamela Norris, Onora O'Neill (Principal of Newnham), Anne Sebba, Elaine Showalter, Henrietta Twycross-Martin and Katherine Whitehorn. There are a few places left for this unique event – do ask us for details if you would like to attend.

In November we were featured as one of the 'Shops We Can't Do Without' in the *Daily Telegraph* Weekend section. Amy Rosenthal wrote: 'What unites all the books is their timelessness. The writing is fresh, psychologically accurate, frequently moving and funny… The combination of office and shop is unusual, yet the atmosphere is warm and welcoming. Once inside, it can be hard to leave.'

Chicklit. com. posted a wonderful article about us by Anna Carey, also published in the *Irish Tribune*. This prompted a discussion on its 'paper jam' page running from early December onwards – well, less a discussion than a delightful series of compliments from Chicklit readers.

There are still some tickets for the Persephone lunch on March 18th at which the three writers of the prefaces to the Whipple novels, Nina Bawden, the Rev Terence Handley MacMath and David Conville, will be 'in conversation' about her. And there are a few places for the second Carlyles evening on April 9th, when madeira and seedcake will be served at the Carlyles House and Jan Marsh will talk about Thomas and Jane and their contemporaries. On May 16th there will be a lunch to celebrate the publication of ***Manja*** by Anna Gmeyner, at which her daughter Eva Ibbotson will talk about her mother. On June 18th Nicola Beauman will talk about 'How do we find our Books?', the title of a leaflet now available in the shop. All lunches cost £25, include a buffet lunch and wine and last from 12.30-2.30.

If you are reading this but for some reason have not had a copy of the colour Persephone Catalogue describing our 38 titles published from 1999-2002 please do ask for one.

The *Mail on Sunday* will be running an extract from ***Someone at a Distance*** on Sunday March 16th. It will appear in their monthly slot that normally has a short story. But the editor for this feature, the writer Elizabeth Buchan, was so impressed by the book and the scene she has chosen that she feels it stands on its own.

Lastly, by special request, here again is a list of the eight books we especially recommend for reading groups: ***William -- an Englishman***, ***Someone at a Distance***, ***Fidelity***, ***The Home-Maker***, ***Saplings***, ***Little Boy Lost***, ***A House in the Country*** and ***The Far Cry***.

PERSEPHONE BOOKS
020 7242 9292

Printed by The Lavenham Press, Lavenham, Suffolk.
If we have failed to acknowledge something that appears in The Persephone Quarterly, please let us know.
© PERSEPHONE BOOKS LTD 59 LAMB'S CONDUIT STREET LONDON WC1N 3NB
TEL: 020 7242 9292 / FAX: 020 7242 9272
sales@persephonebooks.co.uk / www.persephonebooks.co.uk