THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

Summer 2003

Nº 18

OUR SUMMER 2003 BOOKS

A 1933 hand-printed linen designed by Edwin Parker

A late 1940s furnishing fabric, sold in the USA

This summer we publish two contrasting books, our first thriller, ***The Blank Wall***, and ***Hostages to Fortune*** by Elizabeth Cambridge. The latter, which was published in 1933, has long been a favourite of anyone fortunate enough to find it but has nevertheless been out of print since its brief appearance as a Pan paperback in 1948.

The reason is easy to understand: this is a domestic novel *par excellence* and as such would have been ignored by male publishers and by most feminist publishers. It opens in 1915 with Catherine giving birth to her first child and shows us her life with her doctor husband in a village in Oxfordshire over the next eighteen years.

The (male) reviewer of the *Saturday Review of Literature* (Stanley West), writing almost exactly seventy years ago in July 1933, was, however, unusually enlightened; we cannot improve on his account, which is here reproduced in full. He wrote: 'This, we are told, is a first novel, and was the June choice of the English Book Society. We accept the first statement on the word of the publisher, and the second is easily verifiable; and we can only conclude that "Elizabeth Cambridge" (we have no idea if this is a *nom de plume*, but somehow it has the sound of one) [it was] has for long been practising her art in secret. For her book has the artlessness that conceals art; it is like a cartoon from which every redundant line has been carefully eliminated, so that the elements of the design stand out bold and clear, telling a complex story in terms of utter simplicity. If Elizabeth Cambridge is really a young and inexperienced writer, then her future career ought to be extraordinarily interesting to watch.

That there be no misunderstanding, let me say at once that I do not believe that sun-bathers and seashore nymphs will in any considerable number select this book as a beach companion [that is what ***The Blank Wall*** is for!]. It is something to be read and relished in an armchair at home. Its taste and intelligence call for corresponding qualities in the reader. For this author has successfully attempted an extremely difficult literary feat: she has essayed simply to describe the day-by-day life of a middle-class English family, living in narrow circumstances in an Oxfordshire village; and in doing it she has drawn an all but faultless picture of what has sometimes been described (rather foolishly) as the "lost generation" – that is, the generation in England that became adult during the war. The story opens with the birth of a child to the young wife of a war-marriage, the husband, a medical officer, being at the front. Before the war is over, he is invalided out of the army and takes up a scattered country practice in Oxfordshire. From then on the story is that of the adjustment of the wife, Catherine, to all the circumstances of her life – to the difficulties (and in retrospect

they seem almost incredible) of living in the last year of war and the first two of so-called peace; to the *res augusta domi* of a country doctor; to lack of companionship; to hard work; to the abandonment of literary ambitions, above all, to her husband and her three children.

The story is carried down to the present, when the generation that grew to manhood in 1914-18 is on the threshold of middle age, and the new generation that knows the war years only by hearsay is growing to adulthood. Catherine, disillusioned like the rest of her generation, has yet, by sheer power of loving and an endowment of native sense, arrived at an equipoise: "After all, none of us want very much. Security. A living wage. Hope for our children." But the children had thrashed out their own philosophy of life: "You see," says one of them to Catherine, "you all expected a lot," and Catherine reflects: "They will be happier that we were. They expect less."

This note of disillusionment is not quite the final one of the book. There are a couple of concluding sentences which the individual reader must interpret for himself, and which give, with the author's customary fine economy of expression, the clue to her purpose. Personally, I have no hesitation in describing this book as in many ways the most remarkable, and one of the best written, that I have read in a long time.'

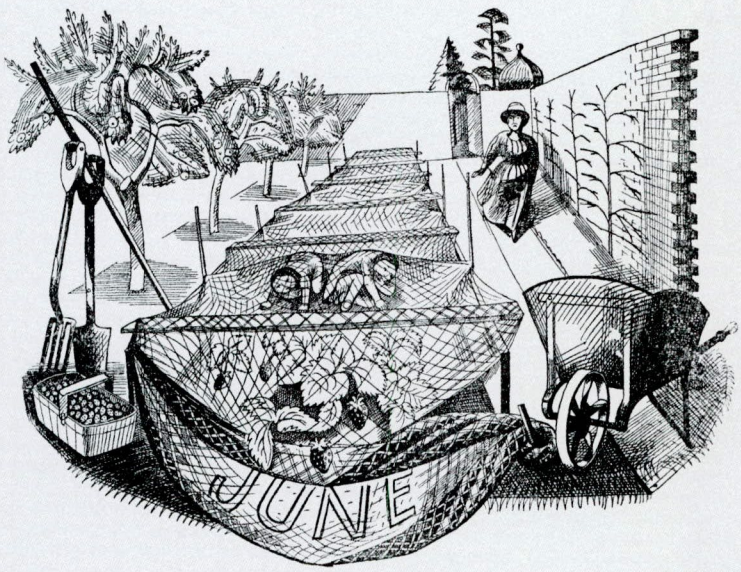


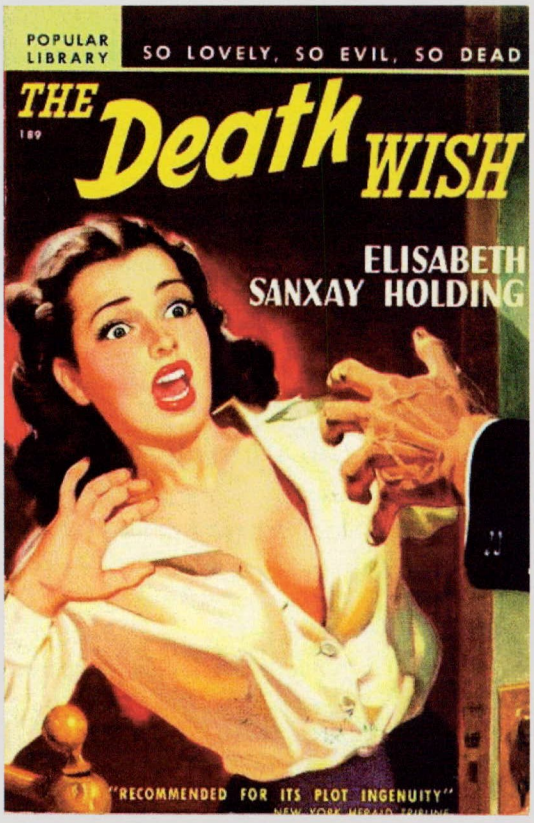
Illustration by Edward Bawden for ***Good Food on the Aga*** *(1933), to be published by Persephone Books in November of this year © Faber & Faber*

The other Persephone book for the summer, ***The Blank Wall***, is also domestic but it is a psychological thriller. We have long been wanting to add a thriller to our list but have not been able to find one that is neither too full of blood and guts nor too formulaic nor, obviously, reprinted by another publisher, as is the case with Marjory Allingham, Ngaio Marsh and Dorothy Sayers. Now Alarys Gibson (who works in the office part-time) has found us this American 1947 thriller about 'a suburban matron, harassed by wartime domestic problems – her husband is overseas – who finds herself implicated in the murder of her young daughter's extremely unattractive beau' (*The New Yorker*). This is a psychological thriller about maternal love and about the heroine's relationship with those around her (especially her children and her maid); it is a gripping read.

In 1950 Raymond Chandler wrote to his English publisher, Hamish Hamilton: '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.'

Elisabeth Sanxay Holding had begun her writing career as a romantic novelist: the *New York Times* wrote in 1928 that in her novel *The Silk Purse* 'she has managed to make every one of her characters, however unimportant, important. They are as real a collection of people as ever said yes when they wished to heaven they could say no. Like real people, they talk when they should be silent, are silent when they should say something, and, with the best intentions in the world, quietly wreck each other's lives.'

A review like this made it a natural progression for Elisabeth Sanxay Holding to turn from romance to suspense, she herself, or her publisher, having realised that her acute psychological perception should not be wasted on light fiction and that (an important consideration after the stock market crash of 1929) she would make more money from it. Thus she started on a career that turned her into 'an important precursor to later writers such as Patricia Highsmith and Ruth Rendell', wrote Maxim Jakubowski (crime writer and owner of Murder One bookshop) in the *Guardian* in 2001, when *The Deep End*, the film based on the ***The Blank Wall*** starring Tilda Swinton, was released. It was also filmed by Max Ophuls as *The Reckless Moment* in 1949, starring James Mason and Joan Bennett.



A 1950s cover to one of Elisabeth Sanxay Holding's books – a very different style from ours; contrary to this cover, Sanxay Holding is a very subtle, understated writer

Alas, it says a great deal about the publicity given to the cinema, and the difficulty of getting attention for literature that is no longer 'new', that so much has been written about both films but so little about the book on which the screenplays were so closely based. Yet, upon its first publication in 1947, ***The Blank Wall*** was highly praised by American newspapers and magazines: *The New Yorker* 'highly recommended . . . this suspense story with a rare and desirable down-to-earth quality.'

The Blank Wall remains the best of Elisabeth Sanxay Holding's novels and was certainly considered as such by Alfred Hitchcock, who reprinted it in an anthology called *My Favourites in Suspense*. His view was echoed by the *Herald Tribune* reviewer who singled out for special praise ***The Blank Wall*** 'by that astonishing artist, the late Elisabeth Sanxay Holding, whose evocation of nightmare was and still is unique, as reprint publishers might care to recall to their benefit.' None did – until now.

OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

In its 'Back in the Bookshops' column *The Tablet* reviewer felt that ***The Runaway*** 'made me see Victorian children's fiction in a new light' and called it 'blithe, funny and psychologically accurate… free of pedagogy and satire, it simply sets out to entertain'; and the heroine, Clarice, is described 'with wry truthfulness'.

The same column later focused on ***Lettice Delmer***, an 'extraordinary novel' in blank verse praised by TS Eliot: 'I was hooked as soon as I began reading it. Susan Miles writes with such intensity that her protagonist's unlikely pilgrimage from pampered under-occupied daughter of the upper middle class to humble, discerning attendant in a ladies' lavatory is absorbing and almost entirely believable throughout...The terrible hospital for venereal diseases where Mrs Delmer pays brave, bright little visits is brilliantly described. So are the doomed but heartfelt attempts of Lettice and her mother to heal the lives of the unfortunates they have rescued...the depiction of the main characters is superbly realistic... a remarkable discovery.'

Miriam Margolyes' cassette reading of ***Cheerful Weather for the Wedding*** continues to attract first-rate reviews, for example from the *Disability Times*, which singled it out as a top choice for Mother's Day.

In *Junior* magazine Anne Harvey recommended Persephone books as perfect gifts, picking out ***The Children Who Lived in a Barn*** and 'Jacqueline Wilson's warm, accessible, loving introduction.'

The Diaries of Etty Hillesum were the subject of a feature in the *Church Times* and were described as 'an extraordinary mixture of nobility, spirituality and Bridget Jones.' Emphasising her 'faith and joy in life', the piece included quotations from the diaries and an article on the 'prodigiousness of Etty's writings'.

An extract from ***Someone at a Distance*** appeared in the *Mail on Sunday's You* magazine in March. Impressed by the quality of the novel's pivotal passage, the paper ran it instead of the usual short story, recommending the Persephone edition as a 'perfect introduction' to Whipple's 'unjustly forgotten' work.

In the *Western Morning News* Mark Daniel devoted a column to Florence White's ***Good Things in England***: 'a masterpiece published in 1932. This majestic volume contains instructions for just about everything, from making coffee to roasting swan and making wedding cakes.'

An article in American *Vogue* described our bookshop as a 'treasure-trove tucked at the foot of an elegant brownstone' with shelves lined with silver-covered volumes 'like rows of beautiful perfume bottles.' It praised ***The Far Cry*** as a 'small masterpiece' as well as the 'Whartonesque ***Fidelity***'.

Salley Vickers wrote a glowing review of ***The Priory*** for the *Spectator*: 'It is the kind of book I really enjoy: funny, acutely observed, written in clear, melodious but unostentatious prose it deserves renewed recognition as a minor classic in this aesthetically pleasing Persephone edition... Whipple is not quite Jane Austen class but she understands as well as Austen the enormous effects of apparently minor social adjustments. . . Christine is a true heroine: vulnerable, valiant, appealing, and the portrait of her selfless maternal preoccupation, done without sentiment and utterly credible, is one of the best I have ever come across. The final triumph of love over adversity is described with a benevolent panache which left me feeling heartened about human nature. . . A delightful, well-written and clever book.'

LITERARY **EDITORS** & THEIR **INFLUENCE**

Adapted from an article published by Professor James Curran in 2001, based on interviews with the literary editors of 22 newspapers and magazines

Of the twenty-two literary editors interviewed, almost all believed that book reviews should engage, interest or entertain, with an important objective also being to alert readers to 'books they ought to know about', and with book sections being seen as a 'noticeboard of what is new and important'. Yet if one of the literary editor's main objectives is to identify books that are important, they manifestly fail in this, since books judged to be important are concentrated in only four areas: biography, literary fiction, history and general humanities – even though these accounted for a mere 27 per cent of new stock.

If book reviews appear selective in the context of which books are published, this is even more true in relation to what people actually read. The public reads mainly paperbacks, yet hardbacks account for over 90 per cent of all book reviews in national newspapers; two-thirds of book readers read fiction, yet over two-thirds of review space is allocated to non-fiction. The divergence between reviewing and reading becomes even more marked in relation to novels: people interviewed were seven times more likely to be reading popular than literary fiction but the former receives overwhelmingly less space on the books pages. So book reviews in the national press do not reflect what is published, do not mirror what is important and do not correspond to what is popular. How then has this come about?

The initial mystery is easily dispelled. Most literary editors perceive literature as a hierarchy: at the peak are works of outstanding literary merit reflected in their quality of writing, originality of vision, and depth of insight and observation. At the bottom are various forms of genre fiction whose literary value is undermined by their adherence to repetitive formulae. Literary fiction is thus judged to be important and space for 'trashy' books is rationed. This cultural traditionalism was undisturbed by the anguished re-thinking which has taken place in university English literature departments in response to the rise of postmodernism, feminism and post-colonial theory.

Furthermore, all the literary editors interviewed had arts/humanities backgrounds which predispose them against books outside this tradition, and all but one had previously worked as a journalist. Since journalistic norms stress the over-riding importance of up-to-the-minute topicality, this largely explains the neglect of paperbacks. Hardbacks were associated with what was new, while paperbacks were identified with yesterday's news, an old story warmed up in new covers. Another journalistic axiom is that 'people are more interesting than things', which is why biographies are the most reviewed books in the press: they are the book-review equivalent of the human-interest story.

Yet even before a book reaches a literary editor it has already been subjected to a complex process of pre-selection. There was general agreement that a book from a major, prestige publisher tended to be approached with 'greater hope' than one from an obscure publishing house. And book covers are thought to reveal much about a book, since there are visual codes denoting a book as 'library fodder', run-of-the-mill, genre, specialist-academic or a book on which money and time have been lavished.

Publishers also heavily influence which books are pushed for review and which are not: extra effort is put into those titles which they think will succeed, and this is often self-fulfilling. The amount of resources committed to winning reviews can vary from the routine dispatch of review copies to literary editors, to praise for a book as one of the key titles of the season in personal meetings with literary editors (usually over lunch or at a party), to a planned campaign of TV and radio appearances, press interviews, launch party and paid advertising. Literary editors maintain regular contact with leading publishers, who have publicity departments employing up to a dozen or more people whose key task is to help and influence the editors. Ultimately, however, publicists make a case and literary editors decide whether or not to listen, so that publicists have to adapt to the preferences of literary editors in order to be effective. This results in promotion that generally reinforces rather than challenges these preferences.

The pattern of promotion thus follows rather than dictates the book review agenda. This gives rise to a self-reproducing tradition: a force-field of influence is generated in favour of certain kinds of books (biographies, history, literary novels etc) because these are the books that most literary editors prefer reviewing. Moreoever, despite the fact that more than half of literary editors are now female, male gender values are still predominant and the book pages continue to represent a cultural tradition formed in the nineteenth century, with a corresponding love of poetry and literary fiction and an identical disdain for science books, fantasy, genre fiction and popular romance.

Another crucial influence is that of journalists working in the same positions on rival papers who each want to be 'in the swim' or first with a scoop: a herd-like behaviour which is only rarely disturbed. In the mid-1980s, Bill Webb, literary editor of the *Guardian*, gave unusual prominence to fiction from central Europe and Latin America, radical social history and feminism; yet by 1999 there were no respected outsiders among national-press literary editors and the group was self-supported in its conformism.

Finally there is the influence of the literary community, made up of writers, publishers, literary agents and literary journalists bound together by social ties and sustained by corporate sponsorship – for example, its members are often brought together at book launch parties paid for by the publishing industry as part of its promotional activities. This community further supports and is supported by the book pages of the national press.

Since the mid-1980s, with the expansion in newspaper size, and the increasingly commercial focus of multinational publishers, books have become bigger news. Novels are increasingly constructed as 'stories' focusing on the author, and the role of the literary editor has changed from someone who merely commissions book reviews to a broker who responds to ideas for converting books into bigger features, serials, interviews or news reports. As a result, most literary editors are now largely recruited from mainstream journalism rather than from a literary or literary-journalistic background, and their hostility to publicists is a thing of the past.

So does it matter which books are reviewed? Reviews influence book sales and public library buying, not only of individual writers but also of rival literary traditions. Which books are reviewed may also have some influence on how books are written. However, the single most important consequence of the national press's selective book agenda is that it narrows access to knowledge. By shrinking the intellectual horizons of the book pages, literary editors are thus doing no service to their readers.

LIST OF PERSEPHONE BOOKS

William - an Englishman by Cicely Hamilton: A prize-winning 1919 novel about the 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 formerly happy marriage.

Mariana by Monica Dickens: First 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 brilliantly describes the effects when a girl in Iowa runs off with a married man.

An Interrupted Life by Etty Hillesum: From 1941-3 a young woman living in Amsterdam, 'the Anne Frank for grown-ups', 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 80 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* from 1938-44.

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: A searing and funny novel about an Edwardian girl who enters 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 1935 novel by Jonathan Miller's mother about a young Jewish film-director and 'the discreet discrimination of the bourgeoisie' (*Guardian*).

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

Saplings by Noel Streatfeild: An adult novel by the well-known author of *Ballet Shoes,* about what happens to a family during the Second World War; to be a ten-part serial on 'Woman's Hour'.

Marjory Fleming by Oriel Malet: A novel based on the real life of the Scottish child prodigy who lived from 1803-11. A French translation was published by Editions Autrement in 2002.

Every Eye by Isobel English: An unusual 1956 novel about a girl travelling to Spain, highly praised by Muriel Spark: it will be an afternoon play on R4 adapted by Micheline Wandor.

They Knew Mr Knight by Dorothy Whipple: An absorbing 1934 novel about a family man driven into committing fraud, who goes to prison; a 1943 film.

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

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's 'Book at Bedtime'.

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', greatly admired by Oscar Wilde.

Family Roundabout by Richmal Crompton: By the author of the *William* books, this adult novel is about two families watched over by very different matriarchs.

The Montana Stories by Katherine Mansfield: Collects together the short stories written during the author's last year, with a detailed publisher's note and contemporary illustrations.

Brook Evans by Susan Glaspell: A moving and unusual novel, written in the same year as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, about the enduring effect of a love affair on three generations of a family.

The Children Who Lived in a Barn by Eleanor Graham: Jacqueline Wilson contributes the preface to this 1938 classic about five children fending for themselves; 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 a R4 'Book at Bedtime' last year.

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

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

A House in the Country by Jocelyn Playfair: An unusual and very readable 1944 novel about the effect of the Second World War 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; a great favourite.

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 unknown 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 (real) street in Chelsea.

Lettice Delmer by Susan Miles: An unforgettable novel in verse describing a young girl's spiritual journey in the 1920s, much praised by TS Eliot.

The Runaway by Elizabeth Anna Hart: A witty and charming 1872 novel for children, illustrated with over sixty woodcuts by Gwen Raverat.

Cheerful Weather for the Wedding by Julia Strachey: A funny and quirky 1932 novella by a niece of Lytton Strachey, admired by Virginia Woolf.

Manja by Anna Gmeyner: A 1938 German novel, newly translated, about five children conceived on the same night in 1920 and their lives until 1933.

The Priory by Dorothy Whipple: The third novel we have published by this wonderful writer, about a family in a large country house during the years leading up to 1939.

'GOING HOME'

by Sally Benson first appeared in *The New Yorker* on 4 July 1942, five years before ***The Blank Wall*** was published.

Her train left from Pennsylvania Station at ten o'clock. Mrs Carey had suggested that she wait and take an early-morning train, but Evelyn felt that she didn't want to waste a minute. 'Seem's if I can't hardly wait to get goin',' she said.

'But you won't get to Washington until sometime in the middle of the night,' Mrs Carey said.

'Yes, Ma'am,' Evelyn agreed. 'That train don't get in till around two. And the train for Atlanta don't go for a couple of hours after that.'

'Goodness!' Mrs Carey exclaimed. 'You'll have to sit in the station all that time! Well, find a nice, comfortable seat and try and get a little sleep.'

The Careys ate an early dinner the night Evelyn left. It was only eight-thirty when she finished the dishes. She untied the minute organdie apron she wore to serve dinner and slipped off her smart black uniform. Her dark-red crêpe dress, freshly pressed, hung over the back of a chair. After she put her uniform away in the broom closet, she stood for a minute in her slip, smoothing her arms with her hands in an ecstasy of anticipation. The palms of her hands looked almost white against the soft dark brown of her arms. She fingered the creamy lace of the slip that Mrs Carey had given her for a going-away present and straightened the seams of the stockings which covered her slender, pretty legs.

The red crêpe was becoming. She had paid twelve dollars for it, almost a week's pay, and it emphasised the shining whiteness of her teeth and the warm brown of her skin. She opened her suitcase and took out a comb and brush, part of the set that LeRoy had given her for Christmas. The suitcase smelled of lilac, and it was filled with a few clothes, neatly folded, and a dozen or so small packages – gifts for Mary, Auntie, old Mrs Valentine, and the kids. She brushed her hair back from her face until it shone and combed the ends in crisp curls all over her head. She picked up her pearl button earrings, which lay on the window sill, and screwed them onto the lobes of her ears.

The kitchen window was open. She could see out across the rooftops of the four-storey private houses to Central Park and the dark, unruffled water of the reservoir. The lights from the apartment houses on Central Park West were reflected in the water, and the street lamps brought out the pale green of the leaves. She could hear the muffled hum of cars passing endlessly through the Park.

She turned back to the kitchen. It was clean and quiet. The yellow walls were soft in the electric light, and an alarm clock ticked away on top of the white enamel refrigerator. She took a pencil and paper from the table drawer and wrote, '1/2 pint heavy cream & 1 qt milk,' and slipped it into the top of a milk bottle that stood on the draining-board of the sink. Then, closing her bag, she carried it into the hall. Her coat and hat were in the hall closet, and she put them on. Her hat was tiny and was made of white gardenias. After a last look at herself in the hall mirror, she went to the door of the living room and stood there shyly.

Mr and Mrs Carey were listening to the radio, but when Mrs Carey saw her, she got up quickly and turned the radio down. 'Why, Evelyn,' she said, 'how nice you look!'

'Mrs Carey,' she said, 'I *feel* nice.'

'Well, Evelyn' – Mr Carey stood up and felt in his pocket 'here. Get yourself something to eat on the train.' He walked over and handed her a five-dollar bill.

'Oh, Mr Carey!' she said. 'Mr Carey, you didn't need to go and do that.'

'Now, that's to spend, Evelyn. To spend on yourself.'

Mrs Carey smiled and held out her hand. 'Goodbye,' she said. 'And if you get held up a day or so, just drop me a postcard and let us know, so we won't worry about you.'

'I wrote out the note for the milkman. But I didn't put out the bottle yet. It don't look very pretty in the hall.'

'I'll put it out later,' Mrs Carey told her.

'Goodbye, Mr Carey,' Evelyn said. 'I told Nancy to take real good care of you while I'm gone.'

'We'll be all right.'

She looked down at the floor and giggled. 'Nancy ain't bad, but she ain't good, neither.'

'That's a fine thing to be telling us at the last minute,' Mr Carey said jovially.

They followed her to the hall and said final goodbyes on a note of hilarity.

Dan, the boy on the service elevator, asked her if she wanted a taxi, and she laughed at this subtle jest. 'Now, don't you let any folks go ringing that doorbell until my friend comes in the morning,' she said. 'Mr Carey don't like to answer the doorbell the first thing.' She took a key from her bag and handed it to him. 'And don't forget to see she gets that. She'll be here at seven sharp.'

'Look out she don't get your job away from you,' Dan said. 'How long you going to be away?'

'A week.'

'A lot of things can happen in a week.'

Out in the street, Evelyn hurried toward Fifth Avenue. Waiting for the lights to change, she wondered if Nancy would have sense enough to remember about Mrs Carey's pineapple juice in the morning. Mrs Carey was reducing and didn't eat a regular breakfast.

She crossed over to the bus stop and stood humming to herself. It was a warm night and the benches along the Park were filled with people. Police dogs and Airedales walked sedately by with their masters, and Scotties and fox terriers pulled and choked on their leashes.

Every seat on the top of the bus was taken, but she found a place by an open window downstairs. She rested her feet on her suitcase and took a dime from her bag. She looked at her neat kid gloves and remembered how she had looked when she first came to New York almost seven years before. She hadn't owned a pair of gloves then and her hands had been rough, with broken, cracked nails. She thought of the Careys' small, pretty apartment and of her own room on 146th Street near Convent Avenue. It was a big room that faced on the street, and in the summer evenings she sat by the window looking out, drinking a bottle of Coca-Cola through a straw. The room was plain, but it was clean and had a washbasin in one corner. She could have her friends up, too, because of the day bed, which made it look like a living room. There was a worn carpet on the floor, a painted chest of drawers, an upholstered chair and two straight chairs. And behind a screen there was an electric plate over which she and LeRoy cooked shrimp gumbo every Sunday night.

She had been happy in that room except for a gnawing homesickness that never left her, not even when she sat in the Apollo or the Regent watching the funniest pictures. It was as though she had to think of her sister Mary and of Auntie's house in Atlanta. She tried to tell LeRoy about Auntie's house. It was on the side of the street that had a sidewalk, and it had a porch covered with honeysuckle vines. 'It's just a little, old, green house,' she told him 'but it's on the good side.'

Lately she had talked so much of her folks – Mary, Auntie, old Mrs Valentine, who boarded with them, and the kids – that LeRoy couldn't stand it. 'Lady,' he said 'you better get goin'.' And he had given her money to help pay for her round-trip ticket. 'I ain't big-hearted,' he explained. 'I just can't stand you no more.'

He had wanted to take her to the station, but Mr Conelly, the gentleman he worked for, had picked tonight to have a dinner party.

At Pennsylvania Station, she bought a movie magazine and

got on the train. It was sticky and close, and the lights seemed dim. She swung her bag to the rack overhead, sat down, and opened the magazine. After she had looked at the pictures, she felt thirsty and walked to the end of the car and got a drink from the water-cooler. As she drank it the train began to move and she had a sinking sensation in the pit of her stomach. She had had the same feeling when she was about to leave Atlanta, and Auntie had told her she was journey-proud. Going back to her seat, she took her bag down and opened it. There were the two house dresses for Auntie, the quart of Old Grand-Dad for old Mrs Valentine, the green silk nightgown and clips for Mary, and the socks and toys for the kids. She tried to think how it would be at the station in Atlanta and how Mary would carry on when she walked in on them. LeRoy had thought she'd better write, but she had wanted to surprise them.

She took off her hat of white gardenias and put it in a paper bag she had packed for that purpose. The car was almost empty, and although she was feeling thirsty again, she was too shy to walk to the water-cooler again. 'Folks'll think I've swallowed a bag of salt,' she thought.

She closed her eyes and thought of Auntie's house and the back yard with the two peach trees that bore hard, bitter fruit. The floors of Auntie's house were bare and splintered, and the furniture was mostly stuff people had given to her, but the rich aroma that came from Auntie's kitchen made you forget such things. With the suitcase open on her knees, she fell asleep.

It was after one when she awakened, her neck stiff and her hands cramped. She set the suitcase on the seat beside her and stood up. Someone farther down the aisle was snoring heavily, and looking out of the window, she saw that it had started to rain. Heavy drops fell against the glass, which was misty and streaked. She walked to the water-cooler and pressed the faucet, but the cooler was empty. Her mouth was dry and she was hungry. She went back and took her hat from the bag and put it on, adjusting it by her reflection in the window. She found her chamois and wiped the dirt from her face and reddened her mouth with lipstick. Then she sat, sleepy and uncomfortable, thinking of the five dollars Mr Carey had given her and of what she would have to eat in the station in Washington.

The station looked deserted. A few Red Caps stood about and they looked at her as she passed. She checked her bag and started across the station to an all-night drugstore. Two men sat at the counter drinking coffee, and she stood looking up at the menu pasted on the mirror before she sat down. The most expensive thing on the menu was a club sandwich, which was fifty cents, and she decided to order one and tell Mr Carey about it when she got back to New York.

She climbed up on a stool. The two men stopped talking and turned to look at her, and the counterman stopped polishing glasses and walked toward her.

'I can't serve you here,' he said.

For a minute she looked at him uncomprehending, and then she understood. In an agony of embarrassment, she slid to her feet.

'I can give you something to take out,' he said.

'No,' she said. 'No thank you.'

The two men smiled and shook their heads. 'Northern nigger,' one of them said.

She walked into the waiting room and was about to sit down when she noticed that the few coloured people in the station had taken a bench in the back of the room together. She hurried toward them. There were four women and one old man. The women carried cheap imitation-leather valises, and bundles wrapped in newspapers. Their hands were bare and their feet bulged and strained in their shoes.

Evelyn was conscious of her hat with the white gardenias and of the bright red of her lipstick. She sat down stiffly near the old man. Her mouth was very dry

and her head ached. She leaned toward him. 'Could you kindly tell me where I could get something to eat?' she asked.

He took off his hat and she saw that his hair was white and thick. 'They's a place six, seven blocks. But I don't know if it's open. You'll get mighty wet. Sure is comin' down.'

Her hand went up to the white gardenias. 'Thank you just the same,' she said.

One of the coloured women looked at Evelyn and whispered to her friend. They began to laugh.

She didn't know how long she sat there. Somewhere in the station there was a drink of water to be had, but it was as though she couldn't move to try and find it. She was in Washington and later she would be in Atlanta. Suddenly she stood up and walked rapidly to the checkroom. Handing in her check, she got her suitcase. Her eyes were shining and clear and she held her head high.

She passed a Red Cap and turned quickly and touched him on the arm. 'When's the next train leave for New York?' she asked.

He looked toward the station clock. 'In about three minutes,' he said. 'Track eighteen. You goin' North?'

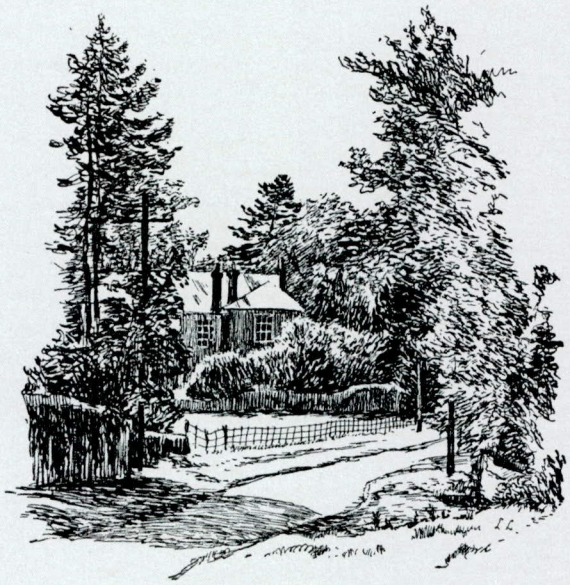
Her laughter was deep and satisfying. 'Not me, boy,' she said. 'I'm goin' home.'

OUR **SEPTEMBER** BOOKS

Leonard Woolf wrote his second novel ***The Wise Virgins*** in 1913, just after his marriage to Virginia Stephen. The hero, Harry Davis, is the son of a middle-class Jewish family which has recently moved from Bayswater to Richstead, a suburb which we may assume is Putney where the Woolf family lived. Harry attends art classes and meets the dazzling sisters Camilla and Katharine. But because he lives at home he is also pulled back towards the values of suburbia and the young women who live next door, particularly Gwen. This Forsterian novel is witty, wise and sharp – and a unique perspective on the relationship between Virginia and Leonard, and Virginia and Vanessa Bell.

Our other autumn book is a collection of short stories by Frances Towers (1885-1948) called ***Tea with Mr Rochester***. It was published in 1949, received glowing reviews ('unique and brilliant' were Angus Wilson's words), came out as a Penguin in 1952, and then was forgotten. The writer of the preface, Frances Thomas, found it on a secondhand bookstall and was immediately entranced. The stories are elusive, unsettling, almost Gothic – and beautifully written. Five of them will be broadcast on Radio 4 this year.

1939 illustration by Lynton Lamb for Flora Thompson's Lark Rise which, like ***Hostages to Fortune****, is set in a village in rural Oxfordshire*



OUR **READERS** WRITE

‘***Manja*** is the most powerful book I have read since Solzhenitsyn's *First Circle*. Every character is drawn with such clarity that one can see each person physically, and also follow the working of their minds. The story is gripping, frightening and totally absorbing. Congratulations to Persephone for printing it, and to Kate Phillips for her sensitive translation.’ MJ, Clevedon

‘***Manja*** is one of the best novels I have read. The lives and the emotions of the five children are beautifully observed. It would be a pity if it were labelled a 'woman's book'. It is much too powerful for that. . . ***The Priory*** is also a gripping book. I agree with all your correspondents who write to say, thank you for rediscovering Dorothy Whipple. It is hard to see why she fell out of fashion so completely. Although I enjoy most of your books, I think this Spring's selection will take some beating. I could not put them down.’ DM, Dover

‘***Greenery Street*** is one of the great English comic novels – I have never seen such a sharp account of the idiocy of the upper-classes.’ TR, London SW1

‘Please publish more Dorothy Whipple! I've just devoured ***The Priory*** over a weekend, which I found even more gripping than ***Someone at a Distance***. She writes great, satisfying stories, creates wonderfully believable characters and deserves a much wider following.’ AS, London W1

‘I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed the cassette of ***Cheerful Weather***. Listening to it in the car on my way to work has been so enjoyable. Beautifully read by Miriam Margolyes, it's magic and I love the music, so evocative.’ JH, Norwich

‘When I bought a copy of ***Lettice Delmer*** at the last lunch I was disconcerted to hear that it was not selling so well and wondered how I should enjoy it. Well, it is a marvellous book. The author simply follows the long tradition of those who knew that the iambic pentameter is the natural rhythm of the English language. The blank verse is entirely easy and unforced. The miserable confusion of Lettice and the troubles of those around her are depicted with the minimum of well-chosen phrases.’ GJ, Wickham Market

‘I have particularly enjoyed ***A House in the Country***. I found so many facets of the settings, characterisation and plot symbolised the changing routines and attitudes of middle-class England. How intrusive the war must have seemed to those people – but how amazingly well they coped and carried on. I lived in that house with all the occupants – and I left oh so reluctantly when it was all over – much wiser, a bit sad but also impressed, yet again, at what the human spirit can and does endure.’ EA, Pershore

‘I read ***Little Boy Lost*** in one sitting, utterly gripped and absolutely terrified that Hilary was going to do something awful and irretrievably stupid. I think for the last few pages I barely drew breath. The friend I work with thought it just as much of an achievement as I do – there really is no word wasted.’ DL, Hornsea

‘I finished reading ***Manja*** a couple of minutes ago. It is a wonderful, terrible book. Thank you for publishing it. For the translator, Kate Phillips, it must also have been a work of great love, and probably exhaustion.’ EM, Church Stretton

‘I have just had a Whipple weekend and re-read ***Someone at a Distance***, which I enjoyed even more the second time around as I was able to notice more detail. It really is a wonderful book and I loved every minute of it. Also, could I enter a plea for more Dorothy Canfield Fisher? ***The Home-Maker*** may be my favourite Persephone book.’ EA, Alcester

ANTICIPATION by Shirley Conran

A friend lent me ***A Woman's Place***, which I read at a gulp, then ordered my own copy. This came with a Persephone leaflet about two irresistible new books, which I ordered. When their quarterly letter arrived, I increased my order to nine, a feast. Next came an elegant catalogue, listing lost books by women. I increased my order to twenty-one books. I dare not visit the bookshop.

I couldn't wait for the postman, so I sent a minicab to collect the treasures, then I took the afternoon off. My PA asked if I were ill. I gloated over the three pale grey piles on my white dining table. I haven't felt such excitement, such delicious anticipation, since groping in the dark at the bumps in my Christmas stocking.

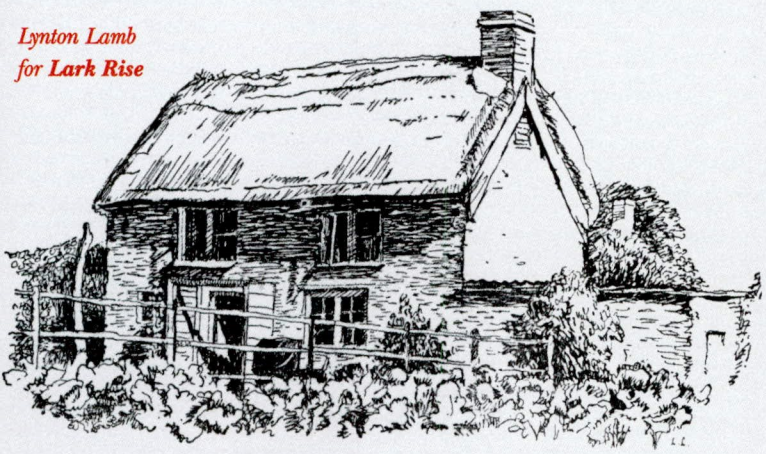
Since I was three I've been a bookworm. For me there is something mesmeric about a book, any book. I don't want to revere my books for they are my companions, and I don't want them perfect; I like a comfortably lived-in book, I believe that books exist to be used, and I annotate mine in red ink; the most useful look as if I've haemorrhaged over them. I give away the occasional, first edition that comes my way – once, *A Room of One's Own* in its original jacket. At my own book-signing sessions I prefer autographing a jam-stained old paperback of *Superwoman* to my latest expensive hardback. Booksellers don't share my enthusiasm.

But the Persephone books, in faultless graphic taste, are too beautiful to deface and already too beloved to give away. My pile of little masterpieces are the result of over forty years of somebody's work. Cheap! Some of them I have been waiting all my life to read: ***Good Things in England*** and ***Kitchen Essays***.

I spent an hour just dipping, deciding which to read first, ***The Victorian Chaise-longue*** or ***The Making of a Marchioness***?... Or perhaps the Mollie Panter-Downes? Another column grew.

I eventually decided on ***Few Eggs and No Oranges***, and was transported to the war-time London of my youth, re-living the shortage of everything, the excitement, the comradeship, the bloody-minded determination not to be slaves – for that is what we all truly feared – that united Britain during World War II. Six hundred pages ended with VE Day, 'So the long nightmare ... is finished at last... it has been a Glorious Day.' And a glorious read.

Clearly these books have been rediscovered and produced with love. They project love. I know I shall love them. Maybe even cherish them, and keep them clean.



Lynton Lamb for ***Lark Rise***

FINALLY

'The outstanding publisher of forgotten classics by women writers,' wrote the *Time Out Shopping Guide* to London's Best Shops and Services 2003, 'now has front of house retail premises in the auspicious literary surroundings of Lamb's Conduit Street (Bernard Castle's Tower Bookshop used to be across the street; Dickens' House is at nearby Doughty Street). Pick up one of Persephone's beautifully produced books, a catalogue or the latest *Persephone Quarterly*.'

And the recent edition of *Book Lovers' London* by the wonderfully named Lesley Reader describes us as being 'one of a cluster of bookshops in the Lamb's Conduit/Great Ormond Street area that make the place such a magnet for book lovers. Persephone is a small, independent publisher that republishes forgotten and neglected fiction and non-fiction in beautifully produced volumes with colourful endpapers and bookmarks. They issue two books a quarter and their authors include Katherine Mansfield, Monica Dickens and Noel Streatfeild. Their catalogue and the *Persephone Quarterly* are both rewarding reads and enthusiasts can join the mailing list. A gift-wrapping service is available. Lamb's Conduit Street has several coffee bars – Sid's is next door to this shop and as good as any.'

The Bookseller's Star Ratings column has selected ***The Blank Wall*** as one of its summer choices. The book was filmed twice: *The Deep End* (2001) is available on video but the first version, Max Ophuls' *The Reckless Moment* (1949) starring James Mason and Joan Bennett, is hard to get hold of. However, we are pleased to have secured a private viewing for Persephone readers at the British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street London W1 on Wednesday 9th July. Tea will be available from 3.30-4.00, the screening will be from 4.00-5.30 and then a glass of madeira will be served. The cost will be £25 per person, the same as for a Persephone lunch.

The weekend at Newnham is sold out but there will be room for a few extra people to join us for lunch on Sunday, hear the three afternoon speakers and stay for the final sherry party. The cost is £65 including vat; please telephone if you would like to do this. And for those who would have liked to come for the whole weekend – we may well have another one in 2004.

At the lunch celebrating the publication of Anna Gmeyner's novel ***Manja*** (pronounced with a soft 'j'!) her

daughter Eva Ibbotson spoke wittily and movingly about her mother and about the book. Most Persephone readers will know Eva's recent bestselling children's book, *Journey to the River Sea*, but several people have asked about her novel *The Morning Gift* (1993) which, although set in England, explores some of the same themes as ***Manja***. We would dearly love to reprint this; but, while we wait to hear if that will be possible, might be able to find secondhand copies.

Postage prices within the UK: these went up in early May, but we have decided not to increase our incredibly good value, virtually nominal, £1 unless we have to; but please do order the summer books with ever greater enthusiasm so that the higher postage charges are less painful to us and we can keep our charges at £1. . .

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