

CELEBRATING OUR
50TH BOOK

THE PERSEPHONE
QUARTERLY

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Bistro instead of Persephone: 59 Lamb's Conduit Street in the 1950s, before the 'improvements' to the shopfront

OUR SUMMER 2004 BOOKS

Bricks and Mortar and *The World that was Ours*, (the latter is our 50th book) are, we hope, good examples of the range remarked on by a recent reviewer when he said that the two novels he was reviewing 'exemplify the breadth of the Persephone list'. The first is a novel about an architect from the 1890s to the 1920s; his preoccupations are his family and his work, and politics do not intrude. But *The World that was Ours*, although it reads like a novel, is a memoir about South Africa's



fabric for Bricks and Mortar by Doris Gregg 1930



darkest hour and is one of our most important books to date.

The author, Hilda Bernstein, is English; she went to Johannesburg in 1933 when she was 17 and married Rusty Bernstein in 1941. She was always very active politically, becoming a communist city councillor in 1943 and a committed anti-apartheid campaigner. Yet her book, written in 1967, two years after Hilda escaped with her family to England, does not fill in the political background in enormous detail: it simply takes

for granted that civilised South Africans fought apartheid and the uncivilised propped it up.

On 11 July 1963 Rusty was arrested at Rivonia with Nelson Mandela and the seven other 'men of Rivonia' to whom the book is dedicated (along with their counsel Bram Fischer).



Hilda Bernstein in the 1940s

The World that was Ours starts by describing, in heartstopping detail, the twenty-four hours during which Hilda waits to hear what had happened to Rusty, then fills in the background to the previous ten years. This is interwoven with domestic detail (babysitters have to be arranged even when an underground newspaper is being produced) and lyrical description of suburban gardens and the South African landscape: the book was after all written in drab Camden Town by an exile heartsick with longing for her country.

The core of the book is the account of the Rivonia Trial itself, the final day of which was forty years ago – on 12 June 1964. Deftly (and this is an account of a trial that is never boring) Hilda Bernstein shows us the bullying of Percy Yutar, the prosecutor – and Mandela's courageous and beautifully spoken address to the court which concluded: 'I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and

free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal for which I hope to live for and to see realised. But if it need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.'

These words have become world-famous, but it is possible that they have not been printed in this exact

recording of this mesmerising statement will be played at the Persephone lunch in October.)

But the main strength of *The World that was Ours* is as a personal memoir, and in this respect it bears comparison with autobiographies by Nadezhda Mandelstam and Christabel Bielenberg, which also describe traumatic twentieth-



Nelson Mandela and Percy Yutar on the day the State President invited his former prosecutor to lunch, 23 November 1995

version until now. The original edition of *The World that was Ours* used the transcript of the court proceedings jotted down by the instructing attorney Joel Joffe; inevitably, and forgivably, it was imprecise. Then, in 2001, a recording of the trial proceedings became available for the first time in the British Library so that we could transcribe the quotations from Mandela's address more accurately. (Some of the

century events through the prism of a woman's gaze. Two worlds are being destroyed in the book, the public world of political activism and the private world of domestic happiness. The former provided exhilaration and personal identity; but it needed additional courage to jeopardise the latter.

After Rusty was acquitted it was Hilda who was at risk, with the start of a new wave of arrests. She was at

home loading the washing machine when the Special Branch came to the front door. 'And I am at the end of the garden among the trees, as they arrive at both the front and back doors, in less than thirty seconds. Somewhere behind me, in a kitchen never to be entered again, the washing machine is going into its rinsing cycle, the pressure cooker sends out its puffs of steam, the children are unaware that I have gone. The bright winter sun illuminates the normality of Saturday morning in a Johannesburg suburb.'

Hilda Bernstein's book describes legendary events with such insight and accessibility that we read about them as though they had happened to us. The same is true of a good novel. Our other summer author, Helen Ashton, was a well-respected and popular inter-war woman writer, who trained as a doctor but gave up her career when she married a barrister. She may be little known nowadays but consistently wrote entertaining and interesting novels – some of which were bestsellers – which leave the reader something to think about. Her *Bricks and Mortar* is about the life of a London architect over thirty-five years. As the *TLS* reviewer said: 'Miss Ashton has the power of writing about people as though she had known them all her life.'

One feels in following her through this chronicle that one has lived next door to Martin Lovell ever since the day when he first set up house with Letty in chambers on the north side of Gray's Inn Square' (five minutes from Lamb's Conduit Street).

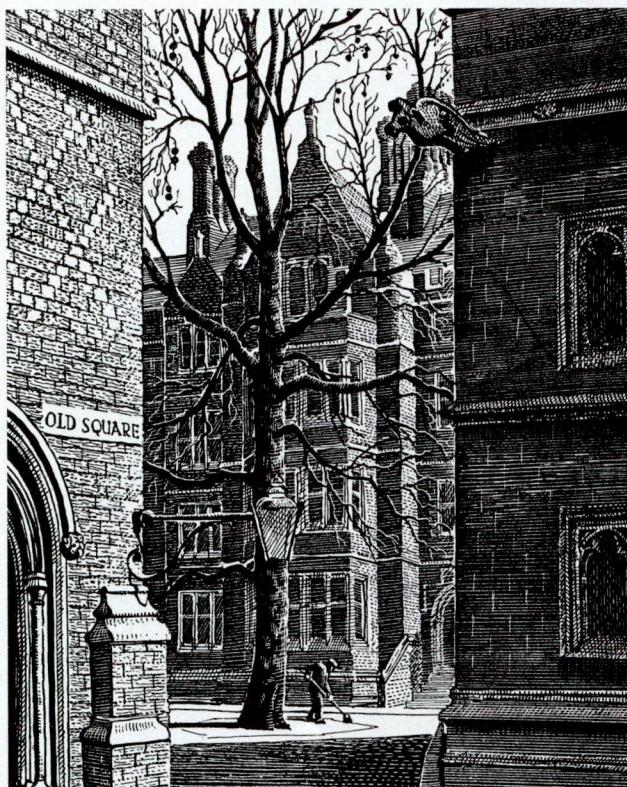
We meet Martin when he is 24, in 1892, in a wonderfully written and good-humoured first chapter, in which, Forsterianly, over dinner at their *pension* in Rome he meets 18 year-old Letty and her mother Lady Stapleford (a widow, 'quietly, desperately determined to marry her pretty daughter to the first eligible

comer'). Martin Lovell stands no chance and rapidly finds himself married to Letty. But *Bricks and Mortar* differs from thousands of similar novels because Martin was 'an architect who was very much in love with his profession': the book traces his professional life over thirty-five years, and anyone with even the faintest interest in houses, or indeed in the property market, will love the details about Martin's life as a London architect, the houses he lives in and the changing styles of the houses he builds. As the *TLS* observed, Helen Ashton, whose brother was director of the Victoria and Albert Museum and whose sister-in-law Madge

Garland was Fashion Editor of *Vogue*, 'has a loving touch with a subject that she obviously has at heart. She treats her houses as she treats her characters, and makes both equally plain to her readers. Whether they are "eligible", "desirable", "quaint old-world" or "up-to-date" her men, women, children and houses all have individuality.'

The novel is also unusual in being about a 'very decent, simple, sweet-minded creature' who realises that his marriage has been a mistake yet makes the best of things in a touching and impressive way. Because he has dignity, commonsense and kindness, enjoys his working life and accepts his family as it is, Martin Lovell has his own special brand of heroism; the book's title refers not just to a solidly built building but to a staunch and brick-like personality.

Helen Ashton is in some respects a typical Persephone author, being an extremely good, once very popular but now forgotten novelist who has not previously been revived because she is neither feminist enough nor romantic enough nor 'great' enough; of her kind, however, she is reliably and delightfully readable.



*Green Tide by Richard Church 1945, picture by CF Tunnicliffe of one of the Inns of Court with the 'freckled, peeling trunks of the plane-trees in the gardens' (*Bricks and Mortar* p33)*

OUR READERS WRITE

'*The Home-Maker* is one of the most extraordinary books I've read. It's rightly seen as a plea for the rights of children but it's also a plea for the inner life – Lester's life, however mundane, is a constant meditation. Each chapter is written from a different individual's viewpoint so that the reader ends up with a kaleidoscope of images of each relationship in the book. How explosive it must have been when it first appeared – how fresh and challenging it still seems.' DT, London EC1 [In fact six years ago Persephone asked the late and highly respected American academic Carolyn Heilbrun to write a preface to *The Home-Maker*; she refused., saying she could not admire it because each chapter was written from a different individual's viewpoint and this destroyed its claim to be literature...]

'My Persephone library is now extensive: the absence of *Manja* was largely due to my insularity. But I consider it outstanding, not only as a story but as a close-up of recent history. A woman of deep emotion, the author's skill at translating it into words is remarkable. I vote this high among your "rescues". And not many books can be described as 'enchanting' but Oriel Malet's *Marjory Fleming* goes further –

it is absolutely enchanting.'

AF, Pangbourne

'The stories in *The Casino* are so perceptive and witty, and some of her metaphors and similes are extraordinary eg "the water in each hollow, fringed with brown weed, was clear as gin" HG, London W4

'*The New House* is like my favourite Persephone books in the attention to character and atmosphere and the fact that it's a good story; most are fiction, I think, except *Few Eggs* which reads like a novel anyway because Vere Hodgson is so marvellous.' LB, Victoria, Australia

'I found *Hostages to Fortune* particularly poignant and thought it was a marvellously well-delineated study of family relationships and was also beautifully written.' TW, Mansfield

'I came across *The Runaway* by chance in a bookshop and felt compelled to write and tell you that it is a very long time since a book gave me so much pleasure. I love everything about it from the sturdy cover, beautiful endpapers and matching bookmark (and spine that doesn't fall apart as you read) to the lively story about Clarice and Olga, and the remarkable wood-engravings and design by Gwen

Raverat – this book is indeed a small work of art, as Frances Spalding says in her Afterword.'

JS London, SW19

'I had an email from my sister, to whom I had given *The Making of a Marchioness*, saying she was "heartbroken" that she'd finished it and that she "loved every last word" of it.' JAS, London WC2

'At a certain age you think that you've probably discovered all the writers that make you want to jump for joy – and then, thanks to Persephone Books, you discover someone like Elizabeth Berridge. I was staggered to read her beautifully-written stories, all faintly sinister, but so wonderfully crafted. And I'm a real fuss-pot about books, too... if they don't completely entrance me after the first five pages, I can't go on.' VI, London W12

'I read *The Priory* at such speed because I was enjoying it so much that I will have to read it again. I treasure all your books, except for *Marjory Fleming*, where I could not get past the third chapter. I gave it to my sister-in-law who RAVED about it. Just goes to show.' JH, Ebbw Vale

'*Few Eggs and No Oranges* is a wonderful read. Vere Hodgson is a special woman indeed, totally unaware of her gift of grace.' CR, Southampton

THE WISE VIRGINS AND THE SUFFRAGETTES

by Elizabeth Crawford

During the picnic scene in *The Wise Virgins* the Garlands and the Davises are lazing on the riverbank at Maidenhead.

Mr Davis enquires: 'How many women take any interest in Home Rule or Tariff Reform? You want the vote and you don't know anything about the questions you would have to vote on.' 'Does your son think the same as you do?' Gwen asked. 'Harry's asleep', said Hetty. 'No, I'm not' said Harry, sitting up suddenly, 'but I'm not going to discuss woman's suffrage on a day like this. I'm pro suffrage. If they want the suffrage, I'd give it 'em.' 'But there's no proof they do want it,' said Mr Davis.

That line was one calculated to provoke instant recognition – and rage – from the campaigners for votes for women. It was a phrase that they had been hearing since the campaign was launched in 1866. They had, over those many years, taken deep breaths, stilled their fury and set about in an orderly fashion to attempt to negotiate their way into the political machine. It was despair at the lack of progress made by following the route of conventional lobbying that led Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst in October 1903 to

found a new society, the Women's Social and Political Union, to force the government and the country to take notice of women's claims to the vote.

In her Preface Lyndall Gordon notes that *The Wise Virgins* looks back to the period after Leonard Woolf's return from Ceylon. It was in fact six days after he arrived back in England, at the time of King George V's coronation, on Saturday 17 June 1911, a day that Leonard spent in Cambridge with Lytton Strachey and Rupert Brooke, that the suffrage movement staged its most stately and glamorous event (cf. the ad opposite from *Votes for Women*). For what was called the 'Coronation Procession' all the suffrage societies joined together to mount a glorious cavalcade through the streets of London. Six months later, however, when Leonard moved into rooms in Brunswick Square (at the top of Lamb's Conduit Street) with Virginia and Adrian Stephen, at a time when he was allowing himself to think that he was in love with Virginia, the political climate had changed. Asquith and Lloyd George had 'torpedoed' (as it was described) the latest women's suffrage bill and the WSPU was arming for war. A first skirmish had taken place on 21 November

when 220 women were arrested in London after breaking windows in government, shop and business premises. As Mrs Pankhurst said, 'The argument of the broken pane of glass is the most valuable argument in modern politics.'

The war went on, and in June 1913, while Leonard Woolf was still writing *The Wise Virgins*, reached an apogee of drama when Emily Wilding Davison, a university-educated woman in early middle age, was killed after attempting to grab the reins of the King's horse during the Derby. Her death was certainly proof that one woman definitely did want a vote; she had a WSPU purple, white and green flag pinned inside her coat when she was flung to the ground. One can well imagine that Mr Davis would have dismissed such a spectacular gesture merely as proof of an unbalanced mind, doubtless entirely consonant with the kind of woman who did want a vote. However, one young woman who lived close to Putney (the Richstead of *The Wise Virgins*), and whom the Davis and Garland girls might have met in the suburban social round, was a certain Eileen Casey, who lived at West Park Road, Kew. She had taken part in a window smashing

raid in March 1912, breaking the windows of Marshall and Snelgrove in Oxford Street, and had gone on hunger strike and been forcibly fed. Olive Hockin, a young artist, was charged in March 1913 with damaging the orchid house at Kew and with setting fire to a pavilion at Roehampton Golf Club. Mr Davis played golf at Richmond – indeed, he played golf wherever he could – and it was perhaps just to make people such as him pay attention to their demands that by 1913 suffragettes particularly singled out golf links for their attention, carving 'Votes for Women' into the grass.

This then is the general background to the infuriating comment delivered by the suburban paterfamilias: 'But there's no proof they do want it'. It was clearly a pat phrase that was regularly produced in any discussion of the suffrage movement in the circles in which the Davises and Garlands moved. The irony is that for nearly fifty years many women and, indeed, many men, had involved themselves in petitioning, public meetings, processions and, by 1913, arson and hunger striking, in order to win the vote for women, not as an end in itself but as a tool with which to better the position of women – so that just such women as the Garlands, Davises and Lawrences did not have to calculate whether the

vicar could be ensnared into matrimony, did not have to spend their time attending garden parties to raise money for the Poor Dear Things, did not have to live, however comfortably, under their father's roof – but could take an independent place in the world. At the same time as the Garlands, Davises and Lawrences were following their appointed paths, thousands and thousands of women around Britain were clamouring for a change – of which the campaign for the vote was to some degree

merely symbolic. The very essence of the cause was the desire of women to free themselves from the necessity of listening – whether in the drawing-room, at the kitchen table, in the House of Commons, or on a riverbank on a sunny afternoon – to what it was that men said women wanted, or did not want.

© Elizabeth Crawford, author of *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*

Demonstration. Special Display at DERRY & TOMS,

KENSINGTON HIGH
ST., LONDON, W.

During the next few days we shall be exhibiting in one of our windows hats and toques made in the colours of the various organisations in connection with the Woman Suffrage movement.

This should prove to be a unique opportunity for purchasing suitable millinery for the great Procession of June 17.



Fashionable and becoming Hat, with Underbrim of Black and White Striped Silk, Trimmed with Cornflower and small Cerise Roses.

25·9



Very pretty Creation of Ivory Lace, with wreath of Forget-me-nots and Cerise Roses.

18·11

Must be seen to be appreciated.

We have an enormous range of hats in all the fashionable shades, trimmed with ribbon, lace, flowers, etc., at 12s. 9d. to suit every tax'e. A visit of inspection is cordially invited.



LIST OF PERSEPHONE BOOKS

1. William - an Englishman by Cicely Hamilton: 1919 prize-winning novel about the effect of WW1 on a socialist clerk and a suffragette. Preface: Nicola Beauman

2. 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. Preface: Harriet Lane

3. Someone at a Distance by Dorothy Whipple: 'A very good novel indeed' (*Spectator*) about an Englishman's tragic destruction of his formerly happy marriage (pub. 1953). Preface: Nina Bawden

4. Fidelity by Susan Glaspell: 1915 novel by a Pulitzer-winning author that brilliantly describes the consequences of a girl in Iowa running off with a married man. Preface: Laura Godwin

5. 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. Preface: Eva Hoffman

6. 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. Preface: PD James

7. The Home-Maker by Dorothy Canfield Fisher: Carol Shields described this ahead-of-its-time book as 'a remarkable and brave 1924 novel about being a house-husband.' Preface: Karen Knox

8. Good Evening, Mrs Craven: the Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes: Superbly written short stories, first published in *The New*

Yorker from 1938-44. Five were read on R4. Preface: Gregory LeStage

9. 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 wit. Preface: Jenny Hartley

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

11. 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. Preface: author

12. 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. Preface: author

13. Consequences by EM Delafield: A harrowing 1919 novel about a girl entering a convent after she fails to marry; by the author of *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*. Preface: Nicola Beauman

14. Farewell Leicester Square by Betty Miller: Novel by Jonathan Miller's mother about a Jewish film-director and 'the discreet discrimination of the bourgeoisie' (*Guardian*). Preface: Jane Miller

15. Tell It to a Stranger by Elizabeth Berridge: 1947 short stories which were twice in the *Evening Standard* bestseller list. Preface: AN Wilson

16. Saplings by Noel Streatfeild: An adult novel by the well-known author of *Ballet Shoes*, about a family during WW11; a R4 ten part serial. Afterword: Jeremy Holmes

17. Marjory Fleming by Oriel Malet: A novel based on the real life of the Scottish child prodigy who lived from 1803-11.

18. Every Eye by Isobel English: An unusual 1956 novel about a girl travelling to Spain, highly praised by Muriel Spark: to be a R4 afternoon play in August. Preface: Neville Braybrooke

19. They Knew Mr Knight by Dorothy Whipple: An absorbing 1934 novel about a family man driven to committing fraud and the effect on his wife; a 1943 film. Preface: Terence Handley MacMath

20. A Woman's Place by Ruth Adam: A survey of C20th women's lives, very readably written by a novelist-historian: an overview full of insights. Preface: Yvonne Roberts

21. Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day by Winifred Watson: A delightful 1938 novel, our bestseller, about a governess and a night-club singer. Read on R4 by Maureen Lipman. Preface: Henrietta Twycross-Martin

22. Consider the Years by Virginia Graham: Sharp, funny, evocative WWII poems by Joyce Grenfell's closest friend and collaborator. Preface: Anne Harvey

23. 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. Preface: Julia Neuberger

24. Family Roundabout by Richmal Crompton: By the author of the *William* books, this 1948 family saga is about two matriarchs watching over their very different children. Preface: Juliet Aykroyd

- 25. 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 the contemporary illustrations. Five were read on R4 in 2002.
- 26. 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.
- 27. The Children who Lived in a Barn** by Eleanor Graham: A 1938 classic about five children fending for themselves; starring the unforgettable hay-box. Preface: Jacqueline Wilson
- 28. Little Boy Lost** by Marghanita Laski: This unputdownable novel about a father's search for his son in France in 1945 was chosen by the *Guardian's* Nicholas Lezard as his 2001 paperback choice. A 'Book at Bedtime'. Preface: Anne Sebba
- 29. The Making of a Marchioness** by Frances Hodgson Burnett: A wonderfully entertaining 1901 novel about the melodrama when a governess marries well. Preface: Isabel Raphael, Afterword: Gretchen Gerzina
- 30. Kitchen Essays** by Agnes Jekyll: Witty and useful essays about cooking, with recipes, first published in *The Times*, then reprinted as a book in 1922.
- 31. 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. Preface: Ruth Gorb
- 32. The Carlyles at Home** by Thea Holme: A 1965 mixture of biography and social history describing Thomas and Jane Carlyle's life in Chelsea.
- 33. The Far Cry** by Emma Smith: A beautifully written 1949 novel about a young girl's passage to India at the time of Partition; a great favourite, it was 'Book at Bedtime' in June 2004. Preface: author
- 34. 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.
- 35. Greenery Street** by Denis Mackail: A delightful 1925 novel about a young couple's first year of married life in a (real) street in Chelsea. Preface: Rebecca Cohen
- 36. Lettice Delmer** by Susan Miles: An unforgettable 1920s novel in verse describing Lettice's troubled journey to redemption, much praised by TS Eliot.
- 37. The Runaway** by Elizabeth Anna Hart: A witty and charming 1872 novel for children, illustrated with over sixty woodcuts by Gwen Raverat. Afterwords: Anne Harvey, Frances Spalding.
- 38. Cheerful Weather for the Wedding** by Julia Strachey: A funny and quirky 1932 novella by a niece of Lytton Strachey, much admired by Virginia Woolf. Preface: Frances Partridge. *Also read on a cassette by Miriam Margolyes (38A)*
- 39. Manja** by Anna Gmeynner: A 1938 German novel, newly translated, about five children conceived on the same night in 1920 and their lives until 1933. Preface: Eva Ibbotson
- 40. The Priory** by Dorothy Whipple: Our third Whipple novel, this one about three generations of a family, and their servants, living in a large country house before WWII. Preface: David Conville
- 41. Hostages to Fortune** by Elizabeth Cambridge: 'Deals with domesticity without being in the least bit cosy' (Harriet Lane in the *Observer*), a remarkable fictional portrait of a doctor's family in rural Oxfordshire in the 1920s.
- 42. The Blank Wall** by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding: 'The top suspense writer of them all' (Raymond Chandler). A 1949 thriller about a mother who shields her daughter from a blackmailer.
- 43. The Wise Virgins** by Leonard Woolf: this is a wise and witty 1914 novel contrasting the bohemian Virginia and Vanessa with Gwen, the girl next door in 'Richstead'. Preface: Lyndall Gordon
- 44. Tea with Mr Rochester** by Frances Towers: 1949 short stories, broadcast on R4 in 2003. They are magical, unsettling, unusually written. Preface: Frances Thomas
- 45. Good Food on the Aga** by Ambrose Heath: A 1932 cookery book meant for Aga users but can be used by anyone; with numerous illustrations by Edward Bawden.
- 46. Miss Ranskill Comes Home** by Barbara Euphan Todd: A 1946 novel by the author of the Worzel Gummidge books describing a woman who is shipwrecked and returns to wartime England. Preface: Wendy Pollard
- 47. The New House** by Lettice Cooper: 1936 portrayal of a family's move to a new house and the resulting tensions. Preface: Jilly Cooper.
- 48. The Casino** by Margaret Bonham: 1948 collection of short stories by a writer with a unique voice. Preface: Cary Bazalgette.
- 49. Bricks and Mortar** by Helen Ashton: a 1932 novel by a very popular writer chronicling the life of an architect in London over 35 years.
- 50. The World that was Ours** by Hilda Bernstein: an autobiography that reads like a novel about the events leading up to the Rivonia Trial in 1964 when Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment but the Bernsteins escaped to England.

'THE HOUSE AT HOVE'

a short story by Diana Gardner

From the upstairs drawing-room of No. 18, the house which my mother took at the beginning of 1920, we could see the white cliffs on the edge of the town and, running towards them, the backs of the driving waves – for the wind was nearly always from the south-west. It was a lovely house, bow-fronted, and faced by two pillars which ran up as high as the cornice below the roof. The terrace in which it was built stood a little higher than the promenade and on grey days the rich ochre of the houses struck a warm note against the cold asphalt of the wide front and the transparent green of the sea.

Although it had been built in the regency and its rooms were large it was still easy to run just after the last war. Then servants were plentiful, and because of the growth of the town the rents were not high – although Mother was unaffected by this last consideration, for when we went to Hove she was a wealthy woman: in the previous year, and two months before his death she had been reconciled with her father, who, twenty years before, had disinherited her when she left his comfortable home to go on the stage.

At the time of which I write she was still comparatively young – about forty-two – with small hands, slender ankles and a long narrow head set aristocratically on a straight neck. Her eyes were large, and nearly black. It always puzzled me why Father chose her and, having chosen, why she accepted him – they were so different. He was nearly twenty years older and had lived most of his life with two maiden sisters. When they met he was making a survey of metal deposits in a piece of out-of-the-way country near Hull. He must have pitied the tired young actress who, late one Sunday night, was admitted to his boarding-house by a reluctant landlady because the hotels were full – or he may have been fascinated by her contrast with his sisters. On her side, his calmness and silences must have appealed to her.

Within a year of their marriage I was born, and two years later Tim arrived. Two years afterwards Father's work took him abroad – to the Gold Coast – but Mother would not go with him: this was the first big difficulty in their marriage, I have been told. Father, reserved

and silent, left with few words and was away for four years. Until my grandfather died Mother managed to live within the income Father provided, but the day she came into her own money her extravagance burst out like a flood. She took the house at Hove, engaged five servants and a nurse for us and entertained recklessly. Although motoring was then a luxury, she bought a large car.

There was something terribly pathetic about Mother: she became the victim of those members of once noble families who fetch up at south coast watering-places, and who play their part for anyone willing to pay. Many were the evenings during that spring when Tim and I, lying in bed in our room at the top of the house, were wakened by the throb of motor-cars and the high laughter of some of Mother's departing friends. Among the voices we could hear hers – quick and over-eager – asking them to come again. As the cars turned beneath the trees their lamps flashed across the moulded ceiling, and after they had gone and Mother had come into the house, the night would grow suddenly quiet, except for a late bus hurrying back to its depot along the empty front.

Because the beach was stony and unfit for children (a cause of annoyance to

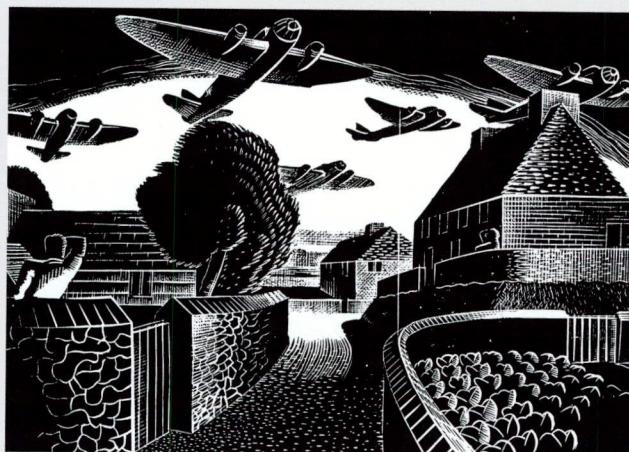
Father when he returned home that summer) we used to play in the gardens opposite. Tim amused himself with a big red ball, while Nurse sat with a novel. I can never think about this time in my life without a sinking of the heart. The quiet, sunny garden symbolises a great emptiness. Every now and again I used to look up at the long, elegant windows of the house which, although beautiful, could give me nothing that really mattered.

Mother scarcely ever joined us. Sometimes she came in for a few minutes when she returned home for lunch, but she was seldom alone.

It was that summer, during the first week in July, that Mr Patton first came to the house. He was inclined to be corpulent, and gentle – a bachelor. He had travelled all over Europe making a collection of miniatures which, I believe, is now famous. There was a kindness about him which made him, of all Mother's friends, the one we liked the most. His skin was pink and soft, and he wore light suits always adorned with a dark red buttonhole. Generally he brought us a box of sweets, and sometimes mother allowed us to have tea with them in the drawing-room upstairs. While

Mr Patton told us a fairy story which continued from one tea-party to the next Mother, beside the tea-set of apple green and gold, would listen with her hands behind her head.

In the late summer Father came home. Mr Patton, who had now become almost the only visitor to the house, kept away for some days. But he arrived one wet afternoon just before tea. The wind was fierce



woodcut by Diana Gardner, Rodmell, Sussex 19 August 1940:
'The Hedge-Hoppers/Heinkels'

that day, and the paddle-boat going down-Channel against the white breakers let out a taper of black smoke against the grey sea. Nurse took us up to the drawing-room. He stood with his back to the gilt mirror above the mantel, his hands behind him and his thin head bent over. He was greyer and narrower. He found it difficult to be natural with us and could manage only a swift pat on the tops of our heads. During tea Mother

seemed to be nervous: she spoke rapidly and smiled continually. Her hair, generally piled up, had been demurely parted in the middle and drawn back.

Within a few days Mr Patton had resumed his visits. After dinner he would sit with Mother and Father at the open window of the drawing-room. I do not think the men spoke much to each other – they had so little in common. Mother seemed to do all the talking and, in a deep silence, would turn her head toward the lighted promenade. Then one evening – I have never managed to forget it – Mother and Mr Patton went out in the warm dusk for a walk. From my bed I heard the front door bang and Mr

Patton's low, friendly voice followed by Mother's high laugh. The scent of Mr Patton's cigar reached into the bedroom. I heard them going down the road, the ring of Mother's heels growing fainter. I lay without moving, looking on to the gently stirring trees outside.

At eleven o'clock Father came to bed. Half an hour later Mother returned. She was alone. After the front door had shut behind

her I heard her on the stairs and a moment later she was in our room. For some reason which I have always regretted, I kept my head on my pillow and pretended to be asleep. She came over to us. Tim stirred and she stopped dead. But as we remained quiet, she gently drew up the painted nursery chair between the beds and sat for a long while staring at us.

Next morning she took us on the promenade. She held our hands and asked us a lot of questions. She spoke rapidly, and laughed at anything we meant to be funny. At lunch she was silent. Father, wearing a high collar and a grey cravat, took no notice of us. Afterwards we went upstairs to rest.

We did not see Mr Patton after that. In fact, he never again came to the house. Four days later Father went for a long walk on the Downs and since it was a wild day with rain in the air Nurse took us for a brisk walk down to Portslade. It was too windy to play with the ball and we were soon covered in seaspray. When we returned home for lunch Mother was not there.

After tea Father came in. He came straight to the nursery and asked us if we knew where she was. His voice was high and seemed to falter. My heart dropped at the sight of his worn, thin face and

anxious eyes. But he said nothing until the following morning, when he called us into the drawing-room, after breakfast. There he told us, as we stood on either side of Nurse, that Mother had left us. I can still see his thin neck and bent shoulders in the mirror behind. She had left what money remained to Tim and me but, standing in the now hollow room, I was aware only of bewilderment and betrayal.

After Father had divorced her he did not go away again. He grew even more silent and remote, and left the management of our affairs to his sister, Frances, who came to live with us. We saw Mother only once more. On our way home from school about a year later, she came out of one of the shelters on the promenade and approached us hesitantly. She was thinner, and her eyes seemed brighter. For a moment I could do nothing but, as the tears came into her eyes, I dropped my satchel and flung my arms round her, while Tim stamped his boots on the pavement making little shrieks of joy.

She turned us round and walked some of the way back, gripping our hands fiercely and asking us questions, one after the other. She was very excited and her voice kept rising.

But when we reached the entrance to the terrace she stopped.

'I can't come any further.' She sounded frightened.

'But you're coming home?' I said. I can never describe the desolation which came over me then.

'I have made you late for lunch,' faltered Mother, panic in her eyes. 'Whatever will they say?'

Tim now clung to her arm.

'You're not going away again?'

This was too much for her. She burst out crying and pushed us away from her. Hardly knowing what she did she came back and kissed us both frantically, unable to look at us, and then turned away with a sob which came from low down in her throat. As she half ran down the road, leaving us staring after her, she did not look back.

The house, austere and lovely in the pale sunshine, was all that now remained. But I remember that, as we entered, the shadows in the hall seemed to have deepened – the staircase led to an empty drawing-room. Thereafter I dared not look too long at the big windows, closed because of the approach of winter, nor at the gilt mirror which reflected only my peaky face and the empty wall beyond.

In due course Mr Patton married Mother and they went to live in Switzerland.

Four years later she died suddenly, at Montreux. It was a great shock, for she was still comparatively young. Father, as he grew older, finally lost all contact with us. When I was sixteen he had a stroke and died. Aunt Frances gave up the house and we went to live with Father's other sister in the country.

And now this war has changed everything again. Tim is married, but has been sent to Egypt, and I am nursing in a big hospital

in London. During the great blitzes I worked day and night and, finally, was sent away for a rest. I went to Brighton. While there I walked down the promenade to Hove. The sight of the buildings, like palaces in the yellow light, brought back to me the old agony of Mother's going. And then, turning by the spring trees, into the terrace, I pulled up short: in that even row of beautiful houses there was a rent like a drawn tooth.

One evening in the winter of 1940 – quite early: about six – a bomb fell there, and all that is left of the house where we lived is a heap of rubble in which you can distinguish nothing except a little piece of the wrought iron banister which used to be on either side of the curved staircase.

© Diana Gardner 1943, taken from the collection *Halfway Down the Cliff* (1946)

59 LAMBS CONDUIT STREET

The photograph on the cover of this *PQ* is partly in homage to *Bricks and Mortar*. Helen Ashton trained as a doctor at Great Ormond Street Hospital, and after her marriage lived in South Square, Gray's Inn, where Martin and Letty have a flat. 'When the sitting-room windows were open in the summer you heard the roar of the traffic in Theobalds Road. The rooms were reached by a common staircase, with twisted balusters, and worn treads of silvery oak.' From here, Letty 'started out with Martin in the mornings through the postern-gate into Jockey's Fields, and went marketing with a basket in Red Lion Street' – and, we can imagine, in Lamb's Conduit Street.

Number 59 was built as a family house in 1702-3. It is listed Grade II and is notable because the basement where we store the books retains the 'original staircase with barley-sugar twist balusters and column newel posts'. It was a grocer's shop from the 1860s to the 1960s and at the time Letty would have been doing her shopping was 'John Woodgate, Provision Merchant'; by the time of the 1901 census it was 'Robert Geo Weston, Provision Merchant'. It remained Weston's for the next forty years and, we like to think, it was from Weston's that EM Forster bought his groceries when he was living in Brunswick Square or Leonard and Virginia Woolf bought theirs when they

were living in Mecklenburgh Square. After the war it became James Debac and Co, Grocers; when the photograph on the cover was taken in the 1950s it was Harold Lewis, Grocers.



Helen Ashton in 1934

OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

The newly-launched books magazine *Slightly Foxed* wrote a feature about us, under the heading ‘A Publisher in Bloomsbury’, calling us ‘one of the real success stories of modern independent publishing’. In it Simon Brett began by reviewing *Greenery Street*, ‘less a story, more a series of incidents, it has a mock-philosophical leisureliness which can explode with impeccable timing into a sequence of comic moments... It is a pleasure to read, an impeccably crafted, very English comedy of manners; and, at moments, can be something more... In complete contrast, *Manja* begins on a note of edge-of-the-seat cinematic tension: 112 pages on, at the end of Part One, which I read virtually at a sitting... the reader is left gasping... What makes the book valuable as a historical record and also successful as fiction is the same: it does not rely on our knowledge of What Was To Come. The writing is quite free of the portentousness of hindsight.’

The Irish magazine *Image* commented: ‘Small and specialist publishing companies that actually survive are a rarity these days, which is why Persephone Books’ fifth anniversary is a real cause for celebration. The secret of their

success lies in a happy union of style and content. For devotees the seasons are marked by their quarterly reprints and the latest two do not disappoint. Margaret Bonham’s writing in *The Casino* is cool, wry and sometimes touching. The other spring title is Lettice Cooper’s hugely enjoyable 1936 novel *The New House* which, on the surface, is just the simple story of a family moving from one large house to a small one, but is utterly gripping, its tension rising from the apparently simple question of whether likable Rhoda will break free of her domineering mother.’ And the *Guardian* wrote about *The New House*: ‘It is tempting to describe Rhoda Powell, the 30-plus, stay-at-home daughter of a widowed mother, as Brookner-esque, even though Lettice Cooper wrote this wonderfully understated novel several decades before Anita Brookner mapped the defining features of quietly unhappy middle-class women... Though it is clear where Cooper’s sympathies lie, she does not preach revolution but shows how difficult it was in interwar Britain to escape the expectations of class and upbringing.’ In *The Spectator* Kate Chisholm described Lettice Cooper as ‘an intensely domestic novelist, unravelling in minute detail the

tight web of family relations’ but one who is also ‘acutely aware of what goes on beyond the garden gate... The exposé of a family under strain because of changing times is curiously more vivid and real than in many novels about family life written today, mostly, I suspect, because of Cooper’s masterly use of Chekhov’s “telling detail”’.

The website womenwriters.com recommended *Lettice Delmer* as ‘a page-turner, a novel that can be read slowly and again to appreciate the fine turnings of phrase and the elegant verse’; the *Bournemouth Daily Echo*’s verdict on *Someone at a Distance* was ‘a great, compulsive, melodramatic, page-turning read’ and about *The Casino* it wrote: ‘Heaven is snuggling down with an elegant book and a box of chocolates. Persephone can always be relied upon to provide the former... An assortment of highly readable stories, both funny and sharp, written in spare, direct prose.’ Finally *Nottingham County Lit* magazine said about *The Priory* that it is ‘the third Whipple novel to be republished by Persephone Books. Each one had my rapt attention. Her sharp eye for detail and the nuances of family relationships together with her wry wit are a delight.’

AND IN CASE YOU MISSED THIS...

Three-quarters of the one hundred places have been sold for the *Second Persephone Weekend* to be held at Newnham College, Cambridge from 18-19 September this year. The timetable will be finalised in July but the confirmed speakers are: Jane Brown, the garden historian, about Newnham garden and women gardeners generally; Juliet Gardiner, whose book on *The Home Front* is forthcoming, about our Second World War writers; Henrietta Garnett about her ancestors and in particular the subject of her recent book, Anny Thackeray, and her great-grandfather Leslie Stephen, founder of the *DNB*; Anne Harvey about Noel Streatfeild and *Saplings*; Wendy Pollard, author of a book on Rosamond Lehmann, about her and Cambridge; Jane Potter of the New *DNB* about the sixty-volume biographical dictionary to be launched on 22 September; the novelist Kate Saunders about romantic literature; the biographer Frances Spalding about Bloomsbury and Cambridge; the novelist Salley Vickers about Dorothy Whipple and some other Persephone novelists; and the cookery writer Bee Wilson about Florence White and Agnes Jekyll.

As you receive this *PQ* Emma Smith's *The Far Cry* will just have finished two weeks as 'Book at Bedtime'; five of the short stories in Margaret Bonham's *The Casino* are to be read on Radio 4 later in June; *Every Eye*, adapted by Micheline Wandor, will be the Afternoon Play on Friday 27 August.

There are one or two places left for the *Persephone Lunch* on 22 June, at which Gretchen Gerzina will talk about her recently published biography of *Frances Hodgson Burnett*; like all lunches, the cost is £25. On Wednesday 14 July from 5.30-7 we will hold another *Persephone Book Group*, the book under discussion being *Bricks and Mortar*; the cost will be £20, which includes a copy of the book – wine and cheese straws will be served. There is no lunch in September because of the Newnham weekend, but on Thursday 14 October there will be a lunch in celebration of Hilda Bernstein's *The World that was Ours*, (the speaker will be announced in September). On Friday 12 November Juliet Gardiner, who has written the afterword to Marghanita Laski's *The Village*, will talk about it at a lunch.



"He ripped off her filmy negligee and growled, 'Remember me, sexy?'"

Authors at Work (1) by William Hamilton, taken from *Horizon*, Winter 1971

We are thinking of setting up an email list in order to let you know about new books, forthcoming events, news, anniversaries, items of interest. Do let us know if you would like to be included. (We would not write more than once a month.)

Our autumn books are *Operation Heartbreak* (1950) by Duff Cooper, an ironic and poignant 'little masterpiece' about the life of a soldier in the years leading up to the Second World War, and *The Village* (1952) by Marghanita Laski, the third novel we have published by her, which is about class and money: life in an English village is disrupted when Margaret and Roy fall in love 'unsuitably'.

FINALLY

Persephone comes to Edinburgh: on Wednesday 25 August Nicola

Beauman will take part in a panel of independent publishers talking at the Edinburgh Book Festival. The next day, on Thursday 26 August from 3-5.30, there will be a Persephone event at Mayfield Salisbury Church Hall, 18 West Mayfield. All our books will be for sale at our special price of £10 or three for £27 (cf. Price Change below), there will be a talk about our first five years, a free copy of our delightful limited edition *Time and Tide* birthday booklet, and tea and shortbread will be served. Admission is £5; advance booking would be helpful but not essential.

Price Change: we have held our prices for five years but have been reluctantly forced to increase them. This is partly because we have never passed on increased printing costs (and in reality these have increased by much more than 10% over five years) and partly because the post office put up its postage prices again on 1 April. In future books bought from the 'fabulous Persephone Bookshop' (*The Times*) will remain at £10; books bought from us by mail order will be £10 (or three for £27) plus £2 postage ie £12 each or £33 for three; but books bought from bookshops will cost £12.

Readers ordering from abroad will have noticed that Zones 1 and 2 have been abolished and there is now one price for sending books airmail instead of £4 for Zone 1 and £5 for Zone 2; the new price is £4.50. At the same time we will be charging £3 to send books surface mail to anywhere in the world including Europe and Eire.

The Post Office: please do not be put off buying by mail order by what you read in the press. Either it is exaggerated or we are extremely lucky. But we find that almost all our books arrive the next day even though we send everything second-class, indeed second-class often seems quicker than first class. Anyone feeling a bit jaded should try to visit the shop at 3.30 when lovely Jim comes to collect our mail bags; the books start their journey in good hands and usually seem to finish it in good hands as well.

Pruning the database: we have not removed anyone from our mailing list for six months because a combination of Christmas, database difficulties and some one-off postal strikes made us reluctant to remove potential Persephone readers. Now, however, 3000 people will receive letters pointing out that

they have not bought a book from us within the last year and asking whether they want to do so. This will bring the number on our mailing list down to 8500. Please do stay on it if at all possible! We are a success in that we are still here and still flourishing; but as a tiny business we can never be complacent and continue to need your support.

astly: do look at the Persephonites website, which a group of readers have set up (it is free, you simply have to create a Yahoo account) and the Chicklit website, which has been discussing our books since December 2002.



"My, you move gracefully and agilely for a heavier man!" she purred softly."

Authors at Work (2) by
William Hamilton, taken from
Horizon, Winter 1971

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

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