

THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

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t House, Bognor' early 1940s, photograph by Cecil Beaton, taken from Trumpets from the Steep by Lady Diana Cooper (1960) © Viscount Norwich

OUR AUTUMN 2004 BOOKS

‘And now, thank God, the holidays are over’ wrote Duff Cooper in September 1952. ‘I have had enough sun for one year, and I always enjoy what the French call *la rentrée*, the return to normal life and all the pleasures of autumn, misty mornings, long evenings, oysters and partridges.’

For Persephone readers an additional pleasure is, we hope, the arrival of our autumn books, the first of which is *Operation Heartbreak* (1950), the only novel written by Duff Cooper, the diplomat and historian. He is shown on the cover with his wife Lady Diana, in a photograph taken some time between 1941 and 1943 when Cecil Beaton was staying with them at West House near Bognor. It is perhaps the modern equivalent of a Vermeer – a domestic interior, and a map on the wall to remind the onlooker of the wider world – and could well have been taken just before the telephone call that came one evening at the end of July 1943 announcing that Mussolini had resigned. Cecil Beaton wrote in his diary:

‘This bombshell has really churned us up in a way that no other piece of news has since the collapse of France! (Only this time the churning is of a different kind!) Duff opened a bottle of champagne and we sat for half an hour while the clock ticked very slowly towards the BBC midnight news...Diana was like a young girl. She said this was one of the greatest moments of her life... Duff thought it “all up” with Italy within the next week, that now we had the Mediterranean we could hammer Germany and the Balkans from Italy, and the effect on German morale would be immense... At last midnight. We raised our glasses at the wonderful news.’

That evening sowed the seed for *Operation Heartbreak* since Duff Cooper, in his capacity as head of the Security Executive, was, in the words of his biographer, then ‘concerned with such matters as... the planning of operations designed to mislead the enemy.’ He would therefore have known that the downfall of Mussolini was due in part to an undercover

operation initiated three months previously. And it was this operation that inspired the ending to the novel he wrote seven years later.

Operation Heartbreak, ‘a work of jewel-like brevity and intensity more expected in French than in English’ (*New York Herald Tribune*) should take its place beside other, similar classics such as *Reunion* by Fred Uhlman, *Strange Meeting* by Susan Hill and *A Month in the Country* by J.L. Carr – short novels about war which are quiet, domestic, poignant and understated. Nina Bawden wrote to us when she heard we were reprinting *Operation Heartbreak*: ‘It is the novel I enjoyed more than any other in the immediate post-war years, and one I have re-read many times since with undiminished pleasure and growing admiration for Duff Cooper’s skill. It is a story of why men go to war; it is also a heart-wrenching love story; a wonderful novel by a masterly writer that should be on everyone’s bookshelf – and not borrowed but bought.’



‘Happy Landings’ 1941 for Operation Heartbreak



Operation *Heartbreak's* hero is called Willie Maryngton; he has a few of the qualities of his creator, most notably that the central tragedy of his life was (or might have been in the case of Duff Cooper) that he was too young to fight in the First World War and too old for the Second. Willie 'knew perfectly well that when a regiment went abroad on active service some officers and men were left behind. But he had never thought that he would be among those officers. The Colonel had talked about the first scrap, but that was just the scrap he wanted to be in. He had said something about heavy casualties. Willie minded little how heavy they were if he was in it, but how could he bear to sit at home, hoping that his brother officers would be killed so that he could take their place?' To some extent these were Duff Cooper's sentiments. He was working at the Foreign Office at the start of the First World War yet longed to be called up; then, when he was finally released and able to go to France, this 'emotional, romantic, passionate man' (in the words of his son, the writer John Julius Norwich) won the DSO.

In *Operation Heartbreak* Willie Maryngton does in the end play a vital part in the Allies' eventual victory; but although this is a novel dominated by the fact of war, it is the touching evocation of Willie's life that

forms the core of the book. As Norman Shrapnel wrote in the *Manchester Guardian*, '*Operation Heartbreak* has been widely praised [indeed it sold 40,000 copies over the Christmas of 1950] but too little attention has surely been paid to the remarkable skill with which the author maintains our interest in his hero, a soldier presented with an affectionate irony and never romanticised... This is a rare book, written with wonderful economy and perfect timing; rare, too, in its shape - fifty thousand words or less. Not its least service is to reinforce the case that somewhere between the story and the novel lies one of the of the most effective literary forms and in English one of the most neglected.'

Duff Cooper was offered a peerage in 1952 and became Viscount Norwich. But it is indicative of his feelings for his only novel, and his affection for his hero, that he would have liked to take the title Viscount Maryngton.

Our other autumn book is the third novel by Marghanita Laski that Persephone has reprinted, the other two being *The Victorian Chaise-longue* and *Little Boy Lost*. *The Village*, first published in 1952, begins on the very day the war ended. Two women, who have been firm friends during the war, go as usual to the Red Cross Post. Here they spend the night as they always had done, chatting over a cup of tea.



*The homecoming of Private Bill Martin from Burma, Winter 1945-6
We'll Meet Again p. 196 ed. by Robert Kee 1984*

As dawn breaks they lock the door 'but still they lingered, unwilling finally to end this night and the years behind it. "There's a lot of us will miss it," Edith said. "We've all of us felt at times, you know, how nice it was, like you and me being able to be together and friendly, just as if we were the same sort, if you know what I mean." "I'll miss it a lot too," Wendy said. There was no point in her saying that it could go on now, the friendliness and the companionship and the simple human liking of one woman for another. Both knew that this breaking down of social barriers was just one of the things you got out of the war, but it couldn't go on.'

The main theme of *The Village* is that Wendy's attempt to cling on to her old way of life was already under pressure by 1939 and had become even more out-of-date by 1945. It is Edith who is the New Britain, with her prosperous son and her commonsense and indeed kindness; Wendy, with her snobbery and her refusal to change and her uncompromising attitude to her daughter, is the Old. When Labour swept to a landslide victory in 1945 'Attlee's government promised a fairer future for all and no going back to the inequalities of the pre-war world,' writes Juliet Gardiner in her Afterword. It is this resistance to change among the middle classes that is a theme not only of *The Village* but also of Mollie Panter-Downes's short stories, her

classic 1947 novel *One Fine Day*, and of Jocelyn Playfair's *A House in the Country*.

When Wendy goes back up the road to Wood View on Priory Hill 'where the gentry lived' and Edith goes downhill on the other side, 'down Station Road among the working-classes', they both assume that the values and habits of pre-war Britain will continue. But Britain had already changed a great deal, a change symbolised by



Marghanita Laski

Edith's son Roy, a printer with excellent prospects, falling in love with the penniless Margaret, Wendy's daughter. 'The story of the romance between the two of them forms the central narrative of the novel,' Juliet Gardiner continues, 'and the attitude of the other villagers when the news gets out illuminates their understanding – or rejection – of the village's elaborately calibrated social stratification. *The Village* is a finely-observed

novel about the losses and gains of the Second World War, how hopeless and how isolating it would be to hold onto the past, how illusory was the notion that the war had broken down class barriers, or had managed to save "deep England" from the future and how peace, too, would produce its own list of casualties.'

'A most perceptive comedy of manners in the English tradition,' wrote the American *Catholic World* when the book came out in 1952, '*The Village* delineates, quite without the waspishness and rancour of so many current novels from England, the quiet but implacable social revolution which is now taking place within that tradition.' It is, as well, a 'condition of England' novel about the futility of 'keeping up appearances', the boredom of middle-class women with nothing to do, even the realisation that cooking and housework had to be streamlined if those women were to take their place in society: *How to Run your Home without Help* (the title of a book Persephone is to publish next year) is what Wendy Trevor is struggling to do, but what her daughter Margaret will relish doing. But above all this is an extremely enjoyable and well-written novel evoking an entire community (there is a long cast of characters at the beginning), and a whole way of life, and has one of the most ancient plots in the world – a young couple who fall in love but are forbidden to marry.

OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

In *The Spectator* Anthony Sampson, the biographer of Mandela, wrote: '*The World that was Ours* has survived as a South African classic while most other memoirs about life under apartheid have been forgotten. It's not just because it's beautifully written, in a plain, unpretentious style, but also because it conveys, with acute observation, the combination of ordinariness and danger which is implicit in any totalitarian state. The author quotes WH Auden: "Suffering...takes place while someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along." And she quietly conveys her own suffering as a political activist who was also a dedicated mother of young children, facing growing persecution, fear and exile.'

Anthony Sampson continued: 'Hilda Bernstein provides the most vivid account, of the many I have read, of the historic Rivonia Trial of Mandela and his colleagues. She movingly describes the different responses of the accused as they faced ferocious questioning from the vindictive prosecutor Percy Yutar. And she becomes fascinated by the "psychology of betrayal", which caused former comrades to testify against their friends.'

Her story is both extraordinary and ordinary; and it is the combination which makes it so moving and memorable.'

The World that was Ours was discussed on BBC Radio London's 'Word for Word': Jenny Linford chose this 'really fascinating book' as one of her three titles of the week. As well as admiring its insight, she found it 'really powerful: every now and then these emotions suddenly flood through. Like the bit when the sentence is announced, actually I was reading it on the Tube and I had tears in my eyes because it was so emotional. Really – I'd recommend it. It's published by a small publisher called Persephone Books who do the most fascinating books, and I must say I haven't read a bad Persephone book, they're always intelligently chosen, and a bargain at £10.'

Summer reading: 'I want Persephone Books' entire list of "rescued" writers' Shena Mackay told the *Observer*, while in *The Tablet* Mary Blanche Gibbs chose 'two exquisite new paperbacks, *Bricks and Mortar* and *The World that was Ours*, that have just arrived in the post from Persephone's wonderful range of forgotten writers.'

'The republication of Helen Ashton's sedate 1932 novel *Bricks and Mortar* won't set the world alight,' wrote Chris Power in *The Times*, 'but the story of architect Martin Lovell and his malfunctioning marriage is affecting, and all the more appealing for Ashton's irony and wit. The novel, beginning in 1892 and ending in 1931, offers a fascinating portrait of shifts within the class system.' In *Image* magazine Anna Carey called *Bricks and Mortar* 'a charming family saga' while Amanda Blinkhorn in the *Hampstead & Highgate Express* described it as 'entertaining and spiky'.

Leicestershire Life reviewed *The Casino* by Margaret Bonham, 'who was what Nancy Mitford would have called a bolter. She married three times, leading a determinedly bohemian life with a love of exotic cars, socialists and gin. The result of this lifestyle is a collection of short stories as fresh as when they were first published in 1948, sharp, wittily-perceptive character sketches drawn mostly with affection, sometimes venom, but always with an eye for the individual. Margaret Bonham really is a writer who deserves wider recognition and affection.'

'FIND YOUR WAY TO THE BACK OF THE SHOP'

In this article in the Evening Standard David Sexton wrote about the way the modern book trade manipulates readers into buying its newest promotions at the expense of books from the past.

We would all like to read more, if only we had the time.

Or so we idly think. One day, we'll kick back and line up the Dickens and the Tolstoy, not to mention the Dante and the Homer. But, while we wait for that great day, at least we have our holidays. When we get to the beach, though, somehow or other – how to explain it? – hard study isn't part of the plan. We want to be entertained, not improved, thank you.

Over the past few years, 'Summer Reading' and 'Books for the Beach' campaigns, calculated to capture uncertain consumers, have become an increasingly important part of the publishing year. Summer is the peak period when we buy books for ourselves – paperbacks mostly. At Christmas, we buy hardbacks as gifts for others, giver and recipient both positively relieved that often – among all those cookbooks, listbooks, picture-books and titchy books – there are few words to be tackled. But summer books actually get their pages turned, one after another, all the way to the end.

There's one big, rarely mentioned, reason for this: holidays away forcibly separate us from our TV screens. Television is reading's arch enemy. Far from the flickering screen, books come into their own. When you finally make it to the poolside, few other entertainment systems are so practical. And before you even get there, there are those long flights, those longer queues, those ten-hour delays ...

This year, we have some new guides helping us locate these page turners: Madeley and Finnigan. 'People are reading along with Richard and Judy, more so than with The Big Read,' says Jo Marino of Waterstone's. 'It's a wonderful recommendation vehicle.' But the booksellers have many other efficient 'recommendation vehicles' at their disposal. We are deep into the land of special deals, the three-for-twos, for example, one of the ultimate consequences of the abolition of the Net Book Agreement in 1995. Perhaps the most brutal version is the 'doorbuster' promotion at Borders, where the first book you see as you come in

the door is offered at half price. At Waterstone's they have 'themed areas', where shoppers can pick up a guidebook to a place and a related novel at the same time. There are promotions of classics and past prize-winners, attempting to raise the tone of promotion, despite the lower 'price point'.

There are two main types of customer in bookshops, Marino explains: browsers who want to mosey around the bookshop and talk to the booksellers before choosing, and searchers, who come in knowing exactly what they want. Both, though, respond to emphatic 'signposting': from the window displays to the 'tableheaders', as the piles at the front of the shop are known. As Joanna Prior, marketing director of Penguin, says: "That's what it's all about – to cut down on that overwhelming feeling of 'What the hell should I be reading?'."

Here is where the whole business gets a little murky, though. Bookbuyers assume that booksellers are reasonably objective about the hooks they are offering. It ain't necessarily

so any more. These days, the big booksellers require publishers to 'participate' if they want to see their books prominently displayed in the bookshops: they make them pay for it. Chain bookshops these days are nothing but big 3-D ads paid for by the publishers.

There is a big response by bookbuyers to the physical placement of the books, as Gary Kibble, head of books at WH Smith, admits. It's an efficient 'promotional mechanic', especially for a mixed retailer, with 'the advantage of footfall' (7.3 million high-street consumers entering the shops each week). Tentative bookbuyers are being steered to a pre-selected range of books. Everybody does it – even virtually, on Amazon. Any book popping up on the home page reflects its publisher's 'participation' too. The system means that the shop's efforts are concentrated on fewer titles, from big publishers – and that books by lesser-known writers from smaller publishers are correspondingly relegated, if not excluded from the shelves altogether. 'It's a huge narrowing down of the overall output,' says Prior.

But aren't these the books that people would want to buy anyway, if they knew about them? Maybe. Sometimes. Sometimes not. The awful truth is that this year's books are not necessarily the best books to buy.

When we have eaten all our Special K, pulled the last Kleenex out of the box and used up all our Persil Non-Bio, we need a new packet, more of the same. But books do not work quite like this. Nobody – not even our sagest literary critic – has read all the good books of five years ago, let alone of fifty or a hundred years ago.

The books of the past have not been used up or rendered redundant. Winnowed by time, they exist alongside the new books, better and, as it happens, mostly

cheaper, too. But this is a truth not to be spoken among publishers and booksellers. They are committed to going forward with their new products, the ones that are filling the windows and covering the tables, at the front of the shop. But all you need to do is find your way to the back of the shop. If you only get to read when you get a break, you want the best, not just what the publishers have paid out to lay in your way in the last five minutes before your flight is called.

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©The Estate of Edward Ardizzone, from *The Suburban Child* by James Kenward

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: 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 very 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'. Afterword: 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. '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 Gmeyner: 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. An excellent present for someone moving house themselves. Preface: Jilly Cooper.

48. The Casino by Margaret Bonham: 1948 collection of short stories by a writer with a unique voice; they were read on BBC Radio 4 in June 2004. 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 Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment but the Bernsteins escaped to England. Preface and afterword: the author

51. Operation Heartbreak by Duff Cooper: a 1950 novella about a soldier who misses going to war – until the end of his life. Nina Bawden has called this 'the novel I enjoyed more than any other in the immediate post-war years... a heart-wrenching love story.' Afterword: Max Arthur

52. The Village by Marghanita Laski: this 1952 comedy of manners describes the readjustments in village life when the daughter of an impoverished middle-class family falls in love with the son of their former cleaner. Afterword: Juliet Gardiner

‘ROOM 226’ by Hilda Bernstein

author of *The World that was Ours*, Persephone Book No 50. ‘Room 226’ was written in the 1960s; it has recently been published by the British Council in *New Writing 12*.

When I had become, not adjusted, but resigned to living for the time being in Johannesburg because I had married a South African and started to establish a family, I found myself, like other white South Africans and quite a number of non-whites too, employing a domestic servant.

My antagonism to things South African extended to the idea of telling someone else to do work that I had been accustomed to doing myself. And in any case I simply did not know how to give orders. It embarrassed me. However, the practical convenience of having the servant outweighed any theoretical dislike of the idea. It meant I was released to do other, more interesting things. The pity of it, of course, is that the majority of white housewives, released from the repetitive drudgery of washing, cooking, cleaning and the rest, don't make more use of this freedom, but spend it gathering in groups over bridge or tea tables to discuss the never-exhausted topic – the servant problem. And I suspect that the minority of women who have used their lives to do something

worthwhile, in whatever sphere, would have found ways of doing the same even with the millstone handicap of having to do all their own housework. But it would have been harder.

The person who made it easier for me to plunge into public activity in the 1950s and 1960s, to become a city councillor, and to spend days and weeks and months running around Johannesburg and its townships, was a woman who I will always think of as ‘my most unforgettable character’. (The *Reader's Digest* used to run a series under that name, usually about American eccentrics whose qualities of kindness or generosity or disregard for the material things of life made them stand out from their compatriots.) Bessie had three children of her own. But when her eldest daughter was about twelve and her third child four she left them with her parents in the country and came to look after my children. Her husband had died some years before, and in the country town – Newcastle – from which she had come the top wage Bessie could earn as a domestic servant was about £2.10 a month. As her parents were now too old to work and

she had to support them as well as her three children, she had no alternative but to come to Johannesburg where wages were higher.

She started work at about six-thirty every morning and the working day was long. Two afternoons a week, Thursdays and Sundays, she was ‘off’. As if the hours she worked were not long enough, many times when I was ill, or in a nursing home having a baby, or otherwise in need of assistance, she would relinquish her free time and continue working. This I never asked for, and sometimes tried to persuade her not to do. But she did not listen.

She rarely complained; the strongest expression she used was not for herself but for her people. When one of her numerous relatives was caught in the net of the pass or other laws she would say, ‘It's too heavy, too heavy.’ It was the weight of the load carried by all Africans, by all poor people, that was too heavy. Life itself became too heavy for her in the end.

She was the one in a large family who always bore the burden of the family's responsibilities. One of her brothers worked as an

unpaid squatter on a white man's farm: six months' work for the farmer, and in return a small piece of land and six months' work for himself. He fell ill, became too weak to work and returned to his parents' home in Newcastle. As he lay ill and dying the white farmer came and took away his wife and two young daughters, because he had not yet finished the six months' work that was his due to the farmer. He died alone while they were still labouring in serfdom. Bessie had to go and bury her brother and help his family.

All through the years Bessie sent money to her parents and paid what rent and rates were due on their small piece of ground. Her father told her that when he died the land would be hers. But when he did die he left only the intention, not a written will, and by native law the land became the property of a second son. This one was a ne-er-do-well, often drunk, often beating his womenfolk. The fact that it was Bessie who paid for everything – funeral, transfer deeds – did not count; nor could lawyers do anything to help her, save take more money to confirm that the land was not hers.

After she had lived with us in Johannesburg for some years, Bessie had another baby, the father a Zulu flat-worker. She returned to Newcastle for the birth and came back to me with the baby when he was only two

months old. But Bessie's mother wanted the child and demanded that she should leave him with her. This Bessie, as a good daughter, could not refuse, so she took her baby to Newcastle.

There he fell ill. Once more Bessie needed money for the train fare to fetch her baby. It was a shock to see him, he had grown so thin and weak. He recovered and, when he was once again fat and healthy, Bessie said she would take him back to her mother. 'Let him stay here,' we urged her. 'Your mother can't feed him properly. He needs you.' Bessie sighed and

shrugged. 'She's too old to care for the baby,' she said. 'Then why take him back?' 'She has asked for him,' she replied.

Once again the baby became ill. She was informed by a letter written by a relative. We thought then that he had recovered, but one afternoon a telegram arrived. Bessie stared at it in horror, for she knew that any telegram could only convey bad news. 'Read it to me.' I read: 'Come at once. The baby is dead.' She let out a desperate cry and flinging her apron over her head she ran to her room. But a short time later she returned to

The Cape Argus CITY LATE

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EIGHT GUILTY IN RIVONIA TRIAL

Seven on all four charges and one on one count
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MRS. BERNSTEIN AND DAUGHTER IN TEARS

Natives shout and sing outside the court

WIFE HEARD THE VERDICT

DEATH PENALTY FOR SABOTAGE TRAINING?

ACCUSED MEN TIRED AND NERVOUS

NEW LIFE! NEUROTONE

NEUROTONE

17 people have died on W.P. roads

ACTION THREAT AGAINST DRIVER

Chasing

Judge's reaction

No sentence to date

Kent's discharge

NEUROTONE

the house and, seizing a duster, started polishing a table with fierce intensity while asking me to find out about train fares and when would be the best time to get a Newcastle train. All afternoon she worked and polished and could not be persuaded to stop for a moment.

Bessie's eldest daughter, Nancy, came to Johannesburg as soon as she was old enough and worked as a domestic servant. Her second child was a boy called Sampson, who stayed in Newcastle until he had finished school, and when he was about seventeen came to Johannesburg to work. He found a job in a hotel, but he couldn't get a pass; because he was not born in Johannesburg he had no right to work there, even though his mother lived there. After a few weeks his employer informed him that he could not keep him on without a pass. He was forced to return to Newcastle, there to work for a while in a very low-paid job, far from the protective eye of his mother.

There now took place a series of events that have happened thousands of times over. After saving some money Sampson came back to Johannesburg and found a job. He then returned to Newcastle with a letter from his employer requesting that he should be given a pass and permit to work in Johannesburg. The Native Commissioner in Newcastle gave him the permit, but it was conditional. The pass had been endorsed permitting him to 'reside and work in the

proclaimed areas of Johannesburg' only for that one employer.

He worked there for a while, but then was offered a better job, which he took. The change of employment had to be registered at the pass office. When he handed his pass to the official with a note from his prospective employer, his pass was stamped 'Endorsed out'. This meant that he had to return to Newcastle – permanently – by the date stated, never again to live or work in Johannesburg.

By that time Bessie's father had died, the land had reverted to her brother, and Bessie had brought her mother and her youngest child to Johannesburg, where she had invested her life savings in a little house in the township of Dube. Even this had only been made possible through the hours we spent patiently arguing with officials and persuading them to allow her, a woman, to buy a house because houses were sold only to men. Sampson therefore no longer had a home in Newcastle. His uncle had sold the land. All his family were now in Johannesburg. Being 'endorsed out' meant that he must go and work on a farm for slave wages. He was, at that time, not more than about nineteen years old.

I phoned the municipality and after much difficulty obtained the information from a senior official that Sampson had the right to appeal against the endorsement of his pass. 'Come to room 226,' I was told.

Before Sampson and I had even entered the huge building of the Municipal Non-European Affairs Department in Albert Street, we were told that our quest was useless. This information was conveyed by the uniformed African whose job it was to keep non-Europeans from entering the department by the main entrance. When I asked the way to Room 226 he took Sampson's pass, looked at it, shook his head, returned it to me and indicated that I was wasting my time.

'They can't do anything for you there,' he said. When I persisted he directed me up the stairs to Room 226, but said that the native boy (Sampson) would have to go round the back way. I explained to Sampson that he must go out of the side entrance to the back entrance, up the stairs, and meet me again outside Room 226.

After keeping us waiting long enough to impress us with their busyness and importance, two clerks in Room 226 allowed me to come in and tell Sampson's story while he – 'the boy' – waited outside. The clerk merely glanced at the pass. 'Can't do anything here,' he said. 'You could try Room 51.'

Off we went to Room 51, I going down one flight by the front stairs, Sampson having to go by the back. There we met, waited, repeated our story, handed the pass to the clerk. He simply shook his head and said, 'You are wasting your time.'

Slowly and loudly, as if speaking to a thick-headed foreigner who refused to understand plain English, I explained again. 'His mother lives in Dube. He is contributing towards the rent of the house. He hasn't any relatives or anywhere to live in Newcastle.'

'It's nothing to do with us,' the clerk said. 'His pass had been endorsed by the government. They're the only ones who can change that. You can try Mr Ferreira if you like, Room 21, Government Pass Offices, Market Street.'

We went to the other end of town, to the old, sad buildings with their endless, sad queues; and we found Mr Ferreira. He listened to the story, took the pass, shook his head. 'This boy was born in Newcastle. He must return there.'

I had now spent several hours shuttling from one office to another and waiting outside doors. 'Look,' I said, with that damp feeling that I get in the nose and throat in such situations, 'I've just explained. His mother now has a house in Johannesburg. She needs his contribution toward the rent. All his family live in Johannesburg. He hasn't anywhere to go in Newcastle, no home, no family, no job. He has a job here and a house here.'

Mr Ferreira said 'That's got nothing to do with it. He was born in Newcastle. He had no right to come to Johannesburg in the first place. His mother

had no right to come here. They shouldn't have let her have the house. His pass can't be changed.'

The next day, when I had calmed down and was once more in a fighting mood, I phoned the Non-European Affairs Department and asked to speak to a senior official. I told him Sampson's story and asked him if it was true that Sampson had the right to have his case reconsidered.

He was very polite. The higher up the official the politer they are. He assured me that Sampson had the right to appeal. 'Bring him to the Non-European Affairs Department,' he said. 'Room 226.'

For a while Sampson worked in his new job, while his former employer continued to sign his pass to overcome the difficulty of not being allowed to change his job without being endorsed out. Then he tried, like thousands of other (many succeeded), to buy a pass. He did not get one. He had to leave his job when the police began to make enquiries at his former place of work. He joined up with other young lads of his own age, passless and usually jobless, adept at dodging the pick-up vans, even at recognising the ghost squad (police who dressed in shabby civilian clothes to intercept and catch pass offenders).

Years later, when Bessie was in hospital and dying, Sampson had become a true son of the slums, a tsotsi boy, familiar with

the jails, familiar with the art of living on the fringes of existence. Bessie longed to see him, but he did not even bother to visit her, and only came once when we had sent, by devious ways, a message threatening him with retribution if he did not go.

There are tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, of Bessies in South Africa. They live in such homes as my Bessie had – a small room in the backyard of their white employers' houses. These Bessies work for little reward. All Johannesburg's fine homes, its beautiful northern suburbs with their tree-lined streets, the bougainvilleas and jacarandas, the magnificent gardens; its southern suburbs; Hillbrow with block upon block of luxury flats: all those places, with gleaming polished floors and well-pressed linen, represent the years of sacrifice of these women. They needed so little to make them happy. All Bessie wanted was a small home – even a couple of rooms – where she could have her children with her. It was like reaching for the moon.

'Tula, tula,' she would whisper softly as she soothed a troublesome child to sleep. In return she had nothing; a baby who died of malnutrition, a daughter worn out with child-bearing and poverty, a son who joined the tsotsis. I can never forget her.

© Hilda Bernstein

OUR READERS WRITE

'*Tea with Mr Rochester* is a lovely collection of unsettling and other-worldly little gems in beautifully elegant prose, and *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* was simply perfection on a small scale: the characters leapt off the page in just a few lines and I could not stop laughing over the scene where Joseph explodes his bombshell about the Albanian "white mice". Pure joy.' HC, London SE25

'I think *Manja* is one of the most memorable books I have ever read; but dear little *Miss Pettigrew* remains my favourite – and I shall return to her many times.' JB, Northallerton

'*Bricks and Mortar* is a very Persephone book. I thought Martin was a wonderfully sympathetic character – although his marriage was hardly a grand passion, he did love Letty, and he made the marriage work for him.' LB, Victoria, Australia

'I cannot recommend *The Home-Maker* highly enough. It was written 75 years ago, but is shockingly timely. A stay-at-home mom drives herself and her kids crazy by pouring frustrated talent into being a stay-at-home mom. But when her husband has an accident and their roles are reversed, interesting things play out. The characters in this book are beautifully drawn, especially

that of the youngest boy in the family.' KB, Minneapolis

'I have just read *The World that was Ours* and have been almost unable to put it down. I thought I knew about the pre-independent situation in South Africa, but of course it only took a few pages to show me I had no idea of the human cost. I felt so acutely for Hilda Bernstein and her family, and all her black friends. How fresh and immediate her writing is.' GN, Inverness

'I was fascinated by *The Carlyles at Home*, particularly after reading *White Mughals* and finding the connection.' DF, Leatherhead

'*Greenery Street* is that rare thing, a happy (but not complacent) novel about a marriage – and I found it blissfully funny.' PA, London SE19

'I have just come to the end of *Tea with Mr Rochester* and am feeling absolutely bereft. It is extraordinary how such a marvellous writer could possibly have been forgotten. I am completely bowled over by her!' V W-H, London NW3

'*Miss Ranskill Comes Home* has been a great favourite among friends and relations: she has solved a number of present problems.' DM, Dover

'*The World that was Ours* is a compulsive read – and so sad. It takes me back to the '60s and '70s and our South African political exile friends. Thank you for publishing it.' JB, Helston

'I have especially enjoyed the short stories I have read on the Persephone list, above all Margaret Bonham, whose quirky humour in *The Casino* has occasionally caused me to laugh out loud. Of all the other books of yours I have bought I have most savoured *Few Eggs and No Oranges*.' JB, London SE3

'Have been very glad to discover your existence and finally have my own copy of *The Victorian Chaise-longue*, quite the most terrifying book I have ever read. Now I dream of a new bookcase filled with grey books.' PH, Reading

'It is very fitting to have such an important book as *The World that was Ours* as the fiftieth Persephone. Reading it again, I find it amazing that the tension is kept up so well even in the very last part about the escape.' KB, Glasgow

'It was sheer joy to be in *Miss Pettigrew*'s world for a day. (That's as long as it took to read it.) Congratulations on rediscovering such a charming and delightful novel.' PF, Stratford

AND IN CASE YOU MISSED THIS...

For those who feel nostalgic about the passing of the corner shop, there are still some unique retail experiences to be had in London,' wrote the *Evening Standard*, drawing up its own list of 'some of the best shops in the city'. First was Persephone Books: 'Fittingly, this unique publishing house sits opposite the post box Virginia Woolf once used.' The nine other 'gems' were Neal's Yard Dairy, The Store (deli) and Rough Trade Records in Notting Hill, Simmonds (hardware), John Pearse (tailor), Rococo Chocolates and VV Rouleaux (ribbons) in SW3, Absolute Flowers in Little Venice and A.Dove & Son (butcher) in Clapham.

On BBC Radio London Susie Symes, Chair of the Museum of Immigration at 19 Princelet Street, was chosen as a 'Listed Londoner' and asked about her favourite London shop. She replied: 'The shop I'm in love with at the moment is Persephone Books in Lamb's Conduit Street, a tiny bookshop selling beautiful, forgotten little masterpieces. The books are £10 each, which is very good value for books as beautiful as these.'

Wedding presents, birthdays: twenty or twenty-five people sometimes club together to give the entire collection of Persephone books. And now there are fifty they are especially good for a fiftieth birthday or for a silver wedding anniversary (twenty-five books each!). We can put the books in a large box, wrap it and deliver it; or we can set up a standing order whereby the recipient receives a book a month or three books a quarter; or whatever seems appropriate.

Ivy Compton-Burnett: Barbara Robinson, a reader in France, wrote to tell us that Ivy was very fond of Dorothy Whipple's novels, 'something which she never mentioned to her intellectual friends: she had two distinct sets of friends and acquaintances. A friend of my parents told me how Ivy talked of her fondness for romantic novels, especially those of Dorothy Whipple. Until now I have never told anyone this, thinking that Ivy would not have liked it known, but when I saw, in *The Spectator*, a review of *The Priory* by Dorothy Whipple I promptly ordered it and I enjoyed it so much that I ordered the other two on the Persephone list.'

The winter books, available at the end of October, are, firstly, Ruby Ferguson's *Lady Rose and Mrs Memmery* (1937), reissued in its original, illustrated format. 'A fairy story with an uneasy crash into social reality', as Candia McWilliam writes in her preface, it describes the girlhood of Lady Rose Targenet, who is born into an illustrious Scottish family, marries respectably – and then... Few will finish this book without a lump in their throat. *They Can't Ration These* (1940) by the Vicomte de Mauduit, is a charming and germane cookery book, also illustrated, about 'food for free'. *The Times Literary Supplement* for October 1940 called it 'a delight', commenting that Vicomte de Mauduit 'makes the most cheering statement that any country dweller armed with this book can live in comfort and plenty even if all the banks, shops and markets were closed. He proceeds to show us where to look for wild food, fruit, vegetable and animal, and gives delicious recipes for the preparation of numerous dishes...'

FINALLY

Persephone was on Radio 4's Today programme on the day the Orange Prize winner was announced: James Naughtie interviewed Nicola Beauman about why 'our' writers are better than any on the shortlist. The BBC had asked for the end of the flap quote for Mollie Panter-Downes's *Good Evening, Mrs Craven* to be read out to the listening nation as an example of a sentence more beautiful than any written today. 'It stayed in my head all day' someone said; for those who missed the programme here it is: 'All over London telephone bells were ringing angrily through empty rooms over which the fine brick dust, seeping in at shuttered windows, was beginning to settle.'

From October onwards we shall have a Persephone mug for sale. Designed and made by Annabel Munn, it is grey – of course – with an abstract representation of our logo, and comes in three sizes meant for espresso, latte and tea; each mug is £10 (plus vat) and, because they are hand-made, they are definitely a limited edition and only available in person from Lamb's Conduit Street.

As you read this the second *Persephone Weekend* will be about to take place at Newnham College,

Cambridge from 18-19 September. A small number of the one hundred places are still available; do telephone if you would like to be a last-minute participant, you would be very welcome.

The *Persephone Lunch* on Thursday 14 October will be in celebration of Hilda Bernstein's *The World that was*

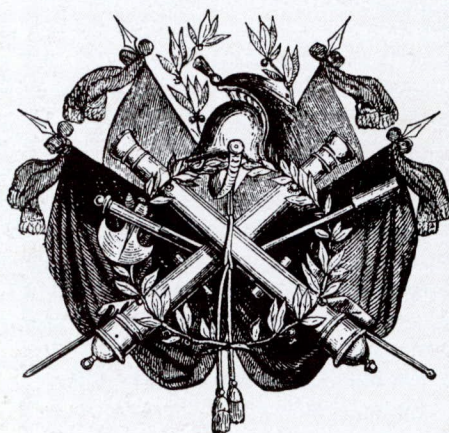


illustration for the jacket of the first (1950) edition of *Operation Heartbreak*

Ours. The planned panel of speakers is: Anne Sebba, who interviewed Hilda Bernstein for *The Times*; Hilda's elder daughter Toni Bernstein; and Francie Jowell, the daughter of Helen Suzman (it is Francie's 1960s dress that has been on display in our *The World that was Ours* window). At the *Persephone Lunch* on Friday 12 November Juliet Gardiner, who has written the afterword to *The Village*, and

whose book on *The Home Front* is forthcoming, will talk about Marghanita Laski's novels. All lunches cost £25 and are from 12.30-2.30; please telephone to reserve a place.

Persephone comes to Richmond (Surrey): on Sunday 7 November from 4-6pm there will be a *Persephone Readers Tea* at the Oddfellows Hall, 15 Parkshot, Richmond. Nicola Beauman will give a twenty minute talk, we hope there will be questions, and best of all this is an opportunity to meet other local Persephone readers. Tea, seed-cake and madeira will be served, and all (by then) fifty-four books will be on sale at the Persephone price of £10 or three for £27. The cost of the *Tea* is £5, which includes a free copy of our fifth-birthday *Time and Tide* booklet. Advance booking would be helpful but is not essential.

There will be another *Persephone Readers Tea* in the same format (a short talk, questions, tea) on Sunday 14 November from 4-6pm at the Old School, Cumnor near Oxford. (Cumnor was the setting for the first Persephone Readers Tea two years ago; the second was in August this year in Edinburgh).

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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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