



THE PERSEPHONE QUARTERLY

Nº 28 Winter 2005

020 7242 9292

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OUR WINTER 2005 BOOKS

‘Some of the smartest lessons in how we live now are to be found not in government speeches or fashionable film releases, but in the small grey-covered books published by Persephone Books,’ wrote Andrew O’Hagan in the *Daily Telegraph*. ‘The volumes are usually lost classics of female writing; they promote the notion that understanding the past is a reasonable way to go about identifying the present, and I have been looking at their newest release as a way of getting a handle on the idea of British domestic bliss.’

The book he was looking at was *How to Run Your Home without Help* (1949), one of the two Persephone books for the winter of 2005-6. This, as its title implies, is a book about housework: we have republished it because, even today, it is extremely useful (Kim and Aggie of Channel 4’s ‘How Clean is Your House?’ would approve), it is a fascinating historical document, and, from the vantage point of sixty years on, it is a funny and at times

extraordinary bulletin from a vanished world. ‘The wartime overalls were off, the pinny was put back on – or, in many cases, worn for the first time, as the market in uniformed domestic help died away – and “a woman’s place” [the title of a non-fiction history of women’s lives in the twentieth century, Persephone Book No. 20] was understood for the next couple of decades to be in the home.’

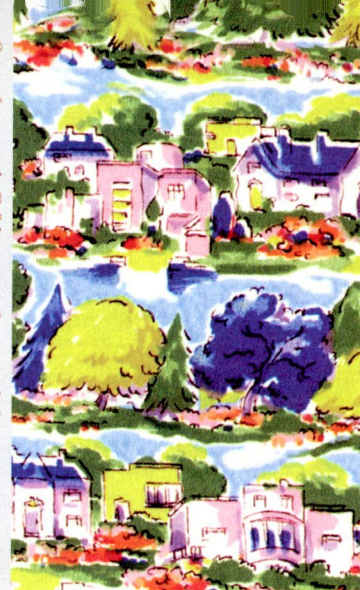
As a result, ‘lives that had been relatively leisured between the wars were now hectic with housekeeping’ says Christina Hardyment in her Persephone Preface: ‘*How to Run Your Home without Help* gives us a densely-woven background tapestry of the “domestic spider threads” that plague so many of the heroines of the women’s novels published by Persephone Books and offers an enthrallingly detailed picture of their duties: laundering techniques “from whites to smalls”, methods of darning,

bottling fruit, scouring pans and managing children’s tea parties. Reading about the relentless cleaning we can understand why, in Dorothy Whipple’s *Someone at a Distance*, her heroine Ellen’s hands were “as hard as cuttle-fish” from doing so much housework.’

Although the author of the book, Kay Smallshaw, was herself a career woman – she was editor first of *Good Housekeeping* and later of *Modern Woman* – she knew that she was in the minority and that most women were at home wishing that the new labour-saving machines were indeed more labour-saving and that pre-war standards could adapt to a post-war world. But this was not to happen for another twenty years; meanwhile Kay Smallshaw’s readers continued to keep up appearances and to go on running their homes to the standards of the time when they had both cook, maid and daily



‘Daisy’, an 1864 wallpaper manufactured by Jeffrey & Co of Islington



‘Riverside’, a 1946 rayon crepe dress fabric by the Calico Printers Association

help (the 1932 painting on the cover had become a portrait of unimaginable luxury by 1949.)

For many years the values encapsulated by *How to Run Your Home without Help* were 'mocked as a life of drudgery, but now they are fashionable again, with every other programme on weeknight British television devoted to how women might better clean their bathrooms or rule their kitchens in the manner of a domestic goddess' continued Andrew O'Hagan. 'Our cultural heroes at the moment are not the suffragettes or the bra-burners but those, such as Kay Smallshaw, "who left their bras to soak in warm soapy water for an hour or so before flat-drying them, then folding them away in a well-dusted drawer, preferably on top of a perfumed drawer-liner."'

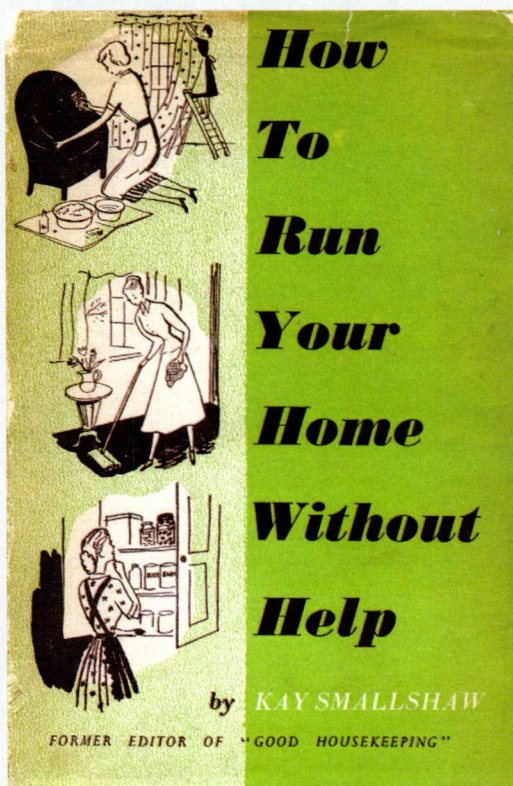
It's a fantasy of course. Most of us fulfil Katherine Whitehorn's classic definition of a slut – someone who removes clothes from the dirty linen basket in order to wear them again. But it's nice to think that we would soak our bras for an hour if we could. And presumably the reason for the success of Kim and Aggie is that millions of

television viewers would in theory like to follow their precepts and would echo Christina Hardymont's words when she concludes: 'I agree with Smallshaw rather than the feminists who rubbished housework so comprehensively in the 1970s: "Running a home may seem unspectacular and

this one is, may be of practical use; and if, as Andrew O'Hagan says, it tells us a bit about how we used to live as well as how we live now, that is all to the good.

'We were just an ordinary, suburban, Victorian family, undistinguished ourselves and unacquainted with distinguished people.' Thus Molly Hughes in her Preface to one of the great classics of autobiography, *A London Child of the 1870s* that she wrote in 1934 and that we reprint as our other Winter 2005 book. Molly Thomas, as she was then, had been brought up in Islington as the youngest of a large, characterful family. There was not a great deal of money and their life was indeed 'ordinary' but Molly Hughes gives the everyday existence of herself, her four elder brothers and her parents, a universality which makes this book quite unforgettable. In 1977 Benny

Green observed in the *Spectator*, when this book was first reprinted, that although London had utterly changed in a hundred years – 'the cobbles which Molly Hughes trod, the skylines she contemplated, the upholsteries which bolstered her, the very air she breathed,



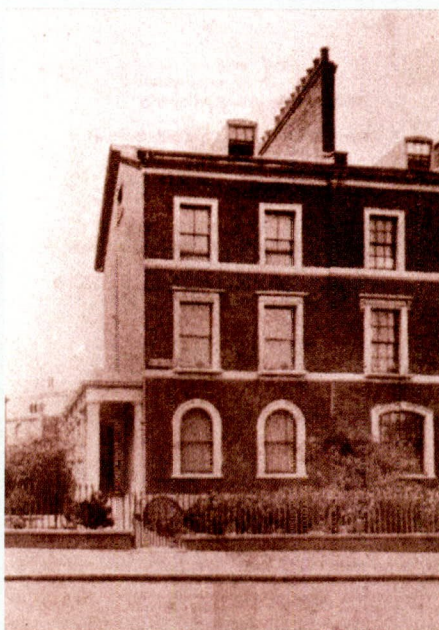
ordinary, but making a success of it, so that the home is a happy one for all who live in it, is creative work to rank with the best. Exhausting though it may be, it enriches the personality.'" Not everyone would go as far as this. But a witty and helpful book about housework, which

all are locked away from us for all time' – yet the reader is given 'an account of life so thorough, so felicitous, so unselfconscious, that vital details will be thrust into the foreground which we never quite thought of in that way before.'

A few years later, in an 'Enthusiasms' column in *The Times*, Sir Roy Strong called *A London Child* a classic account of a class and an era: in it 'there is an abundance of happiness and innocent fun; a truthfulness and a directness, together with an acceptance of life, its ups and downs, as seen from the viewpoint of a mid-middle class Victorian family living in a semi-detached house in the suburbs of north London.' As he says, it is Molly's pictures of everyday life which most stick in the mind: travelling by bus from Islington to the West End, making toffee in the afternoon, going to Cornwall on holiday, walking from Canonbury to St Paul's on Christmas Day, playing games with her brothers.

But it was not at all an easy life. 'The cradle rocks above an abyss' (remarks Adam Gopnik of *The New Yorker* in his Persephone Preface, quoting Nabokov) 'and the middle-class nursery is perched above a chasm of debt and dread...People who look at

Molly's work as narrowly nostalgic, or who imagine that she provides a view that is in some way "comfortable" miss the



1 Canonbury Park North in the late C19th

desperation of her subjects, or their real grace in the face of it. There is much that is comforting in Molly Hughes's writing, but nothing that is comfortable.'

We asked Adam Gopnik to write the Preface because he wrote a piece in 1987 (in fact it was only his second piece for *The New Yorker* – he is now one of their most valued staff writers) explaining why he and his wife had loved the book so much when they first came to live in New York a few years earlier. They used to read aloud to each other and 'of all our reading in

those years...the book we liked most was the most obscure: the autobiography of Molly Hughes [which] came to seem to us the most perfect and moving record of ordinary life in English.' In his profound and touching Preface Adam Gopnik reflects on returning to the book nearly twenty years later when 'my own ambitions, since those early years when Molly's writing reassured me so much, have narrowed enough to make me, in an irony I could not have imagined in those world-devouring days, hope to be no more than a faithful chronicler of another middle-class world and family life in another great and precarious city... I read Molly now not merely as a metaphysical occult "Other"...but as an end to be achieved, a writer to be imitated, a pattern to apply... Molly's book seems to me more painful now than it did when I first read it, but still finer as writing. Here is an ordinary life rendered truly, and joyfully, with a voice at once so self-abnegating yet so gay and funny and precise that we are reminded, in the end, of the one truth worth remembering, that there are no ordinary lives.' We are in complete agreement with Benny Green's verdict that *A London Child of the 1870s* is 'full of literary control: it is a work of art with the completeness which that phrase implies'. An ordinary-seeming book about ordinary lives is yet a work of art, a masterpiece.

OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

In the *Spectator* Charlotte Moore described *Hetty Dorval* as 'a psychological journey' that is 'reminiscent of Edith Wharton or of Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier*, but is clearer and prettier than either. Ethel Wilson sketches people and places with marvellous economy... *Hetty Dorval* has one of the most resonant and suggestive concluding sentences I've ever come across. It's a strange little treat.' And Elena Seymenliyska in the *Guardian* thought that Ethel Wilson's 'charming' novel 'told in a lovely sing-song voice... is immaculately written, and the author's letter to her publisher, politely rejecting most editorial changes, provides a fascinating appendix to a beautifully produced edition.'

In the *Observer* Rachel Cooke wrote a column about cookbooks that are read for pleasure not just for utilitarian purposes: 'The true joy of cookbooks lies not only in whether their recipes work. It also has to do with scholarship, social history, good writing and – most important of all – vicarious pleasure.' And she recommended some cookbooks that are useful 'but they also have an extra something that means you're as likely to be wearing pyjamas as an apron when you read them';

these included books by MFK Fisher, Jane Grigson, Claudia Roden and 'last, but not least, Agnes Jekyll's *Kitchen Essays*, in which she quotes Meredith and thus seems to sum the whole thing up: "When we let Romance go, we change the sky for the ceiling."'

In the *Spectator* Cressida Connolly said 'Despite its grim subject (an old woman, Mrs Temple, losing her memory) *There Were No Windows* is a quite extraordinary book... unflinchingly, blackly funny, brilliantly observed and terrifying... The book is set during the Second World War, in the London Blitz; servants are thin on the ground and, to Mrs Temple's dismay, fail to behave with the deference of yore... As well as describing Mrs Temple's demise, the novel thus gives a sly account of the end of an entire way of life.'

The Sunday Telegraph called *The Hopkins Manuscript* 'intensely readable and touching' while *The Tablet* decried its hero as 'a self-important little man called Edgar Hopkins, whose chief passion, apart from membership of the British Lunar Society, is breeding poultry: it is his reaction to the coming cataclysm, which is announced to the Lunar Society some seven

months in advance, that forms the main interest of the novel.... After the cataclysm, we are strangely taken by surprise, and it would be a great pity to reveal just what Sherriff does with his plot. Devotees of science fiction will like this book for its importance in the history of the genre, and those who enjoy a well-crafted novel will admire it for its panache. In addition (and the excellent introduction by Michael Moorcock makes this point), despite the fact that the moon crashing to earth is fantastic, most of its observations on human nature are timeless, and many aspects of its ending give us a parable for our times in the post-9/11 world. Sherriff is not just an artist but perhaps also a prophet as well.'

Fay Weldon chose *The Hopkins Manuscript* as one of her two books for Summer Reading in the *Observer*. She wrote: 'RC Sherriff wrote this spectacular, skilled and moving novel in 1939. It is supremely and alarmingly relevant to our life today.'

Finally, Jane Rye in the *Spectator* called Barbara Noble's *Doreen* 'a gentle, serious story in which, rather disconcertingly, everybody behaves well... The author's argument is scrupulously fair; she is observant, sensitive and intelligent.'

THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Persephone books make the perfect Christmas present for:

The newly-wed – Greenery Street (no.35)

The keen cook – Good Things in England (no.10), Kitchen Essays (no.30), Good Food on the Aga (no.45) or They Can't Ration These (no.54)

The ghost story enthusiast – The Victorian Chaise-Longue (no.6)

Someone fed up with contemporary fiction – any of the Dorothy Whipples: Someone at a Distance (no.3), They Knew Mr Knight (no.19), The Priory (no.40) or They Were Sisters (no.56)

The World War Two enthusiast – Good Evening, Mrs Craven (no.8), Few Eggs and No Oranges (no.9) or A House in the Country (no.31)

The dog-lover – Flush (no.55)

The mother – The Home-Maker (no.7), Saplings (no.16), Family Roundabout (no.24) or Hostages to Fortune (no.41)

The crime novel enthusiast – The Blank Wall (no.42)

Someone who needs cheering up – Mariana (no.2), Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day (no.21)

or The Making of a Marchioness (no.29)

The son or daughter who's just left home – How to Run Your Home Without Help (no.62)

The traveller – The Far Cry (no.33) or Every Eye (no.18)

The history enthusiast – William - an Englishman (no.1), A Woman's Place (no.20) or The World that Was Ours (no.50)



Gwen Raverat: illustration for 'The Runaway'

The child who's bored of Harry Potter – The Children Who Lived in a Barn (no.27) or The Runaway (no.37)

The poetry enthusiast – It's Hard to be Hip over Thirty (no.12), Consider the Years (no.22) or Lettice Delmer (no.36)

The husband – Little Boy Lost

(no.28) or Operation Heartbreak (no.51)

The ecologically-minded – They Can't Ration These (no.54)

The Bloomsbury Group devotee – Cheerful Weather for the Wedding (no.38), The Wise Virgins (no.43) or Flush (no.55)

The Londoner – Few Eggs and No Oranges (no.9), Bricks and Mortar (no.49) or A London Child of the 1870s (no.61)

The intellectual – Fidelity (no.4), Every Eye (no.18) or The Montana Stories (no.25)

The sci-fi enthusiast – The Hopkins Manuscript (no.57)

To slip in a Christmas

stocking – The Victorian Chaise-Longue (no.6), Cheerful Weather for the Wedding (no.38) or Hetty Dorval (no.58)

The architect – Bricks and Mortar (no.49)

The romantic – Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day (no.21), Brook Evans (no.26) or Lady Rose and Mrs Memmery (no.53)

The Persephone

Books devotee – why not order the entire set of all

62 Persephone Books? (£500 collected from the shop or £525 delivered by courier.)

All our books are available gift-wrapped with the message of your choice for £2 extra. We also have greetings cards for £1.50.

A CAUSE FOR DANCING

For those of us who find real joy in fossicking through publishers' catalogs, it's increasingly clear that it's the smaller, lesser-known firms who are producing some of the best books. This is certainly true when you talk about resurrected older works. There are so many books sitting on my shelves that haven't been in print for decades, but are easily as good as anything coming out today. When a publisher like Persephone Books comes along, dedicated to revitalising forgotten classics, it's a real cause for wine and dancing.

I'm certainly far from the first to shower deserving praise on Persephone, but I can at least feel smug about the fact that I've been reading their fine rediscoveries for almost as long as they've been producing them. They're lovely looking books, too. Sturdy paperbacks in uniform dove-grey dust-jackets, each with different endpapers and bookmarks to match. They don't just satisfy the reader but also the book-fetishist.

Every keen reader has their own idiosyncratic tastes, and one of mine is a particular enthusiasm for the numerous wonderful novels that came out of the United Kingdom from the 1920s to the 1950s. Some are still widely read today. Others undergo periodic rediscoveries,

and a scattered few stumble back into print. Others, though, seem almost completely forgotten, and the reason often has little to do with the quality of the writing.

This is where Persephone comes in. They focus principally on female writers, and the style and range of writers reminds me of the once-great Virago Modern Classics series, now heavily slashed since Virago was swallowed up by Time-Warner. Persephone remains resolutely independent, and is all the better for it. They have so far republished nearly 60 titles, all of which remain in print. Here I'd like to focus on three excellent novellas that are scattered through their selection.

Julia Strachey: *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding* (1932): Now this, this is the business! Beautifully written, every-word-counts stuff from a niece of the waspish and peculiar Lytton Strachey, it follows the interactions of a family on the wedding day of one of its daughters. That the marriage is unlikely to be a success is soon apparent, but that does not stop this from being a wonderfully funny book. Almost nothing of apparent importance happens, but you'll be thoroughly gripped. A demonstration of the value and power of the novella if ever there was one.

Duff Cooper: *Operation Heartbreak* (1950): The only novel by a renowned soldier, parliamentary minister and ambassador, *Operation Heartbreak* is the life story of a man who wants to be a soldier but who can't seem to get a war to fight in. Willie Maryngton is a surprising main character because, despite being such an idiot, he completely captures the reader's affection. He's something of a Victorian remnant trapped in the dead time between the world wars, plagued by hopelessly outmoded ideas of gentlemanly conduct and "honorable" warfare, desperate to fight but frustrated at every turn. The plain, unexcited style of the writing carries a surprising emotional weight, and the potentially unappetizing subject matter is made completely absorbing.

Marghanita Laski: *Little Boy Lost* (1949): If you ever need your heart wrung, this is the book to do it. Laski was a determined feminist and socialist who could write like an angel, and here she tells the story of a father's desperate search for his son in the ravaged France of 1945. It'll shatter you -- and that's a definite recommendation.

Written by James Morrison for www.bookslut.com, a website devoted to books

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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 WW1; 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 nightclub 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 WW1. 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). Afterword: 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 Memmory 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

61. A London Child of the 1870s by Molly Hughes: A classic autobiography, written in 1934, about an 'ordinary, suburban Victorian family' in Islington, a great favourite with all ages. Preface: Adam Gopnik.

62. How to Run Your Home Without Help by Kay Smallshaw: A 1949 manual for the newly servantless housewife full of advice that is historically interesting, useful nowadays and, as well, unintentionally humorous. Preface: Christina Hardyment

'GOOD EVENING, MRS CRAVEN'

BY MOLLIE PANTER-DOWNES

For years now they had been going to Porter's, in one of the little side streets off the Strand. They had their own particular table in the far corner of the upstairs room, cosily near the fire in winter, cooled in summer by a window at their backs, through which drifted soot and the remote bumble of traffic. Everything contemporary seemed remote at Porter's. The whole place looked as though it had been soaked in Madeira – the rich brown walls crowded with signed photographs of Irving and Bancroft and Forbes-Robertson, the plush seats, the fly-spotted marble Muses forever turning their classic noses hopefully towards the door, as though expecting to see Ellen Terry come in. The waiters were all very old. They carried enormous napkins over their arms and produced the menu with a special flourish from the tails of their old-fashioned coats. The waiter who attended to the corner table looked as though he could have walked on as a senator in a Lyceum production of *Julius Caesar*. Leaning protectively over them, he would say in a hoarse, fruity voice, into which Madeira seemed to have seeped too, 'The steak-and-kidney pudding is just as you

like it today, Mr Craven.'

Every Thursday evening, wet or fine, they would be dining in their corner under the bust of Mrs Siddons, talking quietly, sometimes holding hands under the tablecloth. It was the evening when he was supposed to have a standing engagement to play bridge at his club. Sometimes he called for her at her flat; more often they arrived separately. Out of all their Thursdays she loved the foggy winter evenings best, when the taxi-driver growled, 'Wot a night!' as she fumbled in her purse for change, when she ran coughing up the stairs into the plushy warmth and light and their waiter greeted her with a 'Good evening, Mrs Craven. Mr Craven's waiting at your table. I'll bring along your sherries right away.'

She would go over to their table, sit down, and slide her hand palm upwards along the sofa seat until his hand closed round it.

'Good evening, Mrs Craven,' he would say, and they would both laugh.

They always enjoyed the joke that the waiter supposed they were married. It went with the respectability of Porter's that any nice couple who dined together

continuously over a long period of time should be thought of as husband and wife. 'We're one in the sight of God and Mrs Siddons,' he said, but although she laughed, it wasn't a joke with her. She liked being called Mrs Craven. It gave her a warm feeling round the heart, because she could pretend for a moment that things were different and that he had no wife and three fine children who would be broken in bits by a divorce. He had long ago made her see the sense of this, and now she was careful never to make scenes or to sound the demanding note which he hated. Her value for him was to be always there, calm and understanding. 'You smooth me out,' he said sometimes. 'You give me more peace than anyone in the world.' She was a wonderful listener. She would sit watching him with a little smile while he told her all the details of his week. He often talked about the children. At her flat, standing in front of the mirror tying his tie, he would tell her proudly how clever eight-year-old Jennifer was, or how well Pete was coming on at school. On these occasions the little smile sometimes grew a trifle rigid on her lips.

They never went anywhere but

Porter's. In a queer sort of way, although he was known by name, he seemed to feel safe and anonymous there. 'None of the people one knows comes here,' he said, by which he meant none of the people his wife knew. More men than women ate at Porter's. Very occasionally he was greeted by a business acquaintance, who would nod and call across the room, 'How are you?' Then he would call back heartily, 'Fine! How are you?' but he would be a little uncomfortable all through the meal. If she slid her hand towards his knee, he would pretend not to notice, and he would talk in a brisk, cheerful way which, at a distance, might look like the kind of manner one would use when dining with a female cousin up from the country or a secretary one had kept working late and taken along for some food out of sheer good nature.

Sometimes she felt that she would like to put on a low-cut gown and go somewhere where there were lights and dancing, where she could walk in proudly, with him following her without taking a swift, surreptitious look round the room first to see who was there. But she knew how worried he would look if she suggested it, how he would say, 'Darling, I wish we could, but you know it's impossible. Someone would be sure to spot us. We've got to be careful – haven't we?' By now she had

learned exactly how to dress for their Thursday evenings. The clothes had to make her look beautiful for him, but they must be on the unadventurous side so that no one would cast an interested remembering glance from an opposite table. She often wore brown, and sometimes she had a funny feeling that she was invisible against the brown wall and the faded prints of the Prince of Denmark and the noblest Roman of them all.

When the war came, he got a commission in a mechanised regiment. Their Thursday evenings were interrupted, and when he got home on leave things were often difficult. There was a family dinner party, or the children were back from school.

'You know how it is, darling,' he would say ruefully on the telephone. But every now and then he sent her a telegram and came dashing up to London for a few hours. Porter's still looked the same except that most of the men were in uniform, and the old waiter always saw to it that they got their usual table. 'Good evening, Mrs Craven,' he would say shambling forward when he saw her. 'You're expecting Mr Craven?... Ah, that's fine. The pigeon casserole is just how he likes it today.'

They dined together just before he went to Libya. There were two men drinking port at the next table, one with white hair and beautiful, long hands who looked like a Galsworthy family lawyer, the other round and red.



*Lamb's Conduit Street and the corner of Rugby Street
by Ann Usborne, available as a Persephone Postcard*

'Don't think I'm being stupid and morbid,' she said, 'but supposing anything happens. I've been worrying about that. You might be wounded or ill and I wouldn't know.' She tried to laugh. 'The War Office doesn't have a service for sending telegrams to mistresses, does it?'

He frowned, because this sounded hysterical, and glanced sharply at the old men at the next table, who went right on drinking port and talking in their tired old voices.

'Darling,' he said, 'don't start getting ideas like that into your head. If anything did happen – but it won't – I'd get someone to let you know right away.'

She had a wild impulse to ask him how this would be possible when he would be lying broken and bloody, alone in the sand. With an effort, she remembered that he loved her because she was calm, because she was not the kind of woman to make scenes or let the tears run down her face in public.

'I know you would,' she said. 'Don't worry about me. Remember, dearest, you don't have to worry about me one little bit.'

'Good night, Mrs Craven. Good night, Mr Craven,' said the old waiter, hurrying after them as they went out.

A long time after he left, his letters began to arrive. They were not very satisfactory. He wrote in the same hearty style that he put on at Porter's for the

business acquaintances' benefit, and she had the feeling he was worried the censor might turn out to be his wife's second cousin. She worked hard at a war job and lost a lot of weight. The girl who washed her hair said, 'My goodness, aren't you getting grey!' and she longed foolishly to be able to tell her about it and get her sympathy. There was no one to confide in; all these years she had been so careful that she had hardly mentioned his name to anyone else. She went out with other people, but she imagined that she wasn't so amusing or attractive as she used to be and that they noticed it. She began to stay home most evenings, reading in bed or writing him long letters. Before he left, they had settled on various little code words which would give her an idea of where he was, so she was able to tell when he was up in the front lines or when he had gone back to Cairo for leave.

After a while his letters stopped, but she wasn't seriously worried at first. She knew that the mails were often bad; there had been long gaps before. But this time hard fighting was going on in Libya, and she had a terrible premonition that something had happened. She found that she could hardly sleep at all, and when she came home in the evenings, her hand shook as she put the key in the door. She made herself take the letters out of the box and look

through them very slowly. Afterwards she would go into the living-room, sit down, and stare blankly out of the window at the barrage balloons glittering in the late sunlight.

One evening she came in after a hard day's work, and as she stood getting the key out of her purse, she knew that there would be a letter or a cable waiting for her. She was so positive of it that she was tremulous with relief as she got the door open and stooped to the mailbox. There was nothing except a bill for a repair to the radio set. She stood, feeling cold and stupid, then she went swiftly to the living-room telephone and looked up a number in the book. As she dialled it and then listened to the bell buzzing, it seemed odd to her to think how many times he must have heard it ring through that unknown house.

When a child's voice, high, and carefully a little overloud, answered, she was slightly taken aback. She said, 'Is this Mrs Craven's house?' The child's voice said, 'Yes. This is Jennifer. Do you want Mummy? . . . I'll get her.'

After a pause she heard footsteps on a hardwood floor, and then a new voice said, 'Hello? Yes?'

She had thought out what to say, and she made her voice crisp and friendly.

'Good evening, Mrs Craven,' she said. 'I do want to apologise

for troubling you like this. You won't know my name, but I'm an old friend of Mr Craven's, and I've only just heard that he's in Libya. I thought I'd like to ring up and see if you've had good news of him.'

'Why, that's nice of you,' Mrs Craven said pleasantly. 'To tell you the truth, I've heard nothing very recently, but I try not to worry. He'll cable me when he has a minute. Judging by the papers, I shouldn't think any of them have a minute.'

'No, I don't suppose they have,' she said. She could hear the little girl calling out, as if to a dog. She knew that there were two dogs, and that there was French Empire furniture in the room, and on the mantelpiece stood a little Chinese figure in white porcelain with a scroll in its hand. She had helped choose it one Christmas. Mrs Craven sounded calm and unfussed. She could picture her standing at the telephone, smiling slightly, secure in the middle of her own familiar things, maybe watching the child abstractedly out of the corner of her eye while she dealt courteously with this well-meaning stranger.

The pleasant voice said, 'Luckily, I'm tremendously busy myself. That helps to keep one's mind off things, doesn't it? I'm so sorry, I don't think I quite caught the name.'

She mumbled a name that might have been anything and added lightly, 'Just someone Mr

Craven used to know a long while ago. Goodbye, Mrs Craven, and thanks so much. I hope you hear good news very soon.'

She hung up the receiver and sat for a long time without moving. Then she began to weep bitterly. The tears poured down her face, and she rocked her body backward and forward. 'I can't go on,' she sobbed, as though he were there in the room with her. 'I can't, can't go on. You'll have to break them up – I don't care. I just can't go on this way any longer.' She thought of his wife sitting in their home on the other side of town, and the contrast seemed too bitter to bear. All those years of Thursday evenings seemed like a pathetic game of make-believe – two children playing at house-keeping in a playhouse with three walls. After a while she grew quieter. She sat thinking of him, wondering whether, wherever he was, he would have had a sense of something breaking sharply in two, coming apart with a hum, like a snapped wire. Already she could feel the relaxed tension, as though whatever had been holding her taut all these years had suddenly gone limp.

Tomorrow she would write and tell him, but not now. She couldn't remember when she had felt so tired. She went into the bathroom to bathe her face, and then came back and began

taking off her dress. There was a brooch pinned at the neck, and she undid it and stood looking at it for a moment. It was a discreetly beautiful thing of dark, old garnets – diamonds, he had pointed out, were too likely to cause comment, and didn't suit her, either. She put down the brooch and finished undressing. Maybe, she thought, she would wait until after tomorrow to write to him, for she had a feeling that tomorrow there would be a letter from him. She was sure of it. She could see it lying in the mailbox, addressed in that small, neat, familiar hand. If it wasn't there tomorrow, it would be there the next day. She would go to Porter's for dinner, sit at their table, and read it over and over. 'Good news from Mr Craven, Mrs Craven?' the old waiter would say as he leaned protectively over her. 'Ah, that's fine, that's fine.'

She began to smile, but suddenly she closed her eyes for a minute. She had had a queer sensation of falling, of the room slipping away and of herself falling, falling, as one does in a dream, without being able to stop and without wondering or caring what lies at the bottom.

*First published in The New Yorker on 5 December 1942, republished in **Good Evening, Mrs Craven: the Wartime stories of Mollie Panter-Downes**, Persephone Books No. 8.*

OUR READERS WRITE

'The New House is a *tour de force*. It reminds me of Priestley's time plays, especially *Time and the Conways*: one family get-together on a particular day brings about the fracture of a lot of cosy make-believe about themselves and their relationships.' DT, London EC2

'Re Manja: what pain, what brilliance! Is it possible to get this incredible book onto A-Level must read? Has our world learnt anything?' EB, Oxford

'I enjoyed The World that was Ours enormously – it is an enthralling story and so very well written.' NL, Wadebridge

'The Village was a startling insight into English class structures as well as into the impact of war on all members of the community and the emergence of a new type of society – and also a compelling read. And I finally got around to trying Dorothy Whipple (*They were Sisters*) and can now understand why you keep coming back to her works – this was an unflinching look at a very ugly situation, at the destructive and self-destructive urges in the human psyche and at the heartening ability of some individuals to resist them. I read both these books on holiday and found them compulsively entertaining but never trivial,

elegantly written and humane – in fact typical of so many of the Persephone books I've read to date.' RR, County Wicklow

'I have been very moved – and really very shocked – by They were Sisters and had to read it straight through twice to get the full horror of Geoffrey's treatment of wife and children – I'm so glad we did not live then!'

SH, London NW3

'I am so pleased to have It's Hard to be Hip. I remember finding this by chance in a library in the '70s and taking it to work to share with my female colleagues. We laughed for days. Afterwards I could not remember the writer's name and I have been looking for another copy ever since. It is just as true and funny now as it was then.

The Far Cry was new to me but I liked it immensely, finding it perceptive and sensitive. I look forward to reading it again and that's a sure test.' DW, Leicester

'I was enthralled by The World that was Ours. Hilda Bernstein's account of life under apartheid in South Africa, with the insidious reach of its bans and laws designed to stifle every aspect of normal life is powerfully conveyed. There is an Orwellian feeling: abnormality becomes normality for those hunted and oppressed. The

"sinister games" played by the police would be absurd, if not so tragic. Hilda Bernstein is torn between loyalties: family or beliefs, leaving or staying. When escape becomes the only choice, the tension of her dangerous journey grips the reader every step of the way. The immediacy of her descriptions is chilling; her fear is like a "hand of acid" permeating her being. This is an extremely important book.' SW, Newcastle

'What a superb writer Ethel Wilson is! I could tell Hetty Dorval was her first novel: it didn't seem quite believable that Frankie by the end would let Hetty spend the night in her bed with her with so little fuss. But the characterisations are beautifully handled, and the revelations about Hetty's character and Frankie's ethical choices are done with real deftness. The chilling effect of the last sentences, which put the whole story into an entirely different context, fully reveal what a truly masterful writer Ethel Wilson can be.' JD, Portland, USA

'My Persephone Book Bag accompanies me to work every morning. It contains my lunch, an umbrella if rain looks likely and, of course a book (currently *Every Eye*).'

SS, Hertford

AN ITALIAN AT PERSEPHONE

I'm not having a very good time in London, and so one day I go out on my own, wandering about to try and understand it better. While I'm walking through Bloomsbury I notice a sign saying Dickens House, and I think, why not, at least why not look at the outside? But I can't find the house, nor can I find any other sign telling me where it is, but I do find a large children's hospital which I discover is the hospital that owns the rights to *Peter Pan*, and a park which would be just like any other park if it wasn't completely full of children; and if it didn't have a sign at the entrance saying 'No entry for unaccompanied adults' and an extremely tall black boy standing by the entrance and making sure that every grown-up who goes in is accompanied by a child. This is Coram's Fields, given by Captain Coram to the poor children who swarmed over London in the C18th. In front of the park there is a small street, next to a typically English pub with a wooden sign which has a painting of a lamb on it. I walk towards this and go along the street, which I see is called Lamb's Conduit Street, and here I find a little bookshop with a pearl-grey shopfront, white flowers in a vase and a dummy with a 1920s-ish dress on it.

Everything I can see is a bit unusual. The sign says 'Persephone Books' and inside there are old wooden bookshelves full of books the same pearl-grey as the shopfront. Press-cuttings make it clear that



'December' from Four Hedges by Clare Leighton

this is indeed a special bookshop which only sells books about women and that they publish them themselves. I am extremely curious and go inside. An old bell on the door announces my arrival. Everywhere there are open boxes full of books, piles of beautiful grey books, piles of books already wrapped with pink paper and grey ribbon. Wonderful. I ask for some information from a blond girl sitting at a computer and she explains that Persephone Books reprints books 'mostly by women

and about women', that all the covers are the same but that inside each one is different because each has an endpaper chosen to reflect the date of the book's publication and, to some extent, the theme. I begin to understand that they reprint books other publishers have taken off their lists and that they choose them in all sorts of different ways: one of the first books was brought in by someone to the shop, others have to be borrowed from the British Library to be reprinted because no copies can be found in circulation, others are suggested or lent by friends. They have a description of their publications and among its various points I see one thing which I love: it explains that for the summer they choose a book which will be a good choice to read under a sun-umbrella, for winter one which will be good to enjoy in front of a fire, which evokes its atmosphere – the most frank and unusual method of marketing imaginable. And so it was that I came across a very unusual bookshop as I walked through the streets of London.

Taken from an article in *Leggere Donna* (Milan) April 2005, translation Persephone Books.

FINALLY

There will be a *Persephone Tea* on Wednesday December 7th from 4-6pm, and a *Persephone Party* on Thursday December 8th from 6-8pm; both are at *The Persephone Bookshop* at 59 Lamb's Conduit Street London WC1. Nicola Beauman will give a short talk and answer questions; tea, madeira and Konditor and Cook mince pies will be served. The cost is £5 and all our books will be on sale for £9 instead of £10. Please telephone to reserve a place.

Christmas: we will continue to send out books until Thursday Decmber 22nd and will be open on the 23rd until 4 o'clock. Then we will close until January 3rd, when our opening hours will be from 10-6; in future we will close on Saturdays, except before Christmas. The shop will be closed in August, although the office will continue to reply to letters, phone calls and emails and to send out books by mail order.

We now have our own *Persephone Greetings Cards* with envelopes; these include paintings by Eric Ravilious, Harold Harvey and Joseph Southall. They are £1.50 each and we can send a selection of ten for £15 post-free. The shop also stocks *Persephone Postcards*, six views of Bloomsbury by Ann Usborne: Vera Brittain and

Winifred Holtby's house in Doughty Street; St Pancras Church; The Foundling Museum; Bedford Square; Russell Square Station; and Rugby Street and the corner of Lamb's Conduit Street (reproduced on Page 11). The cards are fifty pence each, postage



is free for more than ten. *The Persephone Fifty* – our selection of books we wished we had published – is proving popular but can only be bought in person at the shop. The *Persephone Book Bag* at £5 (purple hessian with round bamboo handles) and the grey *Persephone Mugs* at £10, £12 and £15 (designed by Annabel Munn) remain excellent presents. We also have a changing stock of 'vintage' books. Finally, in the very near future we shall be stocking a grey *Persephone Jacket* (in small,

medium and large) lined with the fabric used for Emma Smith's *The Far Cry*; and we will stock aprons, smocks and dressing-gowns in the *Far Cry* fabric.

The March 2006 books are: *The Woman Novelist*, selected stories by Diana Gardner: when we reprinted 'The House in Hove' in the *PQ* there was such a positive response from readers that we decided to reprint fifteen of the short stories in one volume. The other Spring book is *Princes in the Land* by Joanna Cannan, a 1938 novel rather in the same vein as *Hostages to Fortune*, about a mother bringing up three children, this time in Oxford itself rather than the Oxfordshire countryside.

Lastly: Our new website www.persephonebooks.co.uk will be up from early December. The clarity and ease-of-use of our site has always been much admired: now the time has come to add colour, pictures, and new features such as biographies of all our authors, a monthly Letter from Lamb's Conduit Street, and a Reading Group Column. Do take a look!

PERSEPHONE BOOKS
020 7242 9292

Printed by The Lavenham Press, Lavenham, Suffolk.

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

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