

## THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

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telephone 020 7242 9292  
[www.persephonebooks.co.uk](http://www.persephonebooks.co.uk)





# OUR AUTUMN 2005 BOOKS

Both the Autumn 2005 Persephone books are set in the Second World War.

Although in one sense they could not be more different, in another they are curiously linked: one is about 9 year-old Doreen Rawlings who is starting out on her life, and the other is about the once-glamorous 84 year-old Claire Temple coming to the end of hers. The one is published partly to coincide with the Imperial War Museum's 'Children at War' exhibition and partly because it is an 'unpretentious novel' which treats its subject 'with real sincerity and understanding' (Monica Dickens), the other because we feel it is an outstandingly subtle and yet comic book about a rarely-confronted subject – that of memory loss.

**D**oreen by Barbara Noble was published in 1946 by an already-established writer who was then running the London office of 20th Century Fox; she had gone on working all during the blitz and afterwards, but somehow found time to write a book that confronts an issue

which was then horrifyingly topical. This was whether parents should have sent their children away from cities that might be bombed; and if they had done so whether they could hope to maintain their relationship with them; as Jessica Mann, author of the Preface and of a recently published book about overseas child evacuees, writes: 'The experience of this long separation, very difficult for all concerned at the time, often proved traumatic over a lifetime.'

**T**he novel is interesting and poignant because the author writes with great insight about the mind of a child, but a child who, although sensitive and sweet-natured, is torn between her mother, whom she leaves behind in London, and the couple who take her in. Yet everyone wants only the best for Doreen: her mother who, having decided she would not send her away in September 1939 then, once the blitz began,

feels she had to accept a generous offer for Doreen to live in the country; and the couple who look after her devotedly and then grow more and more fond of her until, in the end, what is being explored is a clash of values.

**B**ut the real dilemma is the mother's. Mrs Rawlings, a Cockney mother on her own, is passionately devoted to her daughter and has never been parted from her before. But she wants her to live, and the couple Doreen goes to is giving her the gift of safety. That they are also introducing her to a completely new way of life, a middle-class, comfortable life in the country, and that she may have been catastrophically wrenched from her impoverished but happy life in the East End – this is not confronted at first; until it may be too late, when one of the characters observes, eventually 'she'll go back to a world where most of the things you've taught her will be drawbacks rather than advantages.'



1940 silk scarf 'London Alert' by Jacquinet, used for Doreen



'Treetops', 1940 cotton by Marianne Mahler: There Were No Windows



But as Jessica Mann observes: 'In 1946 few British people had yet heard of child psychology and specialists were only beginning to understand that bombs might have traumatised children less than the belief that their parents had deserted them.' However, she concludes, 'the separation of parent and child is a cruel fate but not as cruel as the risk of death.' *Doreen* is a deeply involving book, fascinating for the dilemmas it explores, for the portrayal of the child torn between mother and temporary mother, and for its understanding of the tyrannies of the English class system.

Unsurprisingly, it had wonderful reviews in 1946. Pamela Hansford-Johnson said of Barbara Noble: 'Her writing is so temperate, her outlook so tolerant, her breadth of sympathy so marked.' In America Dorothy Canfield Fisher wrote in *Book-of-the-Month Club News*: 'The manner of telling this poignant, subtle tragedy is beyond admiration, restrained, penetrating, deeply moving. The subject is one which would easily lend itself to the rankest kind of sentimentality; in fact this touching story stands straight as an honestly built house, constructed around the anguished, self-controlled mother's intuitive insight into

the meaning of a complex human situation, and her epic, heart-breaking courage in doing her best to save Doreen.' And our reader in the office commented: 'There is an emotional soundness to each character, and to the relations between them, and a coherence



*Norah Hoult in the 1940s*

to each of their responses, that were, to me, the elements that made for an absorbing and gripping read; I confess, I could not find a fault. If we publish *Doreen*, along with Dorothy Canfield Fisher's *The Home-Maker* it would be my co-favourite Persephone Book.'

*There Were No Windows* (1944) is based on the last months in the life of the writer Violet Hunt (whose picture we reproduce overleaf); with insight, humour and startling originality Norah Hoult shows the effect on the once-glamorous 'Claire Temple' of the inexorable deterioration of her memory

The book is constructed in three acts: in 'Inside the House' we see Claire at home in her house, 'South Lodge' at what was 80 Campden Hill Road in Kensington, looked after by her cook and daily help; Norah Hoult recreates her vision of the world through very, very funny and most subtly-observed stream of consciousness, and through the reactions of the two other women. In 'Outside the House' Claire has visitors, including her old friend Edith Barlow (carefully explaining to her that her 'oldest friend, Edith Barlow, comes every second Sunday to lunch'), her former secretary Mrs Berkeley, and another friend, Francis Maitland. It is their admirable determination to be kind, mixed with their all-too human exasperation at the way Claire, so polite and 'normal' in so many ways but so maddening in others, makes them want to scream, that is the funniest part of the book. Finally, in 'The Dark Night of the Imagination', Miss Jones accepts the post of



companion. ‘Mrs Temple is a rather difficult person to deal with,’ she is told. ‘She has been... a brilliant woman. In her day. She wrote, entertained a good deal, and so on. However, she says the same things over and over again. Many people find it tiresome...’

Throughout all this Claire wanders, lost and lonely, round her house, surrounded by mementoes of the past, trying to behave as though she were still *the* Claire Temple, but all the time only too horribly aware that she is losing her memory. Occasionally she goes out into Kensington High Street in her bedroom slippers or up to the police station in Ladbroke Grove (curiously, the one that features in Vere Hodgson’s *Few Eggs and No Oranges* at the same period of the war) or encounters an air-raid warden; he is initially kind to her – but, in the end, exasperated. This is the nub of the book and why it is so unusual: we empathise with every character in the book (except perhaps the cook, whose behaviour is sometimes close to cruelty). People try to be good to Claire. She makes it difficult for them through no fault of her own. And even though it is no fault of her own they find her maddening: we feel for them, and we feel for her.

As Julia Briggs observes in her Preface, *There Were No Windows* takes its title from ‘the ultimate terror of

old age – to be left alone in the dark, and to be shut in upon yourself.’ She also reveals that Norah Hoult based her novel on truth: she was a friend of Violet Hunt and used to walk over from her flat in Bayswater to the house on Campden Hill. Many of the details about Violet’s last months came from a book by



*Violet Hunt when young*

Douglas Goldring that he wrote about her just after she died. In this he confirms that Violet/Claire had indeed been proposed to by Oscar Wilde and that her liaison with Ford Madox Ford (Wallace in the novel) was one of the great scandals of the time. Violet and Ford were well-known figures in the London literary world during the first two decades of the C20th, but were notoriously prevented from marrying by Ford’s first wife (some have surmised that Violet was the original for Florence in his greatest book, *The Good Soldier*). Violet’s most

successful novel was *White Rose of Weary Leaf* (1908), *Weary Leaf* in *There Were No Windows*, and twice she asks Francis Maitland: “Are you publishing anything? I do wish you could get me into one of those sixpenny paper editions. Don’t you think *Weary Leaf* might be suitable?” Mr Maitland, feeling irritation surge up, checked it by taking another sip of wine.’

This is the only book we know, apart from *Iris* about Iris Murdoch (and arguably this book is more humorous and more profound) that is so true and perceptive about memory loss and about the relationship between those who are in poor mental health and those who are in a good state (after all, Norah Hoult is asking, who is the Fool and who is the King? Who is sane and who is insane?) It is also an incredibly funny book, indeed we are tempted to call it a black comedy. The reader is often reminded that Norah Hoult, an Irish writer living in England, was a kinswoman of Joyce and Beckett. However, *There Were No Windows* is not in any sense difficult. And, as Julia Briggs comments: ‘Much of this novel’s power derives from its unflinching representation of old age. [But] its clear-sightedness is redeemed by its generosity, understanding and insight. Norah Hoult transforms her dark materials into a powerful, rich and evocative fiction.’ Her novel is profound and witty; it is a unique *tour de force*.



# OUR READERS WRITE

'I am so full of admiration and appreciation over your publishing *The Hopkins Manuscript*, which I think is the most subtle and brilliant response to the challenge set by the article about climate change in the February *Tablet*. I've thought about it at least once every single day, and scoured the papers (with disbelief at how few there are) for articles that reflect its wake-up call. Brava Persephone indeed.' BR, Bristol

'What a brilliant novel *Manja* is. Being completely obsessed by the subject of National-Socialism, I thought I had read every possible treatment. But the humanity of this book makes one realise how ludicrously melodramatic are most stories describing this period. I thought the set-piece of the classroom, in which the girls are interrogated, is among the most powerful evocations of the spirit of Nazism I have read. What a scene it would make in a film!' KB, London NW1

'I was captivated by the sharp wit of *Mariana* and roared with laughter, all alone, at Mrs ffrench-Burrowes perched on top of her rodeo-horse "as unshakeably as a feeding mosquito", at "Mr Pee-aire" in the pretentious hairdresser's asking Mary if she wants her hair "to stuff a sofa", at Pierre's mother who was only "a cold, unemotional peg on which to hang diamonds." It's clever to make the whole book Mary's life

in retrospect: it's witty, moving, nostalgic, romantic, very English – a wonderful read. And I see from your website that others have loved *Hostages to Fortune* too, but what has not been mentioned is the important role nature plays: it comforts Catherine about her defeat as a writer, it binds the family together in their work in the garden. The story is never static: it flows like a river, there is no stationary, analytical introspection, the characters are constantly developing. What also keeps one riveted is the clear description of daily life, the details about cooking, cleaning, clothes, the things in the home – the reader feels totally part of it. And the language is most wonderfully descriptive. Above all, the guiding tone is understatement. There is nothing dramatic, yet it is the story of constant struggle, of hard work, of practical wisdom and undemonstrative but real victory.' DT, London EC2

'A note of appreciation for bringing us *The World that was Ours* by Hilda Bernstein. I found her account of those terrible times moving in the extreme – the courage and integrity of ordinary people shone on every page. Hilda's story has helped give me a better understanding of the reasons why the expatriate South Africans here had to leave their beautiful country.' JW, Mosman Park, Australia

'I had not read *Flush* in years, because I remembered it as being fairly slight from my previous reading of it. How wrong I was! The astonishing scene where Elizabeth Barrett and Flush stare hard at one another, trying to plumb each other's depths, is almost a perfect figuration for the task of the biographer. I was also intrigued to see this time round that this book is perhaps Virginia Woolf's fullest and most textured consideration of domestic material culture, thus making it a perfect choice for Persephone Books. I loved, too, the edition's beautiful endpapers with the swirling Victorian designs in purple (the colour in which Woolf herself often wrote) that suggest the extremely 'bookish' nature of this work.' JW, Portland, USA

'I read *Manja* a few weeks ago and was moved by the beauty of the writing, the clairvoyance and the haunting story. What a brilliant idea to link the five children by the date of their conception. I am now in the middle of *The Village* which is amazing in that it brings home just how much society has changed in the sixty plus years since I was born. Thank God the automatic assumption that class was an unbridgeable barrier to friendship (let alone marriage), and that it could be talked about openly in those terms, has gone.' HB, Oxford



# 'UNDESERVEDLY OBSCURE'

As a devotee of faintly obscure early 20th-century novelists I printed out the email that arrived the other morning with more than usual relish. A two-day conference to celebrate the centenary of Henry Green, author of *Living* (1929), *Loving* (1946) and other abstruse works rife with stylised dialogue – and would one care to contribute? Literary invitations rarely come more enticing than this, and within moments some crisp suggestions about Green, his chums Anthony Powell and Evelyn Waugh, were tearing back through cyberspace.

Gratifying as it is to see Green getting his due – he died in Knightsbridge retirement in 1973, having more or less drunk his way to extinction – a faint tocsin of doubt still clanged in my ear. Why Henry Green? Why not Patrick Hamilton, another lost figure from the inter-war years whose *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky* was recently turned into a BBC4 three-parter? Why not James Hanley, Walter Greenwood, or F M Mayor? What instinct or accumulation of influences had propelled Hamilton's sponsor, Simon Curtis, to dramatise a work by a man whose most recent biography was described as the worst-selling book in the history

of Faber & Faber?

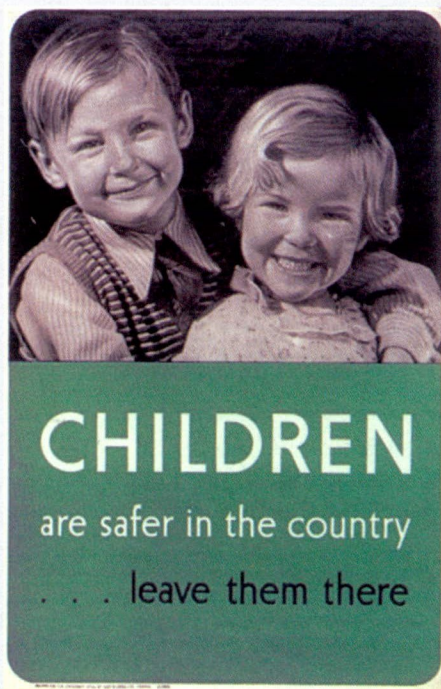
No problem in literature, perhaps, is less instantly soluble than the question of reputations: the bewildering process by which, in the years after their deaths, one writer's stock soars while another's sinks into bankruptcy. The only real judge of a book, Martin Amis once remarked, is posterity. Green, his last novel produced at around the time of the Attlee government, looks to have this exacting arbiter on his side. Contrast this with the sad case of Angus Wilson, who died in 1991, at which point, faculties and income gone, he was being supported by the Royal Literary Fund. After his death, a determined band of friends and admirers pushed his books back into print. Now one looks in vain for his work on the shelves.

It is the same with CP Snow, Charles Morgan, Hugh Walpole, JB Priestley or half a dozen also-rans of the English novel, titans in their day. What keeps a writer alive? Sometimes the explanation is almost a matter of luck or availability. Alternatively, a single great novel shining out among a piecemeal oeuvre can sometimes be enough to keep the flame burning. Then there is the

phenomenon of the tireless lobbying group – cadres of influential fans capable of pulling wires in the appropriate places. Celebrity, TV documentaries and film tie-ins help too.

But what about all the undeservedly obscure? I once spent a couple of sessions at a creative writing course reading my students a short story by a 19th-century Norfolk farmer's wife named Mary Mann. They were, without exception, astonished by its brilliance. Who was Mary Mann, they wondered. And why hadn't they heard of her? I wish I could have told them.

© DJ Taylor in *The Guardian*  
19th May 2005





# THE WHIPPLE WARS

‘These days the distinction between high culture and low culture is blurred,’ wrote *The Oldie* magazine provocatively in July. ‘Comic books are treated as high art and you can take degrees in pop music. If only there were some kind of test... The editorial staff at Virago books once had the very thing that enabled them to work out whether a prospective novel was too lowbrow for them to publish. They applied a simple test: does a book cross the Whipple Line? If above the Whipple Line, it may be considered. Anything below the Whipple Line goes on the reject pile. Dorothy Whipple (1893-1966) was a successful popular novelist of the Thirties and Forties, who has recently been republished by Persephone Books. Her novels are melodramatic, undisciplined and come to heavy-handed, moralistic conclusions: men are pantomime villains or short-sighted patriarchs; women are usually idealised repositories of good sense or spendthrift harlots. Nevertheless, Mrs Whipple’s writing is boldly expressive and has a weirdly addictive quality. She was, in her day, the exemplary middlebrow novelist. We wonder what the modern equivalent might be? Suggestions please.’

Letters of outrage were sent. So far *The Oldie* has published the following from Charles Lock, Professor of English Literature: ‘Your readers have been informed that Whipple’s novels are melodramatic etc. To the contrary, they are tightly structured, subtle in tone, sly of wit; their plots are developed at a careful pace, with a certain amplitude of the inexorable that is reminiscent of Hardy (and by no means at his worst). “Weirdly addictive” her writing certainly is: Dorothy Whipple challenges standard views of English fiction in the mid-C20th and, more seriously, puts into question any simple distinction between high and low culture.’ Celia Brayfield also wrote: ‘I was amazed to read that your diarist considers Dorothy Whipple’s novels melodramatic etc. Surely “understated, well-constructed, subtle but provocatively pre-feminist” would be more like it? An exasperated British film producer of the 1940s complained bitterly of the lack of “bang-up rows” in her books. Whipple was a bestselling novelist of her time, who wrote realistically about ordinary middle-class women, two attributes which guarantee a writer intellectual disdain. Since you ask, her modern equivalent would of course be Joanna

Trollope.’ And Colin Spencer commented, ‘I cannot believe your diarist has read one novel by Dorothy Whipple, for the description of her books as melodramatic etc could not be more inaccurate. Whipple is a social realist of the inter-war bourgeoisie with razor-sharp perception into their foibles and aspirations, her observation of the nuances of human relationships is subtle and it is from that source that her plots derive. Persephone should reap accolades for bringing her back into print.’

Lastly Harriet Evans, fiction publisher at Headline, wrote in *The Bookseller*’s ‘Reading for Pleasure’ column: ‘I read *Someone at a Distance* a year ago, and re-read it again this year on holiday. I’m so jealous of people who haven’t read it before. This is the purest form of storytelling; events happen because of the way that people are rather than a bomb dropping down. I love Persephone Books, the choices are brilliant. I would never have heard of Whipple. She’s a classic example of why Persephone Books is so great. It’s strange how some writers have endured and others haven’t – I think Whipple was neglected just because she has a funny name, and not great titles.’



# THE PERSEPHONE 60

**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 very funny first novel describes 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 the tragic destruction of a formerly happy marriage (pub. 1953). Preface: Nina Bawden

**4. Fidelity** by Susan Glaspell: 1915 novel by a Pulitzer-winning author brilliantly describing 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 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': 'Melly' lies on a chaise-longue in the 1950s and wakes as 'Milly' 80 years before. Preface: PD James

**7. The Home-Maker** by Dorothy Canfield Fisher: Ahead of its time 'remarkable and brave 1924 novel about being a house-husband' (Carol Shields). 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, wit and humanity. Preface: Jenny Hartley

**10. Good Things in England** by Florence White: This comprehensive 1932 collection of recipes inspired many, including Elizabeth David.

**11. Julian Grenfell** by Nicholas Mosley: A biography of the First World War poet, and of his mother Ettie Desborough. Preface: author

**12. It's Hard to be Hip over Thirty and Other Tragedies of Married Life** by Judith Viorst: Funny, wise and weary 1960s poems about marriage, children and reality. Preface: author

**13. Consequences** by EM Delafield: By the author of *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*, this 1919 novel is about a girl entering a convent after she fails to marry. 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; they are funny, observant and bleak. Preface: AN Wilson

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

**17. Marjory Fleming** by Oriel Malet: A deeply empathetic novel about the real life of the Scottish child prodigy who lived from 1803-11; now published in France; was a play on Radio Scotland.

**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 2004. Preface: Neville Braybrooke

**19. They Knew Mr Knight** by Dorothy Whipple: An absorbing 1934 novel about a man driven to committing fraud and what happens to him and his family; 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 about a governess and a night-club singer. Read on R4 by Maureen Lipman; French translation shortly. 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 fierce 1880s satire on the London Jewish community by 'the Jewish Jane Austen' who was a friend of Oscar Wilde. Preface: Julia Neuberger.

**24. Family Roundabout** by Richmal Crompton: By the *William* books author, 1948 family saga contrasting two matriarchs and 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: Novel about a father's search for his son in France in 1945, 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 interesting 1944 novel about a group of people living in the country during WW11. Preface: Ruth Gorb

**32. The Carlyles at Home** by Thea Holme: A 1965 mixture of biography and social history which very entertainingly describes 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: a great Persephone favourite. '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: A unique 1920s novel in verse describing a girl's stormy adolescence and path to redemption, admired 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' (*Country Life*, 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 two cassettes by Miriam Margolyes*

**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 the Nazi takeover. Preface: Eva Ibbotson (daughter of the author)

**40. The Priory** by Dorothy Whipple: A much-loved 1939 novel about three generations of a family, and their servants, living in a large country house. Preface: David Conville.

**41. Hostages to Fortune** by Elizabeth Cambridge: 'Deals with domesticity without being in the least bit cosy'

(Harriet Lane, *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' (Chandler). A 1947 thriller about a mother who shields her daughter from a blackmailer, filmed as both *The Reckless Moment* in 1949 and *The Deep End* in 2001.

**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: Magical and unsettling 1949 stories, a surprise favourite, that are unusually beautiful written; read on R4 in 2003. Preface: Frances Thomas

**45. Good Food on the Aga** by Ambrose Heath: A 1932 cookery book for Aga users which can nevertheless be used by anyone; with numerous illustrations by Edward Bawden.

**46. Miss Ranskill Comes Home** by Barbara Euphan Todd: An unsparing, wry 1946 novel: Miss Ranskill is shipwrecked and returns to wartime England. Preface: Wendy Pollard

**47. The New House** by Lettice Cooper: 1936 portrayal of the day a family moves to a new house, and the resulting tensions and adjustments. Preface: Jilly Cooper.

**48. The Casino** by Margaret Bonham: Short stories by a 1940s writer with a unique voice and dark sense of humour; they were read on BBC Radio 4 in 2004 and 2005. Preface: Cary Bazalgette.

**49. Bricks and Mortar** by Helen Ashton: An excellent 1932 novel by a very popular 1930s writer chronicling the life of a hard-working and kindly London architect over thirty-five years.

**50. The World that was Ours** by Hilda Bernstein: An extraordinary memoir that reads like a novel of the events before and after the 1964 Rivonia Trial. Mandela was given a life sentence but the Bernsteins escape to England. Preface and Afterword: the author

**51. Operation Heartbreak** by Duff Cooper: A soldier misses going to war – until the end of his life. 'The novel I enjoyed more than any other in the immediate post-war years' (Nina Bawden). Afterword: Max Arthur

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

**53. Lady Rose and Mrs Memmery** by Ruby Ferguson: A romantic 1937 novel about Lady Rose Targenet, who inherits a great house, marries well – and then meets the love of her life on a park bench. Preface: Candia McWilliam

**54. They Can't Ration These** by Vicomte de Mauduit: A 1940 cookery book about 'food for free', full of excellent (and now fashionable) recipes.

**55. Flush** by Virginia Woolf: A light-hearted but surprisingly feminist 1933 'life' of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's spaniel, 'a little masterpiece of comedy' (*TLS*). Preface: Sally Beauman

**56. They Were Sisters** by Dorothy Whipple: The fourth Persephone book by this wonderful writer; a 1943 novel that contrasts three very different marriages. Preface: Celia Brayfield

**57. The Hopkins Manuscript** by RC Sherriff: What might happen if the moon crashed into the earth in 1946: 1939 science fiction 'written' by 'Mr Hopkins'. Preface: Michael Moorcock, Afterword: the late George Gamow

**58. Hetty Dorval** by Ethel Wilson: First novel (1947) set in the beautiful landscape of British Columbia; a young girl is befriended by a beautiful and selfish 'Menace' – but is she? Afterword: the late Northrop Frye

**59. There Were No Windows** by Norah Hoult: A touching and funny novel, written in 1944, about an elderly woman with memory loss living in Kensington during the blitz. Afterword: Julia Briggs.

**60. Doreen** by Barbara Noble: A 1946 novel about a child who is evacuated to the country during the war. Her mother regrets it; the family that takes her in wants to keep her. Preface: Jessica Mann



# 'THE PHOTOGRAPH'

'I shall say I'm twenty-nine,' said Miss Timperley recklessly. 'And I shall have my photograph specially taken.'

The slip before her read: 'Mrs Geoffrey Nash, Les Fougères, Olney-sur-Mer, wants by beginning of next month governess for two children, one eight, one six. Elder child rather backward. Applicants must know French. As personal interview impossible, send photograph. Excellent references *essential*.' 'Dear Miss Timperley,' said the Knowall Teachers' Agency, in a covering note: 'We think your French and your references may secure this post for you. Please apply direct to Mrs Nash.'

'My references,' said Miss Timperley proudly, 'are certainly what Mrs Nash requires. There is *no* difficulty about *them*.'

And, indeed, there was not; masses and masses of grateful letters from parents lay locked away in Miss Timperley's jewel-box. Jane improved so much in your care; Tommy has now quite caught up with other boys of his own age; Mary never has those tempers now; we shall always be grateful for your handling of John – oh, there was no difficulty about references, or about Miss Timperley's ability. It was other things which made difficulties: one other thing, to be exact. Miss Timperley sighed as she

remembered what that other thing was.

She had been out of a job for three months now, since her last backward pupil had come triumphantly up to the mark and passed into a large girls' school; her bank balance was getting low, and somehow the outlook did not seem very bright. Usually Miss Timperley passed from one family to another, recommended as the person who had worked wonders with my sister-in-law's youngest, but this, quite by chance, did not happen this time, and Miss Timperley had been obliged to make the round of the agencies.

It was her reception there which had chilled her to the bone, lowered the hitherto dauntless flag of her courage. Her age, asked the agencies? Ah. Qualifications? Ah. Nobody wanted governesses nowadays, said the agencies, when these preliminaries were over; everybody sent their children to properly organised schools. And quite right too, agreed Miss Timperley; oh, they need not think she did not know all the advantages of work and play in common, she recommended school *always* for normal, healthy children; but there were some children, unluckier than the rest, who, by reason of some illness, perhaps, some misfortune, some

accident of heredity or environment, were not suited to the hearty rough and tumble of school life, some children who needed special care. Those were the children, said Miss Timperley proudly, to whom she could be useful. 'M'yes,' said the agencies doubtfully, and made a note. Most people who wanted governesses nowadays, they continued, wanted *nursery* governesses, bright, jolly young things to nurse the baby and play with the children to keep them quiet. And even those, added the agencies, in a desponding tone, were usually specially trained nowadays.

'I am not a nursery governess,' said Miss Timperley, sitting very erect, with two spots of colour on her faded cheeks. 'The profession is an excellent one, no doubt, and has important duties; but it is not mine.'

'No – no,' agreed the agencies, even more doubtfully, and made another note. 'Still, that is the position, Miss Timperley. However,' said the agencies, rising, 'we have your name, Miss Timperley, and will let you know immediately if anything turns up. Are you on the telephone?'

No, Miss Timperley's modest bed-sitting-room was not on the telephone; indeed, there was no telephone in all good Mrs Ladstone's house. But Miss



Timperley would call at the agency every morning about eleven, and then, if anything had turned up...

But nothing ever had. And by and by Miss Timperley began to perceive that the agencies thought her rather old for her job. They talked so much about young nursery governesses who, or young qualified school-teachers just out of the training college who, that some of the feeling they were too polite to put into words filtered through into Miss Timperley's by no means dull brain. At first she was indignant: the very idea! Then she began to wonder. She had already noticed how *young* most of the applicants she saw in the agencies were – really too young for any serious responsibility, she had thought, conscious of superior fitness. But were they really too young, or was she too old? She began to wonder.... And then one day the climax came. Something 'turned up' at one of the agencies, a post which would really suit her, they thought, said the agency with a bright, relieved air. Off went Miss Timperley joyously to an address in the suburbs, and had the door of a smallish house opened to her by a harassed, pretty girl – quite a child, thought Miss Timperley, far too young for so many household cares – with a baby in her arms and two other children clinging to her skirts. This young mother listened to Miss Timperley with a

rather perplexed air, and then suddenly exclaimed:

'Oh, I see! You've come after the post. I didn't understand at first. You see, I wanted someone young.'

The shock was rather severe. After a moment Miss Timperley managed to writhen her lips into a trembling smile; she stooped and caressed the eldest child's cheek with one finger and murmured: 'I see. A mistake, of course. I see.' The girl must have been struck by the expression on her face, for she added, hastily: 'I need someone who will help me in the house as well. It's not at *all* the kind of post the agency should have offered *you*,' she said, with a great deal of scorn for the agency and compliment to Miss Timperley. She also said: 'Would you care to come in for a moment, and rest?' But Miss Timperley declined; she was not at all tired, she said. (And she wanted to be alone.) After that she wondered no longer. She knew. And she did not go every day to the agencies.

And now, all of a sudden, this beautiful, this glorious chance! (Just in time, too. Of course, Mrs Ladstone would readily permit one to fall into arrears for a week or two, Mrs Ladstone was so good and kind, and particularly devoted to Miss Timperley because she came from her native Yorkshire; but then, that was just why one did not want to ask her.) Yes, here was this utterly delightful

opportunity. Miss Timperley was *sure* she was just the woman for the situation at Olney-sur-Mer, the very one. Her French. Her references. The backward child. Yes! the post *must* be hers. But Miss Timperley thought she knew why the agency sounded so doubtful. Well! She would say she was twenty-nine, and she would have a new, modern, young, almost coquettish – Miss Timperley smiled and bridled at the word – photograph taken. She could not afford it of course; but the thing had to be done. She put on her clothes with quite a rakish air, and betook herself to an expensive West End photographer.

At first everything was very disheartening. The beautiful young woman who received Miss Timperley in a room hung with blue velvet assured her that it was an *unheard-of* thing for Mr Angelo to take anybody's photograph without appointment. People made appointments *weeks* ahead. It was most improbable that he would even *see* her that morning. Young Mr Arnold Angelo perhaps might. . . No, Miss Timperley did not want young Mr Arnold Angelo, or anybody else except the head of the firm. It was important, she insisted, most urgent and important. She was so very emphatic and determined about this – for was not Olney-sur-Mer at stake? – that the beautiful reception clerk relented, and conceded that Miss Timperley



might wait for a few minutes while she, the clerk, saw what she could do. She left the room on this errand, and Miss Timperley wandered about, admiring the glossy visages displayed in elaborate show-cases and on the walls. None of them, she noticed, seemed to wear a frown.

'Does Mr. Angelo re-touch a good deal?' she demanded of a younger (and not quite so beautiful, though very nearly) assistant clerk who was addressing envelopes at a resplendent desk.

'A certain amount of re-touching is always necessary, madam,' replied the young thing haughtily.

'Ah!' said Miss Timperley in a superior tone, as if shocked by this practice. (But somehow she felt relieved.)

After ten minutes' agonising suspense Miss Timperley learned that she had had a great, an enormous, a quite colossal slice of luck. The reception clerk, her beautiful eyes quite beaming, came back to say that Lady-Something-or-other had telephoned to cancel her appointment, so that if Miss Timperley cared to wait a few minutes, Mr Angelo would be free, and would take her at once. Miss Timperley was delighted by this condescension on Mr Angelo's part; here was a piece of luck indeed! It showed that the stars were on her side; Olney grew perceptibly nearer.

'While you are waiting, madam, perhaps you would care to choose a style?' said the beauty, flipping over the pages of a large album.

'I don't like those green ones,' said Miss Timperley boldly. 'Nor the mauve.'

'No, madam,' acquiesced the beauty. 'Madam prefers sepia, perhaps?'

'Yes – yes,' said Miss Timperley doubtfully, not quite sure what sepia was. 'Oh! Yes! Sepia,' she decided. 'Like that.'

'What size would madam prefer?' inquired the beauty.

'What are the prices?' demanded Miss Timperley timidly.

The prices were enormous.

'I require only quite a small one,' ventured Miss Timperley timidly. 'Quite a small one, you understand.'

'Certainly, madam,' replied the beauty – so that Miss Timperley felt quite drawn to the girl. How wrong it was to think people unkind and cold because they were not very gushing just at first! This girl was charming. 'Like this, perhaps?' suggested charming girl.

The price was still very large, but what could one do? Think of Olney! This detail being settled, the beauty suggested that Miss Timperley should repair to one of the dressing-rooms and make herself ready to be photographed. Miss Timperley, disconcerted, looked questioningly at the girl.

'If madam wishes to change

her dress?' suggested the beauty. 'Or tidy her hair?' she pursued, reading Miss Timperley's horrified denial of dress-changing in her eyes.

Miss Timperley agreed to tidy her hair, and the girl led her up stairs and along corridors to a small room, very elegantly equipped and full of mirrors. 'This is very different from the practice in my young days,' thought Miss Timperley, glancing round. 'How wonderfully arranged everything is now! Don't go!' she cried in a sudden panic to the clerk. The girl waited with an expectant air. 'Tell me,' said Miss Timperley, in a voice which shyness muffled. 'Would you advise me to keep my hat on, or no?'

The girl's calm eyes took in Miss Timperley's hat. 'Without it would be best, I think, madam,' she said quietly. 'Madam's hair is so charming.'

Miss Timperley, soothed and flattered, turned to the glass; when she turned to the clerk again she was gone. Miss Timperley bolted the door with a little bolt she found and began to re-arrange her hair. She combed it this way, she combed it that, she looked at it from the right, she looked at it from the left; finally she powdered her nose. Then, feeling quite ready to face Mr Angelo, she sat down on the luxurious settee and picked up a copy of the *Prattler*. She read it through from end to end, then she combed her hair



again, then she read the *Prattler*.... Had they forgotten her altogether? Timidly Miss Timperley drew back the bolt and opened the door; she peered along the passage, but there was no one there. With a sigh, she bolted the door again and read the *Prattler*. Suddenly there came a loud thundering knock; Miss Timperley, terrified, fumbled hurriedly with the bolt; in half a minute, trembling like a fawn, she found herself in the presence of Mr Angelo.

He was an elderly man with white hair and a kind face; he asked Miss Timperley to sit down, and looked at her shrewdly. She for her part was busy gazing at the studio and its paraphernalia; such a high-up room, my dear, with a sloping glass roof, an enormous camera like a clothes-horse shrouded in black, and all sorts of the oddest wheeled screens – some white, some black, some possibly sepia.

Miss Timperley heard herself explaining the urgency of the photograph, and how important it was that it should be a good one. 'I should like it,' she said, 'to look' – somehow she could not bring herself to say 'young' – 'I should like it to look rather lively.' The photographer bowed his head in understanding and posed Miss Timperley, seated coyly upon an antique stool. An assistant – another beautiful girl – now appeared abruptly, stuck her head beneath the black cloth, and murmured something

to Mr Angelo. He, too, put his head beneath the cloth, then stood up and gazed with an uncomplimentary air at Miss Timperley.

'I hope I'm not a bad subject,' said she, uncomfortable.

'Oh, not at all, not at all,' said Mr. Angelo without conviction. He advanced to her with mincing footsteps, delicately moved her head sideways about a millimetre, and stepped back to look at the result. Then he took a little rubber bulb in one hand, and was just about to fire, as Miss Timperley mentally expressed it, when there came another murmur from beneath the cloth. 'Ah, yes! Just so!' said Mr Angelo. He snatched a large green curtain from a table and spread it on the floor before Miss Timperley. ('Quite Sir Walter Raleigh-ish' thought Miss Timperley.) 'To prevent the reflection from the floor,' explained Mr. Angelo kindly

Well! He took her like that, he took her like this, he brought up a purple light which sizzled, and placed it on a level with Miss Timperley's ear; he tilted the head, he adjusted the shoulders, he crossed and uncrossed the hands, he moved the stool about, he pushed the screens vigorously up and down the room – this part reminded Miss Timperley of a cricket match she had witnessed with her last employers. He was very competent *indeed*, reflected Miss Timperley gratefully, *no* one could have

taken more trouble, really. Of course, that was the difference between these really good photographers and the poor ones; and the photographs – for he took several – were sure to be splendid. Miss Timperley, harassed at the beginning of the sitting, felt tired to death before the end, but she continued to simper valiantly; it was *so* important, and the photographs were sure to be superb. As a special favour, a very special favour, Mr Angelo promised she should have the proofs the next day but one; and then, flushed and exhausted but triumphant, Miss Timperley found herself in the street.

The next day would have been rather dreary if Miss Timperley had not had the resource of telling Mrs Ladstone all about Messrs Angelo. But Mrs Ladstone's marvel at the wonders of the studio satisfied even Miss Timperley's longing for appreciation, and the day soon passed, and the morrow came, and the second post came, and the proofs came – Mrs. Ladstone brought them up specially, though she was busy making a pie when they arrived, panting up the four flights of stairs with cheerful zeal. Miss Timperley, excited, tore open the and took out the four reddish-looking proofs.

Oh God! Was she really like that? Was it she, that haggard, old, worn woman who looked out at her? Had she really that timid, nervous, incompetent air?



Did her hair really look so thin? Her mouth so fallen? Her eyes so weak? Oh, no! Oh, no! The photographs were bad, bad, bad! Yet Messrs Angelo ... No, they were bad! Yet Mr Angelo had taken such pains.... No, they were bad!

'They're not a bit like me!' cried Miss Timperley, in a high anguished tone. 'Not a bit!'

'Nay, lovey,' expostulated Mrs. Ladstone cheerfully: 'They're as like as life. Just your pleasant look, they have. They're right down good. It just shows,' said Mrs. Ladstone: 'I've allus said it paid to get the best, and it just shows.'

When she had gone, lumbering cheerfully down the stairs to resume the pie, Miss Timperley looked at the photographs again. Then she looked in the mirror, bending forward, scrutinising every feature, every line of her face, with merciless keenness. Yes! The photographs were good ones. The agency was right. The young mother was right. Miss Timperley was old.

'I shan't send the photograph,' panted Miss Timperley: 'I shall say I'm in the early thirties. I shan't send the photograph. I shan't.'

But suddenly Miss Timperley seized upon pen and paper, sat down at the table, selected the least repulsive of the four proofs. Her expression was not weak now, but high and resolved; for Miss Timperley had taken a decision. Was she, *she*, Captain

Timperley's daughter, to tell a lie, suppress the photographic truth? Was she to gain a position by deception? Was she so far beaten by life as that? No! A thousand times no! She might lose the post, she might never get a post again, she might starve, she might (which Miss Timperley thought worse) become a burden to her relations; but better that than a lie, a deception; better to starve than to cheat. 'Let us accept what life brings us and face it out,' said Miss Timperley, taking up her pen: 'Let us at any rate go down with our flag flying.' And in her beautiful, clear, upright hand, she wrote:

'Dear Madam, I wish to apply for the post of governess to your two children. I must tell you frankly that I am fifty-eight years of age.... I enclose an unfinished photograph.... As regards French... With backward children I have had considerable experience...my references...' Yours sincerely, Letitia Timperley.

And suddenly she wept, pressing her thin fingers against her anguished face.

A week later Mrs Ladstone again panted up the staircase, a letter between her floury fingers. 'It's from France, lovey,' she said.

Miss Timperley winced. There was no hope from France, she knew. She opened it wretchedly, and unfolded the sheet with spiritless fingers.

'Dear Miss Timperley (she

read), I think I had better explain my needs a little further. I am obliged to go to Marseilles at the end of July to meet my husband, who is returning from India on sick leave. He will have to stay at Marseilles some time to rest after the journey. You will understand that, though the children's *bonne* is good, I do not care to leave them alone in a seaside resort with her. I must have someone English, someone who speaks French well, and someone I can trust, to leave in charge of the whole household while I am away. In the circumstances I could not employ anyone young, and I think you are just the woman I require. Your references are excellent... your French... Doreen, born in India, a little backward... probably remain with me after my husband's return, as I shall be much occupied with him... four months at least... tickets... passports... boat... train... salary...'

The salary was enormous.

Miss Timperley flung herself on Mrs Ladstone's neck. 'It was the photograph,' she babbled between her happy tears, 'the photograph which did it! I should never have got the place but for the photograph!'

'I always said it were a good one' said Mrs Ladstone with conviction.

From Phyllis Bentley *The Whole of the Sky* 1935 © The Estate of Phyllis Bentley



# 'EVERY-WIFE AND EVERY-CHILD'

Several readers have asked about the picture on the cover of the 2004-5 *Persephone Catalogue*. William Rothenstein's 'Mother and Child' 1903 is, more than anything else, a painting of a domestic interior, which is one reason we chose it. It is unusual because it is not a bit sentimental. Yet it has a timeless quality rather like the woman in our Persephone logo (overleaf). She represents an unbroken line of women who cook, read, put their hair up, wear flowing clothes; we may be 21st century women but we are part of a line that has been before us and will come after us.

The Rothenstein picture is timeless because it alludes faintly to Dutch interior painters such as Vermeer and de Hooch, especially with the blue of the child's smock. (The child is a boy, John, the future Sir John Rothenstein, Director of the Tate Gallery from 1938-64, so it would not be appropriate to call it a dress.) As the art critic Roger Fry observed, Rothenstein had chosen 'the one most elemental and unchanging of all situations, the mother and child. One has only to think of how rarely, in all the hundreds of Dutch genre pieces, the theme occurs in any prominence, to realise how different, how much more ambitious Mr Rothenstein is than

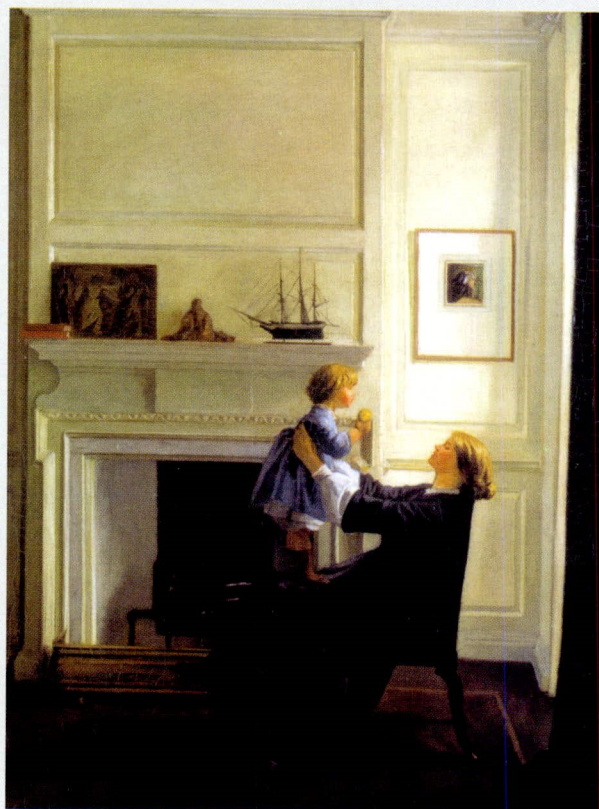
the Dutch masters.'

'Mother and Child' shows William Rothenstein's wife Alice with John in the first-floor sitting room of their house in Church Row, Hampstead; the fireplace is still exactly the same today as in the painting (the house is owned by a Persephone reader). Curiously, although we would nowadays consider the house to be one of the most beautiful in London, Rothenstein came to find it a drawback – it was too attractive. He wrote:

'At first I was happy about the house, with its panelled rooms, carved staircase and noble Queen Anne fireplaces. But I came to feel its very beauty had a defect; it was all too perfect, too stylish; for I was aiming at something more elemental than a Queen Anne interior. I was painting wife and child, and wished to suggest every-wife and every-child; and Queen Anne got in the way, while for portraits the light was too diffused.' After five years William and Alice moved to a red-brick Victorian house nearby (from which they

immediately removed all the decorative plaster work, which they considered fussy).

When this picture was exhibited the critics, as is their wont, got out their knives: one objected to the 'strong note of blue in the child's dress', another thought 'the faint green of the walls becomes sickly', another criticised the 'awkward lines and heaviness of handling'. Our view is that the picture is one of the most perfect C20th representations of mother and child we can think of.



© Tate, London 2004



# FINALLY

There are still some tickets left for *The First Persephone Annual*

**Lecture**, which takes place on Wednesday 5th October. Salley Vickers will talk about 'A Pride of Spinsters: Miss Pettigrew, Miss Garnet and Miss Ranskill.' This event will be at 6.00 for 6.30; wine and cheese straws will be served beforehand and afterwards. The lecture will take place just round the corner from the shop in the magnificent Art Workers Hall at the Art Workers Guild 6 Queen Square WC1 ([www.artworkersguild.org](http://www.artworkersguild.org)); tickets are £15 (from us).

There will be two out-of-London Persephone Christmas teas, one at Truro on Saturday 12th November and one at Sherborne on Saturday 26th November. Both are from 4-6. Tea and cake will be served, and a glass of madeira, and all our books will be on sale for £9 instead of £10. Nicola Beaman will give a talk and answer questions. The teas cost £5, please telephone the office to reserve a place and we will send the address of where the tea is to be held; this is a chance to meet other local readers as well as to buy our books.

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020 7242 9292

On Wednesday 2nd November there will be a lunch in the office from 12.30-2.30 at which Christina Hardyment will talk about *How to Run your Home without Help* by Kay Smallshaw, for which she has written the



Preface. All lunches cost £28 and take place at the office; there is room for twenty-five people.

We now sell *Persephone Postcards*, six views of Bloomsbury by Ann Usborne. These are delightful pen and ink and watercolour drawings of: Rugby Street and the corner of Lamb's Conduit Street; Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby's house in Doughty Street; Russell Square Station; St Pancras Church; The Foundling Museum; and Bedford Square. They are

fifty pence each, postage is free for more than ten. We also sell a small but beautiful selection of plain greetings cards with envelopes and can send a selection of ten for £15 post-free. The Persephone Fifty – our selection of books we wish we had published – is proving popular but can only be bought in person at the shop. And we now have an ever-changing stock of 'vintage' ie secondhand books supplied by David Griffith from his excellent bookshop in Great Ormond Street.

The November 2005 books are: *A London Child of the 1870s*, the classic 1934 memoir by Molly Hughes about her life as a child in Islington. The Preface is by the *New Yorker* writer Adam Gopnik, who has always been a great admirer of the book. The other Christmas book is *How to Run Your Home without Help*, a 1949 manual by Kay Smallshaw, formerly editor of *Good Housekeeping*, which told the newly-servantless housewife how to cope, and can be enjoyed nowadays both for its (rather rigorous) tips and its – to us – unintentional humour.

Lastly: to keep it in mint-condition we can now wrap any of our books in high-quality cellophane for a cost of 50p per book.

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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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TEL: 020 7242 9292 / FAX: 020 7242 9272

[sales@persephonebooks.co.uk](mailto:sales@persephonebooks.co.uk) / [www.persephonebooks.co.uk](http://www.persephonebooks.co.uk)