



# THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

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*'Masqueraders' 1937 for Lady Rose and Mrs Memmery*



1040 *but only against her. Always. Machines for Them Can't Defeat Them*

Lady Rose Targenet, born in the 1850s, becomes Lady Galowrie when she is 19 and, suitably, marries Sir Hector, the owner of the adjoining estate; then, just after her marriage, when her father dies

A romantic novel *par excellence*, the heroine of ***Lady Rose*** remains – even after she has become a Countess and a mother – the ‘silly romantic thing’ she was as a young girl. “‘Too much heart,’ muttered Aunt Katy as if to herself. “Bad. I’ll see you through.” (Alas! she died in rather poor circumstances before Rose’s Archie was two years old.)

Rose starts her life as a beloved, privileged heiress. It is what she ends it as that makes this swift book for all its spangle and sentiment terribly painful and, in its preposterous way, at once all too real. This book contains a truly shocking letter. Through the worst blow a woman can sustain, Lady Rose achieves what we should all hope to before we die – understanding, humility, tolerance, grace.’



**L**ady Rose and Mrs Memmary is set in a classical mansion of the late eighteenth century with pillared facades and sweeping terraces, standing in formal gardens to which long marble steps run down. The sand dunes are just beyond the grounds; Edinburgh is not far away.

There are two houses that might have been at the back of Ruby Ferguson's mind when she was writing her book. One is Hopetoun (a name very like Keepsfield in resonance – hope and keep, town and field), which is exactly as described in the book, west of Edinburgh, near the estuary. Colin McWilliam, the father of Candia and editor of the Lothian volume of the Buildings of Scotland, describes it as 'a veritable palace' which was begun in the early eighteenth century; we reproduce a picture

below. Then there is Penicuik, which is not on the sea but, in McWilliam's words, 'represents the ideal of a Scots Palladian house in a romantic, yet classically inspired, landscape'; as was Keepsfield, it was begun in 1762, on the site of another house.

'It's a little book about dreams and the hard world of money and position and their relations to one another,' concludes Candia McWilliam. 'It's also a love story and a love letter – to Scotland or to a Scotland, one that will be there after the last nobles are dust and only the stars and mountains are left.' We were not surprised to be told, by Ruby Ferguson's granddaughter, that the then Queen Elizabeth loved the book so much that she invited its author to a luncheon at Buckingham Palace and begged her for a sequel. But, like Alain-Fournier's 1914 novel *Le Grand*

*Meaulnes*, with which *Lady Rose and Mrs Memmary* bears comparison, there could be no sequel to something so unique.

Our other book for the winter of 2004-5 is a cookery book: *They Can't Ration These* by Vicomte de Mauduit, also known as Georges de Mauduit de Kervern (1893-c.1940). We wanted to reprint this cookery book about 'food for free' in order to give Persephone readers some new ideas about escaping the tyranny of the supermarkets and enjoying 'the good life' (à la Felicity Kendal); to inspire them to think of ready-to-eat food as being something we can find for ourselves in the wild, rather than, as in the government's recent pamphlet 'Preparing for Emergencies', being exclusively tinned; and because it is an excellent cookery book in its own right. But it also contains within it a poignant and romantic story.



*Hopetoun, from The Buildings of Scotland, Lothian, by Colin McWilliam*



The Vicomte came from an old French aristocratic family; but he went to school in England and then travelled all over the world: the subtitle of his autobiography is 'reminiscences of a wandering nobleman'. In World War 1 he was an aviator (hence the glamorous photograph on this page), worked in Egypt and ended up living in England, publishing four cookery books and a children's book. His last book was the 1940 *They Can't Ration These*, 'the object of which is to show where to seek and how to use Nature's larder, which in a time of peace and plenty people overlook or ignore.'

And as Lloyd George commented in his Foreword: 'I need not stress the timeliness of this book. It is a valuable contribution towards our national defence. Days may lie ahead when it will be a matter of life and death to secure the maximum food supply from those things which grow in our countryside.'

But for the Vicomte it was alas a matter of death. At some time after the book's publication in the autumn of 1940 he seems to have crossed the Channel. Nothing is known of what he did then; all the family does know is that he died in Germany and is listed as having 'died for France'. It is possible that, just as the book was being reviewed in *The Times Literary Supplement* for October 12th 1940, and was being read in comfort by its readers in

England, the Vicomte was all too forcibly testing out what the *TLS* called his '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, vegetables and animal, and gives delicious recipes. To the country dweller with time and a spirit of adventure the book will be a delight.' Of course it is all too possible that the Vicomte had the time, somewhere in the fields of France; he certainly had the spirit of adventure.

We have already cooked two meals based on *They Can't Ration These*. We have avoided squirrels, hedgehogs and frogs; and have made nettle soup (fantastically nutritious) from nettles picked on Hampstead

Heath; trout (which we have to admit we did not in fact catch ourselves); samphire (again, not gathered by us but by local children); baked beetroot, chard and runner beans from the garden; followed by camomile tea. And, before going to bed, we cleaned our teeth with chopped sage leaves. (We have also thrown away all commercial cleaning materials and, according to the Vicomte's precepts, rely on white wine vinegar and lemon juice, as well as pure beeswax.)

This cookery book is not just an excellent read but, like the three other Persephone cookery books, can be used by everyone. However, in the case of *They Can't Ration These*, we very much hope that it never has to be used in a state of emergency. But at least its precepts can contribute to the movement for self-reliance and sustainability.



**GEORGE DE MAUDUIT DE KERVERN  
SUR SON "BLÉRIOT"**



# OUR READERS WRITE

'I enjoyed *The Casino*: unusually with short stories, I found it best to read them one after another, this way you got the feel of the author's style and themes, and felt an underlying link between the stories.' DN, Dover

'*Tea with Mr Rochester* is the FIND, your best and most wonderful book. "Little Willow": so much breathing room, beauty, lovely flow/movement; a mere *aperçu*, and so rich and full it blew me away. And *Operation Heartbreak* – what a lovely honey of a book, beautifully written and structured, devastating irony organic to every previous word. In short I loved it. Such fine prose too.' TM, Rhode Island

'*The World that was Ours* is a fantastic book. It should be compulsory reading for everybody, and I am astonished that it was ever out of print.' CG, London N1

'My first Persephone purchase was of *Miss Pettigrew* and *The Children who Lived in a Barn*. Was it because they were my first that they remain top favourites? I did wonder, until I wallowed in my first Dorothy Whipple and, surely the acid test, did not want to get to the end. So I eked out my pleasure by buying only one Dorothy Whipple in my next threesome, and today have ordered the third. Alas, I

thought, what am I to do when I have that one too? The answer, of course, is to order another Persephone trio at decent intervals, tranquil in the knowledge that I shall find more gems.' PH, Maldon

'I was in my early twenties when I first read *The Village* and it has been one of my "comfort reading" books ever since. Although I live far from the Home Counties village where it is apparently set, everything rang perfectly true – I could appreciate the background to the story, empathise with Margaret and recognise the attitudes of the people in the village. Dipping into my well-read copy once again I am reminded of all the pleasures that are in store for those lucky people who are now going to read it for the first time. It's a wonderful piece of social history – and a good story as well.' SR, Powys

'Just to say that I have immensely enjoyed all the Persephone books I have ordered but for me the most exceptional, moving and original one is *Manja*: I do hope many people are discovering this wonderful book; I shall be ordering some more copies for Christmas presents. Of course I know and love Eva Ibbotson's children's books, so was interested to discover that the

author of *Manja* was her mother. I get pretty desperate looking for something worth reading among current British authors and always ends up turning to Persephone!' JK, London NW1

'This morning I visited Westminster Cathedral, *Bricks and Mortar* in hand, and looked at it with fresh eyes, Martin Lovell's eyes (pp82-3), discovering an infinity of things I had missed before. I love the book, because of the many descriptions of buildings in London, England, and abroad (I shall heed his instructions on how to look at a village church, pp94-5) and also because of the wonderful use of language and imagery.' DT, London EC2

'I particularly enjoyed Mollie Panter-Downes's *Minnie's Room* – I ordered it because I had so much enjoyed the wartime stories and thought this collection was, if anything, even better – the stories were so sharply but delicately drawn, with a haunting sense of the loss not just of a way of life but of youth and hope.' RR, Co. Wicklow

'As so many other Persephone enthusiasts I thought Hilda Bernstein's brave account of her family's life in South Africa was outstanding – I am full of admiration for her.' JP, Colchester



# PERSEPHONE & THE OUP DNB

The new Oxford University Press *Dictionary of National Biography* was launched in September 2004. It is available on line and of course the first thing we did was to see how many of our authors have entries. The answer is: 21 out of 46 are in (as well as Julian Grenfell and Marjory Fleming – although, alas, the charming entry for the latter by Sir Leslie Stephen in the original *DNB*, which we reprint in our edition of Oriel Malet's book, has been re-written in the light of modern scholarship).

The Persephone authors are: Ruth Adam, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Duff Cooper, Lettice Cooper, Richmal Crompton, EM Delafield, Mollie Panter-Downes, Monica Dickens, Isobel English, Eleanor Graham, Cicely Hamilton, Ambrose Heath, Agnes Jekyll, Marghanita Laski, Amy Levy, Katherine Mansfield, Noel Streatfeild, Barbara Euphan Todd, Florence White, Dorothy Whipple and Leonard Woolf. There are also some fabric designers such as Vanessa Bell, Marion Dorn, Duncan Grant, and Margaret Calkin James.

Here are some of the comments: in her entry on Ruth Adam, Sybil Oldfield writes: 'Perhaps her most unusual achievement was

*A Woman's Place* 1910-1975, a succinct, witty, and trenchant social history of British women in the twentieth century that pulled the many interests of her own life together and testifies to her thoughtful analysis of the gains and losses for British women up to and including the women's liberation movement.' A long entry on Duff Cooper, by Philip Ziegler, refers merely to *Operation Heartbreak* as being 'based on a real-life incident in the Second World War that was viewed unenthusiastically by the cabinet office.' But it concludes: 'Courage and joy in living were the most conspicuous features of Duff Cooper's personality. He was a great-spirited patriot, too proud to court popularity, too reserved to command it readily, but a man whose honesty, generosity, and public spirit were never put in question.'

Lynn Knight calls Lettice Cooper's *The New House* 'a fine and technically accomplished work which was described by the author as "a novel of feelings and relationships, rather than a portrait of a place" and won her the accolade "Chekhov in Yorkshire" from the *Manchester Guardian* of the time.' In his entry on Isobel English Peter Parker calls *Every Eye* 'perhaps her finest novel: sharply

observed and beautifully written, this is an exquisite miniature.' Agnes Jekyll, concludes Cordelia Moyse, 'while not professionally trained to run public institutions, was able to apply many of the skills and values commonly associated with the private domestic sphere to the problems of society; while she was hailed as an exceptionally able amateur, it was remarked that had she been a man she would have been "a great public servant" (*The Times*).'

Finally, Claire Tomalin comments: 'Katherine Mansfield's stories [published by us as *The Montana Stories*] have found many distinguished admirers. She is praised for her economy and speed in assembling and dissolving a scene; for her wit, and touch of the surreal; for her divination of the hatred and cruelties beneath the sweet surface of family life; and for her sympathy with the vulnerable, the displaced, and the lonely.'

The new OUP *DNB*, which has fifty thousand entries written by ten thousand contributors, is available on line for £195 a year; we heartily recommend it, and if you cannot afford it yourself do try and persuade your library to buy the online version or to pay £7500 for the sixty-volume set.



# WILLIAM-AN ENGLISHMAN: 1919

review of our first book, and the Femina prizewinners

I shall begin by saying straight out that Miss Cicely Hamilton's new book

*William – an Englishman* is one of the finest war-stories that anyone has yet given us,' wrote a reviewer in *Punch* on March 5th 1919. 'You know already what qualities the author brings to her writing; you may believe me that she has done nothing more real, more nobly conceived, and by consequence more moving than this short tale. It opens, in a style of half-humorous irony, with an account of the youth, early life and courtship of William, who, with the girl whom he married, belonged to the vehement circles of the Labour-Suffragist group, spending a cheerfully ignorant life in a round of meetings, in hunger-striking and whole-hearted support of the pacifism that "seeks peace and ensures it by insisting firmly, and even to blood, that it is the other side's duty to give way." One small concession you must make to Miss Hamilton's plot. It is improbable that, when such a couple as William and Griselda left England in July 1914 to take their honeymoon in a remote valley of the Belgian Ardennes, their friends, knowing them to be without news and ignorant of

all speech save English, should have made no effort to warn them. But, this granted, the tragedy that follows becomes inevitable. It is so finely told and so horrible (the more so for the deliberate restraint of the telling) that I will say nothing to weaken its effect. From one scene, however, I cannot withhold my tribute of admiration – that in which William, alone, broken-hearted, and almost crazed with the ruin of everything that made up his life, creeps home to find his old associates still glibly echoing the platitudes in which he once believed. A hint here of insincerity of conscious arrangement would have ruined all; as it is, the scene holds and haunts one with an impression of absolute truth. For the end, marked like all the rest by an almost grim avoidance of sentimentality, I shall only refer you to the book itself. After reading it you will, I hope, not think me guilty of exaggeration when I call it, slight though it is, one for which its author has deserved well of the State.'

In 1920 *William – an Englishman* was the first book to win the Femina-Vie Heureuse Prize (the Booker, or perhaps the Orange, Prize of its day). Subsequent winners (with the

date of the award in brackets) were: Constance Holme *The Splendid Fairing* (1921); Rose Macaulay *Dangerous Ages* (1922), Gordon Bottomley *Gruach*; *Britain's Daughter* (1923); Percy Lubbock *Roman Pictures* (1924); EM Forster *A Passage to India* (1925); Mary Webb *Precious Bane* (1926); Radclyffe Hall *Adam's Breed* (1927); Virginia Woolf *To the Lighthouse* (1928); HM Tomlinson *Gallions Reach* (1929); Charles Morgan *Portrait in a Mirror* (1930); Richard Hughes *A High Wind in Jamaica* (1931); Stella Benson *Tobit Transplanted* (1932); Bradda Field *Small Town* (1933); Stella Gibbons *Cold Comfort Farm* (1934); Elizabeth Jenkins *Harriet* (1935); LH Myers *The Root and the Flower* (1936); Margaret Lane *Faith, Hope, No Charity* (1937); Richard Church *The Porch* (1938); Robert Graves *Count Belisarius* (1939).

Some of these are very well-known, some are now unreadable, and some, such as the superb *Small Town* by Bradda Field, deserve rediscovery. An interesting challenge for a reading group would be to obtain secondhand copies of all of these from abebooks.com and read through all twenty, making their own judgments.



# 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 Bowden

**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 of 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 a couple who role-swap. 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 Oriol Malet: A 1946 novel based on the real life of the Scottish child prodigy, who lived from 1803-11, written by a 20-year old.

**18. Every Eye** by Isobel English: An unusual 1956 novel about a girl travelling to Spain, highly praised by Muriel Spark: a R4 AfternoonPlay in 2004. 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** 1910-75 by Ruth Adam: A survey of C20th women's lives, very readably written by a novelist-historian: the 'big picture', full of insight. 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 BBC 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.

**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 (cf *They Can't Ration These* p152 ). 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, published in *The Times* and reprinted as a book in 1922. 'This is one of the best reads outside Elizabeth David' wrote gastropoda.com.

**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. A 'Book at Bedtime' in 2004. Preface: author

**34. Minnie's Room:** The Peacetime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes 1947-1965: Second volume of short stories first published in *The New Yorker*, previously unknown in the UK.

**35. Greenery Street** by Denis Mackail: A delightful, very funny 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 extraordinary 1920s novel-in-verse describing a young girl's stormy adolescence and journey to redemption. It was much praised by TS Eliot.

**37. The Runaway** by Elizabeth Anna Hart: A Victorian novel for children

and grown-ups, illustrated by Gwen Raverat. 'There never was a happier book' wrote *Country Life* in 1936. 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 magnificent 1938 novel, newly translated from the German by Kate Phillips, 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 is 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, filmed as *The Reckless Moment* and *The Blank Wall*.

**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' (Putney). Preface: Lyndall Gordon

**44. Tea with Mr Rochester** by Frances Towers: 1949 short stories, broadcast on BBC R4 in 2003. They are magical, unsettling, unusually written. Preface: Frances Thomas

**45. Good Food on the Aga** by Ambrose Heath: A 1933 cookery book, most useful for Aga users but it 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 creator of Worzel Gummidge. Miss Ranskill is shipwrecked and three years later 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 between mother and daughters. Preface: Jilly Cooper.

**48. The Casino** by Margaret Bonham: 1948 collection of short stories by a writer with a unique voice; they were read by Emma Fielding on BBC Radio 4 in 2004. Preface: Cary Bazalgette.

**49. Bricks and Mortar** by Helen Ashton: A beautifully written 1932 novel, by a once very popular writer, chronicling the life of a London architect over thirty-five years.

**50. The World that was Ours** by Hilda Bernstein: A memoir that reads like a novel about the events leading up to the 1964 Rivonia Trial when Nelson Mandela received a life sentence 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.' Afterword: Max Arthur

**52. The Village** by Marghanita Laski: This 1952 comedy of manners describes post-war readjustments in village life. Afterword: Juliet Gardiner

**53. Lady Rose and Mrs Memmery** by Ruby Ferguson: A sweet, funny, unputdownable 1937 romantic novel about Lady Rose Targenet, who inherits a great house, marries well – and then... Illustrations by Sylvia Salisbury. Preface: Candia McWilliam

**53. They Can't Ration These** by Vicomte de Mauduit: A 'food for free' cookery book, published in 1940 when living off one's own resources might have been a necessity and squirrels and nettles the only food one could get.



# THE EXILE by Joanna Cannan

Although Muriel Beckwith had never in her life set eyes upon her Uncle George, when she came to think back over the five-and-forty years behind her, among the scenes that she re-lived as she sat knitting on the deck or in the lounge of the steamship, *Barunda*, there were few from which he was excluded.

Her earliest memory – and incidentally her only memory of her first home – was of a certain Christmas morning. She could see, like an island in the fog of forgetfulness, a square yard or two of the red carpet which had been the dining-room carpet at ‘Restholme’, but had not worn well and become the schoolroom carpet at ‘Lochabee’; she could see shavings from which authoritative adult hands had drawn forth a shiny scarlet chest of China tea. Probably in answer to her, someone had said: ‘That’s from your poor Uncle George’, and in contrast to the shiny red chest, so gay with birds and flowers, the red carpet, enhanced as it was by the glittering brass of the fire-irons, had grown drab and dim. That was all until the next Christmas at ‘Lochabee’. She could not remember whether another tea chest had come then or the porcelain dogs of turquoise blue, which, on her

mother’s death, had been so speedily snapped up by Annie, but she could remember how, at the conclusion of the midday meal, her father had risen and proposed a toast to ‘Absent Friends’, and her mother had murmured ‘George’ into her glass of port wine and, copying Tom and Douglas and Annie, she had murmured ‘Uncle George’ into her glass of water.

She could only have been six years old, but already Uncle George was more than a name to her. She knew that if you dug a hole in the garden, dug down and down, deeper than Papa could dig or Smith, the man who came one morning a week to plant calceolarias in the front garden, you would reach the other side of the world where poor Uncle George was – China. She knew that she was a lucky little girl to be safe in happy England while poor Uncle George was spending his Christmas in scorching sunshine, among horrid yellow men with pigtailed and slanting eyes, and eating their messed-up dishes.

Later, of course, she learned more. She learned how poor Uncle George had been the youngest of ten children and his mother a widow, so that sooner than be an encumbrance he had taken the first post that had been

offered to him, even though it had necessitated leaving England and travelling to the other side of the world. In the first ten years of his exile he had come home twice on leave, bringing the Chinese fans that had gathered such dust on the drawing-room mantelpiece at ‘Lochabee’, the Chinese shawl that had been too good to use till the moths used it, and the Chinese embroideries that somehow had never been made up into anything. But within Muriel’s memory he had had no leave; his employers had found his presence at their Peking office indispensable.

At ‘Lochabee’ his memory was kept very green. Mrs Beckwith abhorred snobbishness, but to have a relative ‘out East’ gave one, she found, a kind of tone. There was the wider outlook. Foreign news, Oriental art, interested her; she could deplore the insularity of her neighbours, accuse them of attributing more importance to a dog fight in the Broadway than to the havoc wrought by a typhoon. There was social advantage. She could talk to Army People, had sustained a conversation with a Proconsul. Her own friends were interested (or it was good for them, anyhow) to hear about China when the subject had been introduced through the



expedient of offering them a Chinese fan to preserve their complexions from the rays of the hot coal fires.

In family life, too, to speak of Uncle George was often convenient. When the children complained of the heat, they were reminded that their poor Uncle George was far hotter; when they complained of the cold, poor Uncle George would have given anything to see frost and snow again. When Tom said that he was tired of Worthing, Papa reckoned up how long it was since Uncle George had had a holiday; when he objected to burying himself in the offices of a Devon solicitor, the example of the family exile clinched the argument. When Papa was put out about the food, Mamma could say: 'Think of your poor brother – nothing but rice and indigestible birds' nests. I should have thought you would have been thankful to see that nice wholesome hash before you'; when he complained about the children's noise or school bills, it was: 'Think of poor George with neither wife nor child to care for him.' One way or another scarcely a day passed at 'Lochabee' but George Beckwith's name was proudly or compassionately spoken.

Uncle George died five years before his brother. It was dreadful to receive no warning – just a curt letter from his employers; dreadful to think that

at the very moment of his passing, the only people in the world that he could call his dear ones were laughing heartily at the Palladium. It was dreadful not to be able to send a floral tribute; all that they could do was to get out the mourning they had had for Grandmamma and insert a nice little paragraph in the 'In Memoriam' column of their favourite newspaper: *Never forgotten by all at 'Lochabee'*.

When her father, and a few months later her mother, died, Muriel found some consolation in thinking of Uncle George wistfully awaiting them on that Further Shore.

\*\*\*\*\*

Muriel had never married. Perhaps too early and too inexorably she had been named 'our home bird'. When her parents died she found herself mistress of their considerable savings, and after weighing up much conflicting advice she disposed of the lease of 'Lochabee' and decided on a world cruise. Naturally no corner of earth called to her as China did, and she took care to select an itinerary which embraced a few hasty hours in Peking. The obliging young clerk in the shipping office assured her that by missing the personally conducted tour to the Tombs of the Ming Emperors she would



THE VICOMTE IN THE KITCHENETTE

*'The Vicomte in the Kitchenette'*  
1934 by Mary Shepard



have time to visit the cemetery where George Beckwith lay. From Okehampton Tom sent half-a-guinea, from Streatham Annie sent three-and-sixpence, from Wimbledon Douglas sent fifteen-and-sixpence to be spent on flowers for Uncle George's grave; and three months later in Peking Muriel bought roses and violets and, camera in hand, set out to visit Uncle George's grave.

In three months of eastward travelling she had seen much that she found curious and a little that she found beautiful – Venice, for instance, and Bethlehem and the ferns in Ceylon. But now, exhausted with sight-seeing and torpid with first-class cooking, she was beginning to feel that it would be nice to be home again, and from her first glimpse of Hong Kong, the harbour crowded with junks and sampans, the red roofs of Victoria city among the bamboo and persimmons, the blue Peak hung like a backcloth against the turquoise morning sky – she saw China through the eyes of an exile – poor Uncle George, she thought, how amongst these gaudy flowers and garish colours he must have longed for the quiet green meadows of England, for elm-bound English lanes and grey English skies.

All through the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, she had planned to lay roses on Uncle George's grave,

and it was a little annoying to discover that China completely outdid England in roses, that George Beckwith must, in fact, have been heartily sick of roses. But it was the same with violets and all the other flowers that she had thought were typically British, so she chose the most English-looking roses that she could see, red and white ones and the smallest heads of violets. Refusing a chair on account of the murderous looks of the coolies, she walked from the railway station, up the road bordered with bamboos, to the cemetery.

It was a pleasant place and quiet – she could not deny that – but it was odd, somehow, to see lemons growing on trees and the grey-green sword-like foliage of the bamboos and so many, many roses. Poor Uncle George, dying all alone, knowing that he was to lie here under the changeless sky and the alien lemons! Thank heaven, when her time came she would rest in the seemlier shade of yew trees.

It took her some time to find the grave for which she was looking. Her feet ached and her eyes ached, but here she was at last and the sun just right for the snaps she had promised to Tom and Douglas and Annie. She was glad to see that Messrs Burnaby and Burnaby, in spite of their niggardliness in the matter of leave, had erected a handsome white marble cross over the

remains of their employee, and that neither weather nor moss had defaced the clear black letters of the simple inscription.

*Sacred to the memory of George Beckwith, born May 4th 1869, died December 3rd 1929. Also of his wife, Ts'z-hi, died September 8th 1930 and of La-yuen, their younger daughter, died April 17th 1932. RIP*

Since the roses and the violets were bought and paid for, Muriel dropped them on the grave and, turning away with a shocked, inarticulate moan, walked rapidly towards the gates of the cemetery,

When Tom, Douglas and Annie asked her for the snap of Uncle George's grave, she told them that the light had been unfavourable.

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First published in *John O'London's Weekly* on February 29th 1939.

© The Estate of Joanna Cannan.

(Joanna Cannan was the author of many 'witty, satirical, even cynical' novels, in the words of the *DNB*; she might be said to have invented the genre of the 'pony book' that Ruby Ferguson, author of *Lady Rose and Mrs Memmary*, also made so much her own in the post-war years.)



# THE SECOND PERSEPHONE READERS WEEKEND

'I found it pure pleasure from start to finish. The programme was excellent, as were all the speakers. Frances Spalding set the tone with her fascinating opening talk on Bloomsbury – there was never a dull moment.' JS, Worcester

'It was the first time I had spent a night in a college in Cambridge: beautiful setting and peaceful surroundings. Pleasant company, interesting talks.' JB-B, London W1

'Not only was it marvellously stimulating but it was the greatest fun, and, for me, there

was the additional bonus of finding seven others (at least) who came from Cornwall. All the speakers were excellent and some – I think of Henrietta Garnett's talk about her Great-Grandfather – were utterly brilliant.' AC, Fowey

'Much good food for the soul and the food for the body was also delicious.' CD, Oxford

'A big thank you for the weekend, which I found totally exhilarating!' OH, Winchester

'The speakers were entertaining, stimulating and informative, especially Anne Harvey's

marvellous talk, which threw so much light on Noel Streatfeild.' KC, Bushey

'The weekend at Newnham was splendid in every possible way. Thank you all so much for such an engaging and stimulating two days. The speakers were, without exception excellent, the more so because each had her own style and atmosphere.' JU, London N1

'What a marvellous weekend! And a long train journey back to Scotland seemed to go like a flash as I was totally absorbed in *Bricks and Mortar*.' AO, Fife





# OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

In the *Spectator* Charlotte Moore reviewed Marghanita Laski's *The Village*, 'one of those lovely Persephone reprints with a pearly grey cover and endpapers like the maids' bedroom curtains in a Victorian country house... This traditionally organised novel of English village life is more than a gentle dig at quirky English behaviour. It's a precise, evocative but unsentimental account of a period of transition, an absorbing novel and a useful piece of social history.'

'Most first-hand accounts by those who fought apartheid tend to be detailed, historical and not overly personalised,' wrote Peter Hain in the *Guardian*, in a long review of *The World that was Ours*. 'Hilda Bernstein's is not. It is a very personal and gripping story which shares her emotions with the reader – she tells how it all happened and how it feels when it happens to you. That is why it is so readable, so fascinating and so important an account of one of the truly heroic struggles to end in complete victory.'

'On holiday,' wrote Sarah Crompton in the *Daily Telegraph*, 'I read *The World that was Ours*, an engrossing and moving account of South Africa's Rivonia

Trial. I also read *Someone at a Distance*, written in 1953 by Dorothy Whipple, which describes the destruction of a happy home by an affair with such detail and psychological insight that it makes many modern novels look conventional and superficial.'

The *Times* paperback reviewer Chris Power noted that 'Duff Cooper, a former Secretary of State for War, never wrote another novel, which, given *Operation Heartbreak's* understatedly affecting quality and satisfying conclusion, is a great shame.'

In the *Jewish Chronicle* Anne Sebba reviewed the 'deeply moving' *The World that was Ours*: 'In this riveting book Hilda Bernstein vividly recreates the atmosphere of post-war South Africa and her own part in the struggle to bring about equality and justice... Most accounts of major political events are written by the men who were driving them. Here is an intensely female view.'

*Good Food on the Aga* was published in 1933,' said *This England*, 'and has since been regarded as a classic cookery book; but the recipes can be cooked on any stove, not just an Aga.'

*Image* magazine's Anna Carey commented: 'As ever, autumn brings two new delectable offerings from the always reliable Persephone Books, *The Village*, a delightful comedy of manners, and the touching *Operation Heartbreak*.'

Colleen Mondor wrote on bookslut.com: 'I recently read *The Wise Virgins* by Leonard Woolf, ordering it primarily (I am chagrined to say) because I had never heard of this novel by Virginia Woolf's husband. *The Wise Virgins* was an unfortunate casualty of both WW1 and Virginia's more overwhelming literary success, but it has found a happy home with Persephone. By the end of Woolf's book I was shocked, stunned in fact, by the turn of events and yet I realise in retrospect that I should have expected it all along. I have just grown so unaccustomed to this style of writing, to the type of books where very quiet things happen in very dramatic ways to perfectly normal people without anyone thinking twice about it. Woolf reminded me yet again why I love this publisher so much. At Persephone they know that drama is found most often in the little moments every day, you just have to sit still and read long enough to notice it.'



# AND YOU MAY LIKE TO KNOW...

**E**ighty years ago, Susan Glaspell's *Fidelity* was published in England, nine years after it appeared in America. Here are extracts from some of the reviews that October of 1924: 'A book of quite astonishing beauty. Mrs Glaspell with this remarkable novel takes her place among the most brilliant living writers of fiction.' 'A notable achievement. One of the finest bits of fiction America has yet given to the English-speaking world.' 'A new force in imaginative literature.' 'Without doubt one of the finest novels produced in any country within recent years.'

**W**e received this letter from a reader about *The Victorian Chaise-longue*: 'I only met Marghanita Laski once, but that was when she came with her Aunt at 10.30 am on February 25th 1953. By 11 o'clock her Aunt had delightedly bought our little house for the asking price of £2000. My husband and I were in the theatre and had completely re-done the house ourselves, but as we were starting a family wanted to move out into the country. We had put the advertisement in the personal column of *The Times*, and by 7.45 am the phone rang incessantly. In all, 200 calls with people offering us up to £500 more saying, "You can't possibly have

exchanged contracts yet" and being surprised when we said, "No, we have given our word." Imagine my surprise when Persephone's edition of *The Victorian Chaise-longue* showed our house – the centre one of Fife Terrace, Islington on David Gentleman's card. By April we had bought our "cottage in the country" at auction, a small Tudor farm house with outbuildings attached, used as a Bakery. Children and grandchildren later we still live in the "The Old Bakery" and hope to continue to do so unless concreted over by the development of Stansted...'

**O**n the Penguin website the novelist Helen Dunmore writes: 'I buy a lot from Persephone – they publish out of print books mainly by women authors – and I have been re-reading *The Wise Virgins*. It's such an angry, passionate, nakedly candid account of a courtship between two people who seem as if they ought not to be together at all. And it exposes Edwardian middle-class social values: the anti-semitism, the constricted lives enforced on women, the abuse of millions of lives through domestic service. You can tell from this book that Leonard Woolf is not going to be a novelist for long. He is going to immerse himself in

politics and social reform, and the long, complex marriage whose beginning is dramatised in *The Wise Virgins*.'

**M**iss Pettigrew *Lives for a Day* is to be discussed on BBC Radio 4's 'A Good Read' on Tuesday December 21st at 4.30 pm, repeated on Boxing Day at 11.00 am. Sue MacGregor will be talking about it with her guests Mike Harding and Susan Greenfield.

**T**he Spring 2005 books are, firstly, Virginia Woolf's *Flush* (1933). Every publisher's list needs a book about a dog (our own spaniel is after all part of the shop furniture) and *Flush* is the outstanding example, describing as it does the life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel during the 1840s in a novella by one of our greatest writers. The new Preface is by Sally Beauman. *They Were Sisters*, our other Spring title, is the fourth Dorothy Whipple novel we publish. It is about three sisters' lives after they marry. A Book Society Choice for the autumn of 1943, it was filmed the following year, the world premiere being on May 16th 1945: we shall be showing the film on that day (a Monday) sixty years later. The new Preface is by Celia Brayfield.



# FINALLY

The next *Persephone Lunch* is on **Thursday December 9th**, when we celebrate the publication of *Lady Rose and Mrs Memmery*. There will be four speakers: Ruby Ferguson's step-grandaughter Sarah; Philip Glassborow, who told us about the book; Alison Haymonds, who researched an article about Ruby Ferguson and provided the biographical detail; and the novelist and short-story writer Candia McWilliam who has written the new *Persephone Preface*. (Because this lunch is only two weeks before Christmas we shall of course be serving Christmas fare, such as Konditor & Cook's mince pies.) On **Thursday January 27th** we shall be having a repeat showing of the 1924 silent *Film of The Home-Maker*, partly to celebrate its reprinting and partly in response to popular demand, so great was the effect on all who saw it last time. The film will again be shown at the British Film Institute 21 Stephen Street W1 (very near Tottenham Court Road tube). We shall start with wine and sandwiches at 1.00 pm, the film will be at 2.00 and afterwards there will be tea and brownies. Other engagements permitting, the afternoon will be introduced by the film director Kevin Brownlow, who very kindly obtained a copy of the film for us. On **Wednesday February 23rd** we shall be holding a *Persephone*

*Book Group*, at which the book to be discussed will be Dorothy Whipple's *They Were Sisters* (to be published in March); the author of the new *Persephone Preface*, Celia Brayfield, will be present. A free copy of the book will be sent to participants in



early February. The event will last from 5.30-7.30, tea, madeira and pizza will be served, and it is hoped that this later time will suit people who cannot get away during the day. Lastly, on **Tuesday March 15th** there will be a *Lunch* to celebrate the publication of Virginia Woolf's *Flush*; the speaker will be the author of the new *Persephone Preface* to *Flush*, Sally Beauman. As usual, the lunches, film and book group cost £25. Please telephone the office to reserve places for these events – they do tend to get booked up.

**C**hristmas: we shall continue to send out books until the 22nd December and shall expect them to arrive by the 24th, so great is our faith in the Post Office. We have 'Happy Christmas' cards to accompany wrapped books (£2 extra) and we also now stock a range of blank Royal Academy greetings cards by artists such as Elizabeth Blackadder, Mary Fedden and Edward Ardizzone; they cost £1.50. *The Persephone Mugs*, especially made for us by Annabel Munn, are now in stock; they come in small, medium and large (espresso, latte and tea) and cost £12, £14 and £17.50 – but can only be bought from the shop. We also have a few of the large *Stendig Calendars* imported from America; they cost £40. Finally, we have *The Persephone Notebook* – a 192 page book which looks exactly like an ordinary *Persephone* book except the pages are blank. We hope that many people will use it as a 'Reading Notebook' to keep a list of the books they read. But of course it can be used for a myriad of other purposes. The *Notebooks* are priced exactly like the books ie £10 each or three for £27 and may be bought as part of a trio eg two books and a notebook are £27 plus £2 postage per book.

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