

# The Persephone Biannually

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*Elisabeth Reading 1911 by August Macke; he was 24 when he painted this portrait of his wife and would die at the Front in France in the second month of the First World War.*



# OUR BOOKS FOR SPRING/SUMMER 2016

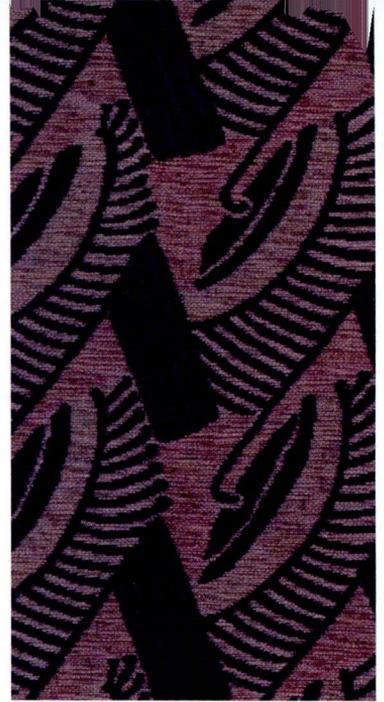
In 2008 Persephone Books published *Round about a Pound a Week* by Maud Pember Reeves, a ground-breaking study of working-class life in Lambeth in the early years of the C20th. Witty, readable, poignant and fascinating, ‘full of the kind of human detail that is normally only found in a novel’ (Persephone Catalogue), it came out in 1913, the same year the author’s daughter Amber Reeves (1887–1981) was writing her novel *A Lady and Her Husband*. This is now PB No.116 (and its publication is a first for us: we now have books on our list by a mother and a daughter).

Amber Reeves (Mrs Blanco White since 1909) had been one of the young women visiting the working-class families in Lambeth. It is thus unsurprising that her novel focuses on the social issues that had been preoccupying her mother. However, it is also a novel about marriage (hence its title): in a deeply sophisticated way it describes a middle-aged couple who love each other navigating round the rock of their differences.

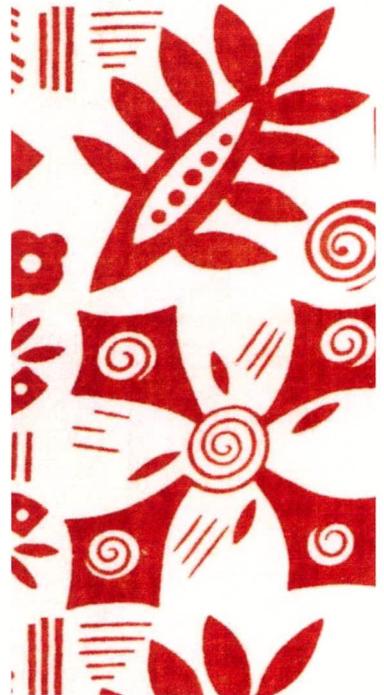
The plot is straightforward but unusual. Mrs Heyham’s daughter leaves home to get

married and suddenly she is left with no family and nothing to do (the servants ensure that she does no work in the house, for it would be another 25 years before middle-class women realised they could ‘run your home without help’ PB No. 62). The daughter, who is young and modern in outlook, suggests that her mother takes more interest in the family business. As Ford Madox Ford (author of *Parade’s End* and *The Good Soldier*) wrote in his review of this ‘very clever and very observant book’ in March 1914: ‘It shows us the household of a great employer of labour; a constructive genius in the realms of tea shops. He is honest, buoyant, persevering, unbeatable, and he gives the public excellent poached eggs, unrivalled cups of tea, pure butter, and wholesome bread.

‘His wife is just a normal woman, leading a sheltered life under the protection of her husband’s comfortable fortune. But when she finds an occupation in the study of her husband’s female employees in the tea shops, she discovers that these poor creatures are wretchedly underpaid; that they have to stand for too long hours; that



*‘Cracow’, a jacquard woven wool and linen by Roger Fry for the Omega Workshop 1913 © V & A used for A Lady and Her Husband.*



*A textile used for The Godwits Fly designed in 1941 by the New Zealand artist Avis Higgs b.1918 cf. avishiggs.com*

they have to eat their meals in damp cupboards. She meets a baby's nurse who says that women in this world have a poor time of it; she meets a secretary who says, "I wonder that any woman ever loved a man. They're ugly, they're greedy, they're coarse-minded. They've taken the whole world and made it theirs." In other words, she runs down the gamut of female miseries.'

'The most curious and interesting section of this

novel,' Margaret Drabble has written in a piece about Amber Reeves, 'comes towards the end, when Mary Heyham leaves home secretly in order to think things through. With a sense that "her intellectual life was only beginning" she takes a small flat in Chelsea, where, for a week, she battles with such works as *The Shareholder's Guide to Company Law*. And she is very happy in her flat, where nobody can find her. Far from being frightened by the solitude, she rejoices in it.'

(Indeed, Samantha Ellis in her *Persephone Preface* wonders whether this part of the novel might have had some influence on *A Room of One's Own*.)

**A** *Lady and Her Husband* is 'a really good novel about the cosseted middle-aged wife of a successful businessman who suddenly wakes up to the wage-slavery on which her quality of life is based' (the words put into the mouth of HG Wells in David Lodge's 2011 novel about him, *A*



*Maud Pember Reeves and her daughter Amber Reeves with Anna-Jane Blanco White in 1910*

*Man of Parts*; a quarter of the book is about Amber). Her novel is indeed extremely readable with a moving and insightful portrait of a marriage at the heart of it. Nor is the insight surprising, coming from a girl who gave the best college paper that the great classicist Gilbert Murray said he had ever read, who was even called 'brilliant' by the difficult-to-impress Beatrice Webb, and who was thought 'a girl of brilliant and precocious promise' by HG (his real words this time). Famously, he wrote about her in 1909 as the eponymous *Ann Veronica* in which he portrayed a 21-year-old bluestocking who studies biology, gets swept up in politics, but then at the end marries her older teacher, telling him; "I say, you *are* rather the master, you know."

HG and Amber Reeves had had a serious affair while she was still a Cambridge undergraduate, and he encouraged her writing; in fact in 1908 he tried to find a publisher for the short story now printed in this *Biannually*. Yet, as Samantha Ellis writes, in the novel Amber Reeves 'is also saying that no one has to be buried by marriage. She is proving Wells wrong. He couldn't let go of his idea that he was the most exciting thing ever to happen to Amber. *A Lady and Her Husband* shows that no one subsides for good. Mary Heyham remembers who she is, becomes brave again, and curious, and humane... The book is a quiet but brilliant retort to *Ann Veronica*.'

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For Persephone Books this is a New Zealand spring: both our new titles are linked by that far-away country. Amber Reeves was born there; during her childhood her mother took part in the campaign to give women the vote: in 1893 New Zealand was the first country in the world to do so. In 1896, when the Reeves family came to London, Amber was nine. Ten years after that the author of our second New Zealand book, Iris Wilkinson (1906–39), who wrote under the name Robin Hyde, began her life in Wellington.

She is nowadays bracketed with Katherine Mansfield as one of New Zealand's most important writers, yet we at Persephone Books had never heard of her, only coming across her work two years ago when we were in New Zealand. Our guidebook of choice was Duncan Fallowell's *Going as Far as I Can* and in it he describes finding *The Godwits Fly* (1938), 'one of the finest evocations of family life ever penned. Even when horrible things happen, the iridescence of the writing drenches the scenes with beauty. The text is rich food and mustn't be rushed. Robin Hyde often ventures into the surreal. Her morality is unconventional. It is not a family saga, she doesn't tell you a story – she tells you everything. There is an emotional completeness even to the most incidental characters which calls to mind DH Lawrence in his earlier, Nottinghamshire works. The second half, recounting the heroine's more independent

involvement with the world around her, held me more, and yet I have less to say about it. The book builds to a powerful climax, before dipping in subtle resolution.'

*The Godwits Fly*, PB No. 117, is a semi-autobiographical novel spanning the years 1910–28. In some senses a *bildungsroman*, it is the story of Eliza Hannay growing up in a suburb of Wellington. Robin Hyde added a short Foreword which begins (in a tone that makes the reader think it is mid-sentence, thus instantly drawing them in): 'But many people do not know what a godwit is. And it is true, too, that the godwits, flying north, never go near England. They fly to Siberia. Most of us here are human godwits; our north is mostly England. Our youth, our best, our intelligent, brave and beautiful, must make the long migration, under a compulsion they hardly understand; or else be dissatisfied all their lives long' (the godwit is the same metaphor for New Zealanders as Moscow is for the three sisters in Chekhov).

Robin Hyde had an English father and Australian mother. All the time she was growing up the lodestone in their household was England. Indeed, the quotation we have used on the bookmark alludes to this: to the heroine Eliza's mother always having longed to go to England but then she married and had three children 'instead of finishing up in London'; and her

father, 'though he had been in England at school, and would show them pictures of forests and cottages if he felt in the mood, said, "Curse your bloody British Empire", when he was angry.'

So, in another life, Robin Hyde would have been English and an important English writer. Yet *The Godwits Fly* has been out of print in the UK since it was first published here in 1938, and indeed was out of print in New Zealand until 1970; only after that did Robin Hyde start to be rediscovered. One reason for this was the circumstance of her life and death. She left home at 17 to be woman's editor on a newspaper; beginning her vast output of journalism (vast given she died when she was only 33). Her lover Harry Sweetman (Timothy Cardew in the book) went to England but died there; Robin Hyde had an illegitimate baby who died at birth – she took his name when she began publishing – and a second baby who was fostered; a knee injury in 1924 resulted in a botched operation and a lifetime of pain. All these traumas led to a suicide attempt and she went to live – and write – in a cottage in the grounds of Auckland mental hospital. Her first book came out in 1929: nine more would follow over the next ten years. She travelled in China and in 1938 arrived in England. Here she spent periods in hospital and stayed with friends but eventually, in August 1939, in the attic of 1 Pembridge Square, Notting Hill Gate (the ground

floor is now the public library) a suicide attempt was successful. It was a week before the outbreak of war and few had time to honour her; during the post-war period she was forgotten.

The biographer Ann Thwaite (who was also born and brought up in New Zealand) says in her Persephone Preface: 'In this 21st century, Robin Hyde's writing has been restored, by a number of mainly feminist critics, to an important place in the brief history of New Zealand literature... as a poet of "compelling lyrical, political and philosophical knowledge".' And *The Dictionary of New Zealand*

*Biography* comments: 'The volume, range and originality of Robin Hyde's writing has only recently been recognised. She offered a piercing personal vision of an inner life, yet also conveyed a strong sense of place and an understanding of the historical forces that shaped her world. As one who had suffered personal loss, illness and poverty she identified with the dispossessed, and in a hostile world longed for community and reintegration. As a portrait of a young girl's life, as an introduction to a great but neglected writer, as an evocation of life in New Zealand during the 1920s, *The Godwits Fly* is unique.'



*Robin Hyde in 1938*

# LYONS TEA SHOPS

In *A Lady and Her Husband* Mary Heysham finds herself the joint owner of Imperial Refreshments, a chain of respectable and well-designed tea shops, developed and managed by her husband, and paying their young waitresses eleven or twelve shillings a week. It was written at the time when J Lyons was expanding its group of tea shops into an essential part of London, and British, life.

When J Lyons opened its first tea shop in Piccadilly in 1894 it caused a sensation. 'Queues formed early and customers waited outside on benches thoughtfully provided by the management. At times the crowds became so excited that police attendance was required' (Peter Bird *The First Food Empire*).

The Lyons tea shops were not the first. Since the 1860s the Aerated Bread Company (ABC) had opened tea shops for city workers, but they were 'shabby' and 'rudimentary'. From the 1880s Pearce's Coffee Bars provided a mug of coffee or cocoa for a halfpenny, as well as free newspapers, but the smoky atmosphere deterred most women. At the same time Lockhart's Cocoa Rooms offered snacks and confectionery (a large cheesecake for a penny). At Harris's restaurants there were sausages, but no drinks, and customers had to stand against a wooden ledge. By contrast,

Buszard's tea room in Oxford St catered mainly for the aristocracy. But in general the coffee shops and eating houses did not cater for women.

Lyons's original business was catering for exhibitions, but one of its founders, Montague Gluckstein, saw the opportunity to open a chain of tea shops of quality, value for money, and low prices – in attractive surroundings, with polite and dignified service. 'Tea, instead of being made in the morning and kept hot for much of the day, was freshly made for each customer.' The interiors were in the French style of the Louis XVI period, and the fascia embossed in pure gold leaf on a white background. Favourite dishes were mutton pie, French pastries and apple tart. By 1900 there were 37 Lyons tea shops in London and the chain soon grew elsewhere. The peak year of expansion was 1910, when twenty-four tea shops opened.

By 1921 Lady Angela Forbes was writing in the *Daily Mail*: 'Today the Lyons tea shop is everywhere. For the business girl, not only in the City but in every part of London, the nearest tea shop is not far away. The girls who crowd into the tea shops at midday no longer need the protection of a room reserved for their sex alone. They share a table with men as naturally as they take a seat – or strap – in tram and tube.'

Initially waitresses were selected for their poise and deportment as much as for their waiting talents. They were generally tall, unmarried and in their late teens or early twenties. They wore high-necked, ankle-length, dark-grey dresses. Working hours were long – often seventy-four hours a week of standing and walking, and staff turnover high. Most waitresses were paid 10s to 12s 6d a week, and tipping was discouraged.

In 1909 Nell Bacon was appointed chief superintendent of all tea shop staff. She had joined Lyons at 17 in 1897 and became a tea shop manageress in 1903. She was strong, austere and enforced Victorian discipline. As chief superintendent she was responsible for over 10,000 staff at any one time, and over half a million waitresses passed through her charge. She initiated a staff training school in 1910 and played an active role in regular refashioning of the uniforms (including the 'Nippy' look of the 1920s). She was associated with Lyons for more than 60 years.

Efforts to improve wages at Lyons were not too successful – apparently the profit on each meal was only a farthing. Back in 1895 waitresses organised a one-day strike, assisted by the leader of the dockworkers, but the outcome simply consolidated a guaranteed but low take-home wage. Later, in 1920, five hundred tea shop staff became

members of the United Catering Trades Union, and initiated a strike about an allegedly unfair dismissal. The 'Storm in a Tea Cup' strike lasted two days, but those who refused to return to work were dismissed, and there was a long queue of applicants in Shaftesbury Avenue for the jobs which became vacant.

Lyons tea shops did well in the 1920s, but were to suffer from the depression of the 1930s, and then in WWII lost many of their staff to war work and had to go self-service. Lyons still operated

120 tea shops in 1969, when they tried to rebrand them as Jolyon restaurants ('old Jolyon' in the 1960s TV *Forsyte Saga* was played by Kenneth More). But it didn't work, and the last Lyons tea shop closed in 1981.

The challenge of social and employee welfare for employees who had to stand all day and which Mary Heysham addresses in *A Lady and Her Husband* was to be picked up twenty years after it was published when, in 1934, Simon Marks of Marks and Spencer appointed

Flora Solomon to initiate a Social Welfare Department for their saleswomen – canteens, chiropody, medical support, sports clubs (cf. her autobiography *From Baku to Baker Street*).

Now Lyons is a brand name for coffee bags, a key part of morning refreshments for the team at Persephone Books. And the founders' genes live on in Nigella Lawson, a descendant of the original families, the Glucksteins and the Salmons.



*A rare view of the inside of a tea shop c. 1920. Situated on the corner of 321 Oxford Street and Dering Street, it opened in January 1907. The cast iron framed tables with marble tops were discontinued soon after this picture was taken as they were found to be too heavy to move for floor cleaning. Cf. *The First Food Empire: a history of J. Lyons & Co.* by Peter Bird p109.*

# OUR BLOGGERS WRITE

‘RC Sherriff is a fine example of a writer whose work deserves a renaissance. I read *The Fortnight in September* a couple of years ago, and was completely enchanted by it. *Greengates* has a similarly quiet, gentle wisdom; a sense of the old world giving way to the new; and captivating emotional integrity. In an effort to rekindle their marriage Tom and Edie Baldwin decide to move to the country. It sounds like a simple enough premise, yet Sherriff turns it into something brimming with humanity. The early chapters are shrouded in this delicate, profound melancholy, and you sense that a very real threat of tragedy hangs in the balance: this isn’t just a grim retirement, it is life itself fighting for survival. For most of the novel, it is by no means certain that he will succeed in finding a better life, and his faults – the trace of snobbery; the self-doubt; and the impatience with Edie – remain intact. Ultimately that’s what makes him such an exceptional character. He is entirely ordinary, but for the fact that he and his wife continue to strive for something finer.’ Shiny New Books

‘*No Surrender* by Constance Maud is an absolute page-turner written at the height of the women’s suffrage movement in 1911. Emily Wilding Davison said that this novel ‘breathes the very spirit of our Women’s Movement’ and I would recommend it to

anyone wishing to get a sense of the characters and events of the struggle for female suffrage. It interweaves the story of a working-class mill girl who joins the movement with stories of the better-known ‘posh bird’ (technical historical term) side of the movement. In the character of the mill girl’s love interest, it also casts a light on those parts of the emerging labour movement that failed to support the women in their fight. There are parts of this book that feel tame, but the forced feeding scene (far too pleasant a term for what was essentially torture) is brutal and the closing scene with the women marching down Piccadilly is glorious.’ Brontes Page Turners

‘For Tom Baldwin and his wife Edith in *Greengates*, retirement brings first freedom ... and then panic. Tom begins to regard his retirement “as a marooned man might think as he calculates the time his food will last”. In delightfully well-crafted sentences and highly original imagery, Sherriff explores his themes of retirement, the need for a purpose in life and home ownership – as a burden or an adventure. The old house and the new house are almost characters in themselves.’ Passengersintime

‘If you like E F Benson’s petty bitchery, and the psychological dissection of Barbara Pym’s novels, you will love *Vain Shadow*, a perfect, brilliant novel about

crumbling boundaries between classes, sexes, generations and traditions which is a complete pleasure to read. Jane Hervey exposes the selfish expectations of entitlement that her characters display. But this is not a novel in which the servants and tenants are agitating at the barricades, it is a novel of domestic bullying and misogyny. Hervey’s technique to expose the characters’ inner, truthful and often deeply selfish selves is to interject their thoughts as a commentary to what they actually say out loud. *Vain Shadow* is relentlessly feminist and also powerfully socialist.’ KateMacdonald

‘At face value *Greengates* (1936) is an enormously readable novel about Tom Baldwin who retires from his job with an insurance company and settles into his suburban life. But the stories of the Baldwins’ two houses – Grasmere and Greengates – represent the way time has moved on in the country before and after WWI. Grasmere is a dark and steadfast old house, rooted in the past, where nothing has moved with the times. *Greengates* is brand new, fresh and full of promises for the future. The furniture within the two houses, the journeys between them, the people who surround them... all of these factors represent the passages of time and of the British tradition of resistance to change. RC Sherriff writes with such wonderful eloquence. He

has fantastic turns of phrases that are at once very neat and precise, while also being beautifully descriptive and evocative. It's hard to explain why a novel about a couple of retired folk buying a house should be so compelling to a woman in her mid-30s but *Greengates* truly is.' MadamJMo

'*The Village* is not so much a character study as a very acute and overtly political piece of writing, which lays bare the more ludicrous elements of the British class system as it stood at a crossroads moment. At the heart of this broiling story is a relationship between two younger residents whose relatively innocent desire to be with each other stirs up a furore of gossip and indignation. A union between the two classes is unthinkable to the gentry on the hill, the thin edge of the wedge. But actually, they've got their eye on the wrong wedge altogether. The real threat to their superior status is not the risk of being made a "laughing stock" in the eyes of the lower orders, but in their loosening economic hold. Their worth is rapidly diminishing, gentility no longer enough to set them apart. Laski tells an engrossing story. While so many aspects of the entrenched gentry views are odious to us now, laughable even, Laski paints its adherents to some extent as victims themselves. There is one negative aspect about the Persephone novels: they end. I've read so many of them and invariably reach their final pages with a little flutter of sad panic.' HAFerdinand

'Having her husband around all day every day is driving Edith and their old servant crazy. "It was funny how Tom seemed to think that because he had retired, she had retired, too." When they sell their house and auction off all their furniture, the new house turns out to be all they hoped and they again have purpose and enjoy life. *Greengates* enchanted me. I love Sherriff's writing style, too. "The room was at its best in the winter warmth, for the sun had a way of pointing out things that the standard lamp forgave." "It was a doeful clock at the best times, but it looked at its worst at 6.25, when its hands gave it a dreary, drooping moustache." "A high wind one night unravelled Mr. Baldwin's leaf heap and restacked it against the kitchen door." Planet Joan

'I found *Few Eggs and No Oranges* a really interesting and engrossing read. Not everyone is born to be a diarist, but Vere Hodgson draws us straight in: even when she is writing about some of the smaller things that might initially seem less interesting, they become more and more fascinating as we realise the little things often meant the most (like the lack of eggs mentioned in the title). My reading tip is to spread it out over a longer period of time as you cannot read it like a novel, even if the 600+ pages have a wonderful warmth that some diaries can lack.' Savidge Reads

'Sometimes, but not often, a novel comes along which

makes the rest of what one has to review seem commonplace. Such a novel is *Every Eye*," John Betjeman said in the *Daily Telegraph* on its first publication. When the book opens, Hattie is a 35 year-old woman, recently married to a younger man and they are about to go on honeymoon to Ibiza. Hattie is uncomfortable for most of the trip and doesn't enjoy the time with her new husband: her scepticism and negativity stay with her at a time when she should be at her happiest. But Isobel English makes the point that it really does not matter what age two people are when they fall in love. If there is kindness and caring and tenderness in a relationship then age is irrelevant.' TheBookBinders Daughter

'*Family Roundabout* is a well-written, critical observation of domestic drama and complex familial relationships. Mrs Fowler silently witnesses the trial and tribulations of her family. Mrs Willoughby rules hers with an iron hand. At the end of the story they have a remarkable conversation about family troubles recurring at cyclical intervals, almost like a constantly moving roundabout. Each of the characters and their relationships are described with remarkable clarity. Foibles in human character are acutely observed. None of the characters are perfect. They are all remarkably human and awaken the sympathy of the reader.' BagFullOfBooks

# CONSEQUENCES

‘Oh, Alex.’ I suspect every reader of E. M. Delafield’s *Consequences* (1919) has said this aloud at least once. They may have said it in sorrowful sympathy; they may have chuckled at it knowingly; they may have shrieked it in exasperation. They may have varied its emphasis. But they will probably have said it, as I have, in a range of tones and volumes. It is one of the most frustrating books I know.

My copy is now battered; it has been flung down many times. It probably says something damning about me that I read it at least once a year. I am in good company, however, as the introduction to my edition notes that *Consequences* was Delafield’s favourite. A photograph of her in the 1930s reveals a seated but determined-looking figure sporting the most fabulous homburg hat. The resonance between this quietly certain figure and her complicated, tentative book is not immediately obvious, but in the figure of Alex the author created something extraordinary. To read *Consequences* is to give yourself over to a series of small irritated explosions: ‘Oh, Alex’ inevitably gives way to ‘Why, Alex?!’

Alex: shy, awkward, so fixated by her lack of confidence that when it makes a rare appearance she overwhelms and domineers completely. She has five emotional states: rattling over-exuberance, peevish

jealousy, sick dismay, worshipful adoration and utter inertia. She is ‘incapable alike of asking or of bestowing in moderation’. Her ability to observe convention is non-existent. She makes no friends; she breaks off her hard-won engagement. She enters convent life; finding nothing there, she leaves a decade later determined that the family who offered nothing years earlier may do so now. Inevitably they do not.

*Consequences* is a novel that explores in painful detail what it is to be someone who not only fails to reach the ideals of her class, but cannot even appreciate that they exist. Faced with any choice at all, Alex’s choice is always the wrong one. Not a bold wrong, mind; not a devil-may-care rebellion. No, Alex is destined to fail in a million small ways.

Any of us who has ever put our foot in it or made the wrong choice will find at least one instance where they sympathise deeply with Alex – and this is the novel’s cleverest trick. The system against which she struggles is as hateful and pointless as Alex herself can be. Sent to school with the maxim ‘friendly with all, familiar with none’ ringing in her ears, Alex proceeds to lavish ‘inarticulate, unreasoned adoration’ on individual girls. Each love object is regarded with blind wonder, and with fatalistic apathy Alex wordlessly accepts the fact that they ignore her.

The adult beauty Alex expects to attain in her débutante season never materialises. Instead, the white dress that is supposed to bring about a transformation merely emphasises her red elbows, thin neck and rounded shoulders. Where Alex had been led to expect wonder, success and romance, the Season itself is a round of dull dinners and awkward dances. Alex never attains social confidence and, in consequence, never finds peace.

Annoying as I find Alex (and I do: oh, I do) I can never bring myself to condemn a young woman whose only real failing is to have less-than-perfect looks and an inability to make small talk in a drawing room. Why blame Alex for failing to land a husband when the real blame must fall on a society that will not allow her to earn a living and which passes family fortunes to the boy children only? Why exact such a terrible toll? ‘I never asked to be born’ is the most teenage of cries but in Alex’s case, it takes on reverberations that stay with the reader. Looking at the copy beside me now, it strikes me that placing *Consequences* at No.13 on the Persephone list probably wasn’t an accident.

*This extract is taken from Louisa Yates’s article on Consequences, PB No.13, which first appeared in Issue 48 of the magazine Slightly Foxed which we sell in the shop.*

# PERSEPHONE IN WINTER

## Chrysanthemum

See that dishevelled head,  
Its bronze curls all undone?  
I am that one,  
The stubborn slattern of your  
garden bed;  
No sweetness for you here, but  
bittersweet  
Admission that my hour must  
needs be fleet;  
A frosty tang of wit, an autumn  
face,  
Perchance the memory of some  
sharper grace,  
That shone beneath the imperial  
yellow tiles  
Nor needed stoop for princely  
sulks or smiles;  
Tatterdemalion courage here, a  
ghost  
To captain some obscure,  
defeated host . . .  
Many the springtime maidens,  
crisp as snow . . .  
Yet, hapless sir, we know  
Your fate . . . to love me most.

## In the Lane

I'd like to forget now, just for the  
one clear minute,  
Or more, if my querulous heart  
would let me be,  
Life and everything in it  
Save this. Once on a day, under  
a crab apple tree  
Stood an old white horse with a  
velvety Roman nose,  
And a child reached up to pat  
him – ah, warily!–  
Since lately she'd met with a rose  
Of damask petals, and fiercely  
indignant bee.  
But the old white horse liked

apples. He stood as still,  
Munching them there, as the  
shadows brushed on the hill  
In glades of amber and purple.  
The faint wet tang  
Of macrocarpa leaves crept into  
her heart.  
There was the world, apart  
From all but an old white horse,  
a child, and a thrush that sang;  
It might have been something of  
Schuman's; the child didn't  
know –  
Far happier so.  
There was no harm in that – in

stroking a velvety nose,  
Hearing the crunch of apples,  
looking at leaves in the lane.  
No clever, treacherous torture, to  
work in the brain –  
Everything simple and plain,  
A bright-edged beautiful peace,  
that loves you and goes –  
*Lie quiet. Perhaps, if you're still, it  
may come again.*

These two poems by Robin Hyde  
come from her 1937 book of  
poetry *Persephone in Winter*.



*Two terracotta Third Century figurines Alexandria Museum*

# THE PERSEPHONE 117

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

2. **Mariana** by Monica Dickens This funny, romantic first novel, which came out in 1940, describes a young girl's life in the 1930s. Preface: Harriet Lane **Also a Persephone Classic**

3. **Someone at a Distance** by Dorothy Whipple 'A very good novel indeed' (*Spectator*) about the destruction of a formerly happy 1950s marriage. Preface: Nina Bawden, R4 'Book at Bedtime' **Also a Persephone Classic**

4. **Fidelity** by Susan Glaspell 1915 novel by a Pulitzer-winning writer brilliantly describing the effect of a girl in Iowa running off with a married man. Preface: Laura Godwin

5. **An Interrupted Life** by Etty Hillesum From 1941–43 a woman in Amsterdam, 'the Anne Frank for grown-ups', wrote diaries and letters: they 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' ninety years before. Preface: PD James

7. **The Home-Maker** by Dorothy Canfield Fisher An ahead-of-its-time 'remarkable and brave 1924 novel about being a house-husband' (Carol Shields). Preface: Karen Knox **Also a Persephone Classic**

8. **Good Evening, Mrs Craven: the Wartime Stories of Mollie Panter-Downes** Short stories first published in *The New Yorker* from 1938–44. Five of them were twice read on R4, and on R7. Preface: Gregory LeStage **An unabridged**

**Persephone audiobook read by Lucy Scott. Also a Persephone Classic**

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 'One of the great English cookbooks, full of delightful, delicious recipes that actually work.' Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall

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, weary and wise 1960s poems about marriage, children and reality. Preface: author

13. **Consequences** by EM Delafield By the author of *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, PB No. 105, this 1919 novel is about a girl entering a convent after she fails to marry. Preface: Nicola Beaman

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 Funny, observant, bleak 1947 short stories, twice an *Evening Standard* bestseller. Preface: AN Wilson

16. **Saplings** by Noel Streatfeild A novel by the well-known author of *Ballet Shoes*, about the destruction of a family during WW2; a R4 ten-part serial. Afterword: Jeremy Holmes **Also a Persephone Classic**

17. **Marjory Fleming** by Oriol Malet A deeply empathetic novel about the real life of the Scottish child prodigy who lived from 1803–11; translated into French; a play on BBC 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 A 1934 novel about a man driven to committing fraud and what happens to him and his family; a 1943 film. Afterwords: Terence Handley MacMath and Christopher Beaman

20. **A Woman's Place** by Ruth Adam A survey of women's lives from 1900–75, 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; now a film with Frances McDormand and Amy Adams. Preface: Henrietta Twycross-Martin. **A Persephone audiobook read by Frances McDormand. Also a Persephone Classic**

22. **Consider the Years** by Virginia Graham Sharp, funny, evocative WW2 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', praised by Oscar Wilde. Preface: Julia Neuberger

24. **Family Roundabout** by Richmal Crompton By the author of *William*, a 1948 family saga contrasting two matriarchs and their very different children. Preface: Juliet Aykroyd

- 25. The Montana Stories by Katherine Mansfield** All the short stories written during the author's last year; with a detailed editorial note and the contemporary illustrations. Five were read on R4 in 2002.
- 26. Brook Evans by Susan Glaspell** An unusual novel written in 1928, 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 late 1945, the *Guardian's* Nicholas Lezard's Paperback Choice, R4 'Book at Bedtime' read by Jamie Glover. Afterword: Anne Sebba. **Also a Persephone Classic**
- 29. The Making of a Marchioness by Frances Hodgson Burnett** A very entertaining 1901 novel about the melodrama when a governess marries a Marquis; a R4 Classic Serial. Preface: Isabel Raphael, Afterword: Gretchen Gerzina. **A Persephone audiobook (unabridged) read by Lucy Scott. Also a Persephone Classic**
- 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. 'One of the best reads outside Elizabeth David' wrote gastropoda.com. **Also a Persephone Classic**
- 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 WW2. Preface: Ruth Gorb
- 32. The Carlyles at Home by Thea Holme** A 1965 mixture of biography and social history describing Thomas and Jane Carlyle's life in Chelsea.
- 33. The Far Cry by Emma Smith** A beautifully written 1949 novel about a young girl's passage to India: a great Persephone favourite. R4 'Book at Bedtime'. 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; much admired by TS Eliot.
- 37. The Runaway by Elizabeth Anna Hart** A Victorian novel for children and grown-ups, republished in 1936 with Gwen Raverat wood engravings. Afterwords: Anne Harvey, Frances Spalding
- 38. Cheerful Weather for the Wedding by Julia Strachey** A funny, sardonic 1932 novella by a niece of Lytton Strachey, praised by Virginia Woolf. Preface: Frances Partridge. **An unabridged Persephone audiobook read by Miriam Margolyes. A film with Felicity Jones. Also a Persephone Classic.**
- 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 (the author's daughter)
- 40. The Priory by Dorothy Whipple** A much-loved 1939 novel about a family, upstairs and downstairs, living in a large country house. 'Warm, witty and realistic' (Hatchards). 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 shielding her daughter from a blackmailer. Filmed as *The Reckless Moment* (1949) and *The Deep End* (2001); a R4 serial in 2006.
- 43. The Wise Virgins by Leonard Woolf** This wise, and witty 1914 novel contrasts the bohemian Virginia and Vanessa with the girl next door in 'Richstead' (Putney). Preface: Lyndall Gordon
- 44. Tea with Mr Rochester by Frances Towers** Magical, unsettling 1949 stories, a surprise favourite, that are unusually beautifully written; read on R4 in 2003 and 2006. Preface: Frances Thomas
- 45. Good Food on the Aga by Ambrose Heath** A 1933 cookery book written for Aga owners which can be used by anyone; with illustrations by Edward Bawden
- 46. Miss Ranskill Comes Home by Barbara Euphan Todd** A wry 1946 novel: Miss Ranskill is shipwrecked and gets back to a changed wartime England. Preface: Wendy Pollard
- 47. The New House by Lettice Cooper** 1936 portrayal of the day a family moves into a new house, and the resulting adjustments and tensions. Preface: Jilly Cooper
- 48. The Casino by Margaret Bonham** 1940s short stories with a unique voice and dark sense of humour; they have been read several times on BBC R4. Preface: Cary Bazalgette
- 49. Bricks and Mortar by Helen Ashton** An excellent 1932 novel by a very popular pre- and post-war writer, chronicling the life of a hard-working, kindly London architect and his wife over thirty-five years.
- 50. The World that was Ours by Hilda Bernstein** A 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 escaped to England. Preface and Afterword: the author **Also a Persephone Classic**

**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 Memmary by Ruby Ferguson** A 1937 novel about Lady Rose, who inherits a great house, marries well – and then meets the love of her life on a park bench. A great favourite of the Queen Mother. Preface: Candia McWilliam

**54. They Can’t Ration These by Vicomte de Mauduit** 1940 cookery book about ‘food for free’, full of excellent (and 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*). A ‘Book at Bedtime’ on BBC R4. Preface: Sally Beaman

**56. They Were Sisters by Dorothy Whipple** A 1943 novel by this superb writer, contrasting three different marriages. Preface: Celia Brayfield

**57. The Hopkins Manuscript by RC Sherriff** A 1939 novel about what might happen if the moon crashed into the earth in 1946 ‘written’ by Mr Hopkins: Preface: Michael Moorcock, Afterword: 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 the lovely and selfish ‘Menace’ – but is she? Afterword: Northrop Frye

**59. There Were No Windows by Norah Hoult** A touching and funny 1944 novel, 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 1934 memoir 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 funny. Preface: Christina Hardyment

**63. Princes in the Land by Joanna Cannan** A 1938 novel about a daughter of the aristocracy who marries an Oxford don; her three children fail to turn out as she hoped.

**64. The Woman Novelist and Other Stories by Diana Gardner** Late 1930s and early 1940s short stories that are witty, sharp and with an unusual undertone. Preface: Claire Gardner

**65. Alas, Poor Lady by Rachel Ferguson** Polemical but intensely readable 1937 novel about the unthinking cruelty with which Victorians without anticipating any future for them apart from marriage.

**66. Gardener’s Nightcap by Muriel Stuart** A 1938 pot pourri: miniature essays on gardening – such as Dark Ladies (fritillary), Better Gooseberries, Phlox Failure – which will be enjoyed by all gardeners, keen or lukewarm.

**67. The Fortnight in September by**

**RC Sherriff** Another novel by the author of *Journey’s End*, and of *The Hopkins Manuscript*, Persephone Book No. 57, about a family on holiday in Bognor in 1931; a quiet masterpiece.

**68. The Expendable Man by Dorothy B Hughes** A 1963 thriller about a young doctor in Arizona which encapsulates the social, racial and moral tensions of the time. By the author of *In a Lonely Place*. Afterword: Dominic Power

**69. Journal of Katherine Mansfield** The husband of the great short story writer (cf. *The Montana Stories*, Persephone Book No. 25) assembled this Journal from unposted letters, scraps of writing etc: a unique portrait.

**70. Plats du Jour by Patience Gray and Primrose Boyd** A 1957 cookery book which was a bestseller at the time and a pioneering work for British cooks. The line drawings and the endpapers are by David Gentleman.

**71. The Shuttle by Frances Hodgson Burnett** A 1907 page-turner about an American heiress married to an English aristocrat, whose beautiful and enterprising sister sets out to rescue her. Preface: Anne Sebba

**72. House-Bound by Winifred Peck** This 1942 novel describes an Edinburgh woman deciding, radically, to run her house without help and do her own cooking; the war is in the background and foreground. Afterword: Penelope Fitzgerald

**73. The Young Pretenders by Edith Henrietta Fowler** An 1895 novel for adults and children about 5 year-old Babs, who lives with her uncle and aunt and has not yet learnt to dissemble. Preface: Charlotte Mitchell

**74. The Closed Door and Other Stories by Dorothy Whipple** Short stories drawn from the three collections published during Dorothy Whipple’s lifetime. Five stories were read on BBC R4.

- 75. On the Other Side: Letters to my Children from Germany 1940–46** by Mathilde Wolff-Mönckeberg. Written in Hamburg but never sent, these letters provide a crucial counter-point to *Few Eggs and No Oranges*, PB No. 9, Preface: Ruth Evans
- 76. The Crowded Street** by Winifred Holtby A 1924 novel about Muriel's attempts to escape from small-town Yorkshire, and her rescue by Delia, alias Vera Brittain. Preface: Marion Shaw
- 77. Daddy's Gone A-Hunting** by Penelope Mortimer 1958 novel about the 'captive wives' of the pre-war women's lib era, bored and lonely in suburbia. Preface: Valerie Grove
- 78. A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914–39** by Nicola Beauman A mixture of literary criticism and historical evocation, first published in 1983, about the women writers of the inter-war period.
- 79. Round About a Pound a Week** by Maud Pember Reeves A study of working-class life in Lambeth in the early C20th that is witty, readable, poignant and fascinating – and relevant nowadays. Preface: Polly Toynbee
- 80. The Country Housewife's Book** by Lucy H Yates A useful 1934 book on topics such as the storeroom and larder, garden produce, and game.
- 81. Miss Buncle's Book** by DE Stevenson A woman writes a novel, as 'John Smith', about the village she lives in. A delightful and funny 1934 book by an author whose work sold in millions. Preface: Aline Templeton
- 82. Amours de Voyage** by Arthur Hugh Clough A novel in verse, set in Rome in 1849, funny and beautiful and profound, and extraordinarily modern in tone. Preface: Julian Barnes
- 83. Making Conversation** by Christine Longford. An amusing, unusual 1931 novel about a girl growing up which is in the vein of *Cold Comfort Farm* and Persephone Book No. 38 *Cheerful Weather for the Wedding*. Preface: Rachel Billington
- 84. A New System of Domestic Cookery** by Mrs Rundell 1816 facsimile edition of an 1806 cookbook: long, detailed and fascinating. Preface: Janet Morgan
- 85. High Wages** by Dorothy Whipple Another novel by Persephone's bestselling writer: about a girl setting up a dress shop just before the First World War. Preface: Jane Brocket
- 86. To Bed with Grand Music** by Marghanita Laski A couple are separated by the war. She is serially unfaithful, a quite new take on 'women in wartime'. Preface: Juliet Gardiner
- 87. Dimanche and Other Stories** by Irène Némirovsky Ten short stories by the author of *Suite Française*, written between 1934 and 1942. 'Luminous, extraordinary, stunning' was the verdict of reviewers.
- 88. Still Missing** by Beth Gutcheon A 1981 novel about a woman whose six year-old son sets off on his own for school and does not return. But his mother never gives up hope...
- 89. The Mystery of Mrs Blencarrow** by Mrs Oliphant Two 1880s novellas about women shockingly, and secretly, abandoned by their husbands, that were favourites of Penelope Fitzgerald. Afterword: Merryn Williams
- 90. The Winds of Heaven** by Monica Dickens This 1955 novel by the author of *Mariana* is about a widow with three rather unsympathetic daughters who eventually finds happiness. Afterword: AS Byatt
- 91. Miss Buncle Married** by DE Stevenson A hugely enjoyable sequel to *Miss Buncle's Book* (No. 81): Miss Buncle marries and moves to a new village. Afterword: Fiona Bevan
- 92. Midsummer Night in the Workhouse** by Diana Athill 'Funny, engaging and unexpected' (*Paris Review*): 1950s stories by the editor and memoir writer. Preface: author, who also reads six of the stories as a Persephone Audiobook.
- 93. The Sack of Bath** by Adam Fergusson A 1973 polemic, with many black and white photographs, raging at the destruction of Bath's C18th artisan terraced housing. Preface: author
- 94. No Surrender** by Constance Maud A fascinating 1911 suffragette novel about a mill girl and her aristocratic friend. Preface: Lydia Fellgett
- 95. Greenbanks** by Dorothy Whipple A 1932 novel by our most popular author about a family and, in particular, a grandmother and her grand-daughter. Afterword: Charles Lock
- 96. Dinners for Beginners** by Rachel and Margaret Ryan A 1934 cookery book for the novice cook telling her everything in exacting detail: eye-opening and useful.
- 97. Harriet** by Elizabeth Jenkins A brilliant but disquieting 1934 novel about the 1877 murder of Harriet Staunton. Afterword: Rachel Cooke
- 98. A Writer's Diary** by Virginia Woolf Extracts from the diaries, covering the years 1918–41, selected by Leonard Woolf in 1953 in order to show his late wife in the act of writing. Preface: Lyndall Gordon
- 99. Patience** by John Coates A hilarious 1953 novel about a 'happily married' Catholic mother of three in St John's Wood who falls 'improperly in love'. Preface: Maureen Lipman
- 100. The Persephone Book of Short Stories** Thirty stories, ten by 'our' authors, ten from the last decade's *Biannualies* and ten that are newly reprinted. A Persephone bestseller.
- 101. Heat Lightning** by Helen Hull A young married woman spends a sultry and revelatory week with her family in small-town Michigan; a 1932 Book-of-the-Month Club

Selection. Preface: Patricia McClelland Miller

**102. The Exiles Return by Elisabeth de Waal** A novel, written in the late 1950s but never published, about five exiles returning to Vienna after the war: a meditation on 'going back' and a love story. Preface: Edmund de Waal

**103. The Squire by Enid Bagnold** A woman gives birth to her fifth child: a rare novel (written in 1938) about the process of birth. Preface: Anne Sebba

**104. The Two Mrs Abbotts by DE Stevenson** The third 'Miss Buncl' book, published in 1943, is about Barbara Abbott, as she now is, and the 'young' Mrs Abbott, keeping the home fires burning during the war.

**105. Diary of a Provincial Lady by EM Delafield** One of the funniest books ever written: a 1930 novel, written as a diary, about everyday family life. Afterword: Nicola Beauman

**106. Into the Whirlwind by Eugenia Ginzburg** A Russian

woman is arrested in 1937 and sent to the Gulag. Filmed as *Within the Whirlwind* with Emily Watson. Afterword: Rodric Braithwaite

**107. Wilfred and Eileen by Jonathan Smith** A 1976 novel, based on fact, set in the years 1913–15. Wilfred, badly wounded in France, is rescued by his wife. A four-part television serial in 1981. Afterword: author

**108. The Happy Tree by Rosalind Murray** A 1926 novel about the long-term and devastating effect of WW1 on the young, in particular on a young woman living in London during the war years. Preface: Charlotte Mitchell

**109. The Country Life Cookery Book by Ambrose Heath** This 1937 cookbook, organised by month (and thus by excellent seasonal recipes) was illustrated by Eric Ravilious. Preface: Simon Hopkinson.

**110. Because of the Lockwoods by Dorothy Whipple** Her 1949 novel: the Hunters are patronised by the wealthy Lockwoods; as she grows up

Thea Hunter begins to question their integrity. Preface: Harriet Evans

**111. London War Notes by Mollie Panter-Downes** These extraordinary 'Letters from London', describing everyday life in WW2, were written for *The New Yorker* and then collected in one volume in 1971. Preface: David Kynaston

**112. Vain Shadow by Jane Hervey** A Waugh-ish black comedy written in the 1950s but not published until 1963 about the days after the death of a patriarch in a large country house and the effect on his family. Preface: Celia Robertson

**113. Greengates by RC Sherriff** A 1936 novel about retirement: Mr Baldwin realises the truth of 'for better for worse but not for lunch' but finds a new life by moving to 'metroland'. Preface: Juliet Gardiner

**114. Gardeners' Choice by Evelyn Dunbar and Charles Mahoney** Two artist friends collaborated over the text and drawings (of which there are forty) of this rare and delightful 1937 gardening book. Preface: Edward Bawden, Afterword: Christopher Campbell-Howes

**115. Maman, What Are We Called Now? by Jacqueline Mesnil-Amar** The author's husband was arrested and disappeared in July 1944; for the next six weeks his wife kept a diary which is an unparalleled description of the last days of the Occupation in Paris as they actually happened. Photographs: Thérèse Bonney. Preface: Caroline Moorehead

**116. A Lady and Her Husband by Amber Reeves** A 1914 novel about a woman who realises that the waitresses in her husband's chain of tea shops are underpaid – and tries to do something about it. Preface: Samantha Ellis

**117. The Godwits Fly by Robin Hyde** A semi-autobiographical lyrically written 1938 novel by the great New Zealand writer, who published ten books in ten years and died in London in August 1939 when she was 33. Preface: Ann Thwaite



Detail from *Mrs Abington as 'Miss Prue' in Love for Love* by Joshua Reynolds 1771

# EGERIA OUT OF WORK

## AMBER REEVES

Egeria lay on the bed, a figure of tragedy, and watched her husband from half-shut eyes. He, handsome creature, was in the middle of his morning exercises. Clasp the pillar of the bedstead with the right hand as the book prescribes, he was swinging the left leg backwards and forwards and counting to eighteen. Four, five, six – this was the last exercise, and still not a look for Egeria, that charming sight!

She sat up for a moment to make sure, by a glance into the long carved mirror across the room, that she was charming, and lay back again with a deeper wound in her heart. The mirror had shown her a delightful picture – really she had planned that room very well, even if she had spent a little too much on it. The dark canopy of the bed, as if it were a cave under the sea, held reflections from the sunlight on the floor; the bedclothes gleamed like mother of pearl; and between them Egeria in her silks and laces, her golden curls and her little sea-green jacket, appeared as bright, as delicate, as rosy as a shell.

Jim ought not to have been able to take his eyes from her, and yet – ten, eleven, twelve – this was how he chose to answer his wife when she opened her mind to him, tried to claim his sympathy and show him for once her point of view. She had spoken in her most gentle voice,

she had made quite sure first that he was awake, and all the notice he had taken had been to stare at the ceiling for a minute and then to say abruptly, 'Here, time to get up! I've got to meet that blighter at ten!' After that he had climbed out of bed, pulled down the sheets as if she did not matter, yawned, and begun his exercises. Without a kiss, without a look. It was just like Jim as he had been lately and yet she was startled; it confirmed everything she had been thinking and yet she could not believe it.

It was soon to appear, however, that Jim had been more attentive than she had supposed. Eighteen swings of the left leg achieved, he took advantage of the turn which must be made before starting with the right leg to observe – callously, cheerfully – 'My dear child, take it from me, there's nothing the matter with you but discontent. All you women are discontented. Town life, I daresay. You ought to be getting up early and digging in the rhubarb patch to find worms for the chickens.' Then he remembered that he had not taken the necessary two deep breaths, took them, and relapsed through habit into the rest of the exercise.

Well, there you were! Egeria lay still. Only her eyelids moved, closing a little more. She was a woman who faced facts and the

fact was, obviously, that he did not, could not, love her at all. She had been telling herself so for some time, not as a matter of fact because she believed herself, but because she had kept noticing little things, and because her life was monotonous and this was an interesting thing to think.

And now it was true! Shivering with excitement, rejecting dismay, ingeniously she arranged her evidence.

Jim always went to sleep again after drinking his morning tea but Egeria lay awake and thought. And this morning, as it was two days before her twenty-third birthday, she had naturally thought more than usual about age and life and fate, and what they had done to her and where she was going – things she had considered a good deal before she married Jim. Jim had carried her off her feet, and made her live with him on the surface – shallow – but oh how wonderful it had been! Well, anyway, to get back to that morning – when he showed signs of waking for the second time she told him, not at all in a complaining voice, not in the least as if she thought it was his fault, but just as she would have loved Jim to talk to her if only he would – only Jim never did talk to her about anything that showed he needed her – how old she felt she was getting and how she was afraid that she was

growing narrow and dull. One kindly word from him then, even a grunt would have been enough. But he had said, yes he had said that, it was worse than nothing, 'Well, don't feel old then, you're not old!' and had shut his eyes.

Then she had justified herself – well, who wouldn't? She had said that it was no wonder she felt dull with him away all day and working most evenings and none of her friends near and Jim's friends not caring apparently for anything more intellectual than Bridge. She did her best to be a companion to Jim, but when he did come home she had nothing interesting to talk to him about. Before she married she had been accustomed to be a real companion to Dad and Hugh, but then they cared about the sort of books and pictures and music she cared for, and if you are not an engineer it is impossible to be a real companion about engineering. Anyway, it only irritated Jim when she tried. And so she felt sometimes that she was not succeeding very well with her life.... Surely that was moderate enough, and yet Jim had not chosen to say a word! Honestly, was it fair? Let Jim just try her life, just a week of it. In two days he would be dancing round the room saying – as indeed he often said now after only a wet Sunday afternoon – 'Let's smash all this Gerry and break away and go and dig for gold in Alaska!' And yet he had his interesting work to keep him busy all the week.

The more she thought of it the more unjust it seemed.

She looked at him again. How handsome Jim was. His face showed no sign whatever of the mental blindness, coarseness, callousness, which had caused him to behave as had behaved that morning. It did not show either the slightest consciousness of what was happening a yard away, of the swarm of Egeria's thoughts, so swift, so poignant, that they were making her eyelids sting with tears. No, she decided, superficially his face was merely good-natured and energetic and careless, the face of a man who thought about work, and listening in, and cars, and who, when he talked, wanted to talk about tennis and tobacco and cars. He looked careless – but who wouldn't when he had been loved and run after and praised for the whole of his life!

Egeria turned on the bed, stabbed by unendurable pain. She herself, only a year ago, had sometimes almost cried at the thought of Jim's good looks, the way his hair grew, his chin, his curling mouth – had only not cried because she had been so happy that she could laugh instead!

But she turned again sharply, twisting her face into her arm. Oh it was unfair, it was horrible that he should go on looking like that, just as he had when he told her that he loved her more than his life! It could not be borne! Then she smoothed out her attitude again, for Jim was moving about the room, and if he could not realise it for himself

she did not want him to see from her position what she was feeling. She was just in time: he did look at her, he said, 'Buck up old thing or you'll be late.' Then he took down his dressing-gown from its peg and went into the bathroom. Egeria sat up, sobbed once, made herself smile, and began her daily business.

By breakfast time she was perfectly calm and facing the situation; in fact before she had finished her bacon she had decided:

- 1) That Jim did not love her at all,
- 2) That anything is better than uncertainty,
- 3) That a woman of spirit does not sit pining after any man, but makes a new life for herself with triumphant ease.

A new life is a vague term, but here it meant a life which, while not robbing one's husband of anything he has shown himself able to appreciate, will nevertheless satisfy one's natural instincts and legitimate aspirations.

Now these took the form of a desire for friendship and intelligent conversation. Egeria excelled at conversation. She had an amusing little mind, eager, prettily decorated, but Jim did not want to listen to her, he did not want her at all apparently except for the most obvious purposes – why, if another girl were to take her place Egeria did not believe that Jim would notice the difference provided that the new one was the same size!

Egeria must then find a friend. And it would not be for Jim to

criticise her. He couldn't go a step from the office without two girls appearing from nowhere, one on each side of him, all smiles and bliss. They turned up for tennis, they dropped in for supper, they rose from the floor at dances. He never appeared to take much notice of them or even to know which two they happened to be, but there was something about him which seemed to say that he liked to have them there. Anyway they were there. Egeria for her part did not mind them. She said so frequently to herself and sometimes to other people. What she did mind was that the real Jim, whom she had supposed to belong to her, whom she had set out to discover when she

married him, had eluded her search and lately seemed to be further withdrawn than ever....

Well, only a fool would go on thinking of that, and Egeria did not intend to behave like a fool. She told herself instead how odd it was, and how fortunate, that Standon Hurst should have rung up and asked her to lunch with him only two days ago, and that he should still be waiting for her answer.

'I've never fixed up that lunch with Standon Hurst, Jim,' she said as she handed him his second cup of coffee. 'I'll ring up this morning.'

'Hurst?' said Jim. 'Oh yes, I remember. The blighter you were telling me about. The one you knew when you were in that

bank. All right, only don't go getting into mischief. Here – give me some more milk in this coffee.'

All this, of course, was as wrong as it could possibly be. Standon Hurst, if a blighter, was not a mere blighter, but the important director of an extremely important bank. He was very much talked about, almost every week he granted an interview to the Press. It was most flattering that he should have remembered Egeria, when he had not seen her for three years, and rung her up, saying that he had a message for her, and sent an immense, magnificent basket of carnations.

'I am surprised that he should have remembered me,' she



*"Darling, your lovely manuscript is absolutely safe with us."*

1995 postcard by Douglas Hall b.1944, printed for members of The Society of Authors

therefore pointed out.

'I expect the old fellow you worked for put him on to it!'

The old fellow she had worked for had been a director of an affiliated bank, and Standon Hurst was not at all the man meekly to carry messages from someone of so much less importance, but of course if Jim chose to take that view there was nothing but 'I expect so' to be said. Thoughts, however, were a different matter. The more she considered it the more she wondered why Hurst had sent her flowers. Apart from business she had not known him at all.

Six months or so before she first met Jim, Egeria had experienced a conscientious crisis. She had felt very keenly various startling things, among them that no one ought to be a parasite, and that commerce ought to be humanised and linked onto the rest of life, and that social barriers are anti-social. In order to give effect to her beliefs she had insisted on working, really it did not matter at what, and finally a friend of her father's, this director, had taken her as his secretary. There had been opposition to face, but she had gone right on with it until she met Jim.... Well, it was no use thinking about that now. She would think about Standon Hurst, who had visited the place in all his glory while she was installed there. He had emerged from an enormous car, a handsome middle-aged man, impressive, benign and metropolitan. He had taken the trouble to be polite to Egeria and she had

endowed him with subtlety and wit. She had seen him fairly often for about three weeks, and after he had gone her employer had continued to talk of his talents and importance. Then Jim had come to stay for a while with an uncle and everybody else had been forgotten.

Well, Egeria was escaping from that blindness now. She would accept the invitation. Something made her sure that the banker was offering her a real friendship. What she remembered of him was first of all stimulating and next companionable. She had known directly she saw him that they were two people made to get on well. The whole thing was going to be delightful. He would bring new interests in to her life, prevent her from growing dull and narrow-minded, and she would keep him amused. Why, he had not even seen her yet in pretty clothes! Not that that mattered, for the whole thing was to take place on a purely impersonal plane. After the doubts and misery of the last few months no woman alive wanted more emotion less than Egeria.

When Hurst, rung up, replied that he would contrive to be free that very day, she felt at once that Fate intended the affair to be a great success. She sat down eagerly to the solid monthly review which she bought in the interests of culture but did not always read, and gave her mind to two gloomy articles on foreign affairs, a sound article on the Government's industrial policy – it was thrilling to find that some

of Standon Hurst's opinions were quoted in it – and finally, in a fury of optimism, and perhaps because she had not read the title, to an article on the latest developments of Einstein's theory of gravitation. These distinguished men have such wide interests, who could tell what he might not want to talk about at lunch. But in the middle of a sentence which began, 'The author confesses that he passed through a period of considerable perplexity and distress before he realised the vital distinction between unoccupied and empty space...'<sup>7</sup> it occurred to Egeria that she had better consider her clothes. It was a radiant day and she possessed exactly the right frock, very cool, very cunning, mostly white, but with just that pink about it and just that green which only truly fair-skinned women can wear. Then there was the hat she ought never to have bought – she ran over to the glass – yes, she was lovely – stung to a sort of wildness. Was loveliness nothing because Jim had forgotten to notice it?

Standon Hurst was waiting for her at the Ritz; she recognised him at once. He looked as handsome, as commanding, but somehow more solid and less subtle than she remembered. He did not see her until she was beside him, holding out her hand – 'Mr Hurst – you are Mr Hurst? I am Mrs Lovat.'

They shook hands and then he said, slowly, mechanically, as if he had rehearsed it and were sure of its effect, 'Still the same dear

little girl as ever I see.'

What an extraordinary thing to say! Egeria was startled, her answer died on her lips. He did not seem however to expect an answer, and merely remarking, 'Well, suppose we come along' he walked heavily towards the restaurant. Egeria had the queer sensation that he had not taken notice of her at all.

This blankness continued while he ordered lunch. Although from time to time he said 'You'll like so-and-so' or 'I advise you to have –' she still had the feeling that she might have been part of the table furniture. It was not until the waiters were gone and calm restored that he turned to Egeria and said 'Now let me have a look at you...'

He did have a look at her, there could be no doubt about it. He looked at her hat and her frock and her face and her bag and her gloves. Nothing that she has planned was wasted on him. Then he said, 'You've improved you know. Immensely. Who would have thought that the dear little girl I knew in Bridgetown would have turned into a little beauty like this.'

Egeria had never been insulted in her life and she did not quite understand what was happening. She blushed, but this did not worry him, and he went on, 'And you're married – living in a nice little flat I daresay!' Then he turned to select hors d'oeuvres.

It was exactly like a dream which is going wrong, sliding away into something ludicrous. Perhaps if she spoke – so she said 'You have a message for me? I

suppose it is from Mr Cosgrove?'

Her host laughed and then said, 'Here, have some of this.' He helped her to something green and white taken from a bed of ice.

It was more like a dream than ever. Egeria lifted her head and looked round. There were the usual sights of a restaurant, the windows, the hats, the busy faces, the usual expensive smiles.

'Now what would you think,' the voice next to her was going on, 'if I told you that I had not got a message at all?'

'I should wonder why you said you had.' Egeria felt somehow desperate.

For this she got a very keen look. 'Well, I have – of course I have – and as you suppose from your friend Cosgrove. But I don't mind telling you that if it hadn't been for the memory of your pretty little curly head over by the door, I shouldn't have thought of it twice. I wonder if you know how fascinating you used to look? I expect you do. But I don't expect you ever thought that three years after, we should be lunching here together today.' And as one surrounds a bunch of flowers with leaves he surrounded these sentences with smiles.

It was incredible, but it was happening. Egeria found herself crimson again, this time with anger. 'You really must not –' she began, and then faltered and stopped. Suddenly she had grasped the situation. This man had only seen her as a typist working in an office, and he was placing her as a little business

girl thrilled and delighted to be lunching here with him. Possibly such a girl would expect the tone which he was now adopting, possibly he meant nothing offensive. She must put him right, she must make it clear so that he would understand, she must do it in a dignified way or he would not believe her. It took her a moment, then she found her coldest manner. 'What a long time ago it seems, doesn't it? I was only in the bank for a few months you know, studying commercial conditions. Mr Cosgrove is a friend of my father's. Then I married – a consulting engineer. My husband is very much interested in his work, but I am not a mathematician, so I have to keep up the family interest in art and politics. I was interested to see your name this morning in the *Modern Review*.'

It was unfortunate that waiters serving fish should have interrupted this vital pronouncement.

A minute or so went by before he answered, then he said, 'Now to my mind women should always be intelligent. A woman without brains is no use to me. But mind you, she must know how to use them in the right way.' He picked up his fork.

The fish was delicious and the remark, though not quite what she wanted, seemed a little better. Egeria began to like him again, for she was extremely anxious to like him and to make this meeting a success. She was wondering whether to say more about the article when he began again, a trifle laboriously, 'It's

not so surprising to me you know as I daresay it is to you that we should be here together. The very first time I saw you I thought to myself what a dear little companion you would make. I knew at once that you and I would understand one another.'

It was what she had said to herself, almost her words, but oh how different! Egeria blazed with resentment. She had opened her mouth to tell him what she felt when she found herself struggling insanely not to laugh. After all that she had been feeling that morning about Jim's obtuseness, after all she had imagined about friendships and intellectual interests, here she sat opposite an elderly gentleman as

obtuse as two right angles and improperly trying to make love! It really was funny, screamingly funny – she had tried to catch herself up. It was interesting too – if she had been another kind of girl! She pinched her fingers in order to control her face.

Standon Hurst was watching her. 'Ah, that's right. You were angry just now. I saw you. There isn't much that I don't see, my dear. And now you're laughing. Quite right. Never make scenes. Never show your feelings in public, though that's a thing some little girls find it very hard to learn. Now mind you, it's quite right to have spirit, I like it. I could tell that you have spirit from your walk, you walk like a panther–'

For Heaven's sake, not a dear little panther flashed through Egeria's mind...

'A little yellow panther – ' 'You really must not.' She broke down into laughter.

He smiled, but stiffly, and Egeria seized her chance. She was mistress of the situation now, if a little elated, and meant to remain so. Eyes dancing, scarlet cheeks, mouth curved with amusement, she chattered away for the rest of the meal, about books, plays, people, anything that came into her head, not caring much whether he listened or not. And while she talked she told herself that it did not matter at all, it was simply extremely funny and it did not matter. Before she went though she must



*Arguably one of Harold Knight's most important paintings, Afternoon Tea (1909) illustrates a time, place and style that encapsulate the artist's contribution to British Impressionism. Messum's sold it last summer to a private collector and the catalogue said: 'The painting shows the sitting room at Sandycove, the painter Garnet Wolsey's house at Lamorna in Cornwall. Wolsey himself posed as the butler, who serves tea to Florence Carter-Wood, seated at left dressed in green and Laura Knight, at centre dressed in blue and wearing a hat. (Cf. Jonathan Smith's novel Summer in February which we sell in the shop.) Knight's balance between genteel luxuries and austere "good taste" recalls works by Wilhelm Hammershoi, which he possibly saw in several London exhibitions of the time.'*

say a word or two to show him how decent women feel. After all, if she had been some poor little girl....

Hurst meanwhile, watching her, made an excellent lunch. He said little, for she gave him little chance, but when she began to put on her gloves he leant forward. 'Now wait a moment my dear, there's something I want to say. I can see you're not very pleased with me, you think I have been going too fast. Well, I don't want to hurry you, you are worth waiting for. The more I look at you the more I feel sure you are one of those women who can lift a man up to the great heights. You take your time – think it over – and next time you feel like it ring me up and we'll dine here, and if you like theatres we'll go to a play—' He looked at her hard, he seemed almost anxious.

'The great heights.' It was the funniest thing he had said, and yet it somehow ended Egeria's feeling of amusement. All at once, from excited she became sad and chilled. 'You don't understand' was all she could say. She looked at him in distress.

'You mean you won't?'

She nodded.

'You're not going to change your mind?'

She shook her head.

'Then that's enough.' He sat back, his eyes, his voice, his attitude suddenly became lifeless, interest gone out from them. If he might not make love to her, they seemed to say, why should she exist at all?

It was an astonishing change.

Egeria was taken aback – relieved, of course, as a decent young woman must be but also, to her astonishment, slightly dismayed. This was inexplicable – very wrong – but it was there. Egeria was to learn a great deal about herself when she thought things over at home that afternoon.

'Thank you so much,' she said, 'it has been most interesting to see you again.' Those warning words about his behaviour would not come, even though she felt certain that in a day or two if not tomorrow her place would be filled by somebody else with curly yellow hair. It was clear that she was a coward.

In the meantime they seemed to be going out. Hurst did not look at her. His aspect was one of lethargic gloom and general dislike of everybody around him.

Once in the street she almost ran, she wanted so badly to be at home, safe in her flat, orderly, sunny, serene. And yet when she reached it the long afternoon that stretched before her seemed suddenly empty and long...

This world is not all that it should be.

Meanwhile, Jim in his office was finding his assistant hopelessly stupid. When he asked for anything the fellow stared at him owlishly from half-shut eyes.

'But don't you remember where you put them?' Jim insisted.

The young man shook his head. All the muscles of his face were contracted.

'You've been making a night of

it!' Jim was indignant.

'No I haven't. But I have been awake all night, to tell you the truth I have neuralgia so badly that I hardly know where I am. But I'll remember in a minute.'

Neuralgia! The word sank to the bottom of Jim's mind and as he was starting home it rose again. That was it! Gerry had neuralgia that morning. She had been looking awfully queer lying there on the bed and she had nearly snapped his nose off at breakfast. She was a plucky little thing not to have complained. It was a long time since he had bought her any chocolates.

He bought her some chocolates and carried them in to her where she sat looking disconsolate on the sitting room sofa.

'Head better?' he asked, and went on without waiting for an answer, 'I might have known you had neuralgia. Here, shove up a bit. There's plenty of room on my knee –'

Egeria, clinging to him, thanking him for the chocolates, realised that some ways of being misunderstood are at any rate more comforting than others.

*© The Estate of Amber Reeves  
This story was probably written in 1908 since it is known that HG Wells was looking for a publisher for a story the 21 year-old Amber Reeves had written in that year; it was allegedly 'about a young wife dismayed to discover how much independence she had forfeited by getting married, which showed distinct promise in that kind of writing'. David Lodge p300*

# WOMEN HAVE NO STAR

It was said so casually. It is said so casually. For at least another five years longer, if Hitler and his friends have a bit of luck, it will be said so casually: just a take-it-for-granted aside in conversation. Women writers are good, sometimes even sensationally good. They win prizes and lull the livers of the reviewers. But they haven't any stars. First rate second raters.

'Susan Miles,' I suggested. This was a shot at a neat angle, because almost nobody who is anybody has ever heard of Susan Miles [author of PB No. 36 *Lettice Delmer*]. I was up against a redoubtable reviewer, who shot me a keen glance and said 'yes, good, very good,' and then added gently, 'Neurotic.' It might have been true, too: I could recall passages in her work which were more from the odd than the even of life. My conversationalist – not foeman – scored the next point. 'Men like LH Myers and EM Forster have the quality in their novels that women never quite reach. It's a kind of serenity, breadth of vision.'

'Stella Benson.' 'No, neurotic too. They all are.' 'A woman writer's life is certain to make her neurotic. Unless she's so massively thick of hide that it's impossible for her to be any good at all. In that case, she wouldn't have the acute perceptions which go to make a really fine book. You don't allow 'for

conditions.' 'The conditions aren't under discussion. It's the results that count. The results aren't quite the same as the work of the best men writers.' And again, I thought, it might be true. Grant Myers his serenity, Forster the one and only good book which has ever been written, without a trace of sentimentalism, on the colour question: a book whose very simplicity haunts you with the piercing belief, 'These things happened. They must have happened, because I know and feel as I read them, that they are exactly true.' Grant too the neurotic strain in the writings of women: perhaps that is a defeat with victory somewhere behind it, visible through the ranks of the disordered sentences. Perhaps the over-wrought, over-taut vision of the woman writer at her very best touches a humanity and an insight which the serene male has not – because he has not been obliged to look at life with a perpetual crick in his neck like Lot's poor lady.

It will be interesting, in a generation, to hear the relative merits of male and female writers summed up. I believe it will be found that women have been more representative of their period, more sensitive, with quicker eyes. Their individualities add up much nearer to the sum of a decade than do the big bull-frog figures, puffed out by the wind of a moment.

Not that it commences, this woman-writer query, with the work of the C20th. Greeks were at one time very cross about Sappho, and later she was enshrined; and whichever mode one prefers, temper, or embalming and homages, enough of the broken bits remain to piece her together.

Of course they have a curious custom, these women writers, and poets, of dying young, or else of writing very little. Stella was in her early thirties when she chose to expire; Winifred Holtby [author of PB No. 76 *The Crowded Street*] – a sound novelist and a good tactician – not much older; Katherine Mansfield [author of PBs Nos. 25 and 69] 32 or 33 when she plucked the nettle. And others of them remain for me sempiternally childish figures. I never imagine Emily Dickinson, that odd little poet, as much more than about 15 years of age. And then there are the one-poem women. Everybody knows Amy Lowell's 'Patterns'. But who knows by heart another of her poems? The trail is lost, for the mere effort of ceasing to be a woman – lacking in artistic expression – is so great that a long summer is infrequent and an Indian Summer almost impossible.

*'Women Have No Star' by Robin Hyde The Press June 5th 1937, reprinted in Disputed Ground: Robin Hyde Journalist 1991*

# OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

‘**M**aman, *What Are We Called Now?* is a journal kept by Jacqueline Mesnil-Amar after her husband, André, then fighting in a Jewish resistance network, was arrested. It is full of flashbacks as well as eloquent reflections on the situation in France and on life in general. In spite of her desperate anxiety, she tried to maintain normality for her daughter: her efforts to shield her from painful knowledge are brilliantly drawn. This is the first English edition of Mesnil-Amar’s book, and is beautifully printed with an insightful introduction by Caroline Moorehead and haunting photographs by photo-journalist Thérèse Bonney. After the war, André and Mesnil-Amar founded an organisation to help returning Jewish deportees. She railed at the appalling fate of Europe’s hundreds of thousands of displaced orphans and children, many of whom had forgotten who they were or where they came from, let alone their religion. The final part of this book contains some of her essays about the unsettled life facing these orphans. While Mesnil-Amar might be pleased to have found a new audience, she would have grieved at the timelessness of her subject matter.’  
Anne Sebba the *Telegraph*

‘**G**ardeners’ *Choice* is an unconventional illustrated gardening book first published in 1937. Evelyn Dunbar and

Charles Mahoney’s approach was novel because some of the forty plants featured are not far removed from what more conservative gardeners of the period would have considered weeds. The text continually reveals the authors’ knowledge and their sometimes subtle humour. Many of the botanical drawings were made at Dunbar’s family home in Kent, including the study for *Phytolacca decandra*, sometimes called the Red Ink Plant for the bright juice of its berries. She wrote most of the text. She later won acclaim as a war artist, celebrated for depictions of the Women’s Land Army. Also included is a preface by artist Edward Bawden which was written in 1937 but arrived after the book had gone to the printers.’ Alison Oldham the *Ham and High*

‘**T**he stoicism of the suffragette campaigners in the face of unendurable ill-treatment has become a lodestone of suffragette mythology. Their passive agony was a weapon against the government as much as the acts that led to their imprisonment, and probably did more to shift public opinion towards them. It makes an appearance in *No Surrender* by Constance Maud when its heroine, a Black Country millworker called Jenny Clegg, brings the love of her life round to her way of thinking by her courage and commitment. In

the course of many conversations outlining the case for the vote and the reasons for militancy, Jenny and her middle-class friend Mary O’Neill have to face down not just sceptical men but also the “Antis”, the women who opposed the extension of the franchise and criticised the militants for their unladylike behaviour. *No Surrender* reeks of authenticity.’ Sarah Crompton the *Guardian*

‘**D**uring Evelyn Dunbar and Charles Mahoney’s love affair in the 1930s they collaborated on a book about gardens. *Gardeners’ Choice* is a delightful find, illustrated with line drawings and word portraits of plants. The writers have an eye for the unexpected and this book makes you look at flowers with a fresh eye. The auricula has “patterned dignity” and “the gold lace polyanthus speaks rather of rich and discreet liveries, the plum and muted reds of immaculate chauffeurs and commissionaires”. Mary Keen the *Telegraph*

‘**G**reengates is set in London in the mid-1930s, where we find Edith Baldwin and her husband, Tom, rattling around in Grasmere, a dank terrace house just off Edgware Road. The Pooterish Mr Baldwin has recently retired as a City clerk, a change that has depressed them both. At once cosy and compelling, *Greengates* is an adorable story and a fascinating bit of

social history. The Baldwins' desire for what the social historian Juliet Gardiner calls, in her preface, "an attenuated form of modernism" is touching. But it's also, given the sneers that suburbia attracts, rather chastening. Even as Sherriff pokes fun at their aspirations – at their flushing lavatories and new-fangled light switches – he never stops reminding us that they are, nevertheless, pioneers: plucky, determined and brimful of sweet ambition.' Rachel Cooke the *Observer*

**J**ane Hervey's *Vain Shadow*, written in the early 1950s, lay in a drawer for ten years. Eventually published in 1963, it received little attention. Now this funny, tightly constructed novel of a landed family on the brink of implosion after the funeral of their patriarch has been rescued by Persephone, and should be gratefully received by every book group in the land.' Charlotte Moore 'Books of the Year' the *Spectator*

**B**ook recommendations do not always bring as much pleasure to the recipient as the person doing the commending. But I must publicly thank the reviewer who put forward, as an overlooked classic, *The Fortnight in September* by RC Sherriff earlier this year. At first glance an annual holiday taken by a south London family in Bognor may not draw the reader in. Yet, as Flaubert wrote, the life of a flea may be as engrossing as that of Alexander the Great, if well told.

Sherriff, better known for *Journey's End*, refers, during the family's rail journey to the south coast, to "a full hour of unexpected pleasure". It does service for the book, and the beauty of reading. Full marks to Persephone Books. You won't be disappointed.' Michael Henderson the *Telegraph*

**G**reengates (1936) traces a retired couple's move to the countryside at the onset of postwar modernity. As in *The Fortnight in September*, Sherriff conjures desperation and aspiration alike with the smallest details: the way Edith notes that, in his excitement at leaving town for country, her husband "seemed to have forgotten all about his lumbago"; the way the elm tree Tom hopes to plant in the garden comes, like the house itself, to represent hope for a new life. The novels are reminiscent of, and superior to, John Williams's *Stoner*. They draw pathos from their characters' stoicism in the face of the trials, however humble, that they face. Sherriff's writing has not dated. His novels are full of poignancy and wit, compassion and imagination. Now is the time to rediscover them.' Francesca Wade the *Telegraph*

**G**ood Things in England was Felicity Cloake's first choice if she had to choose ten cookery books: 'Picking just ten from my enormous collection made me feel as if I was Captain von Trapp being asked to choose between his children. It couldn't

just be about usefulness: I have yet to pot a lamprey or roast a cygnet but I treasure Florence White's *Good Things in England*, a collection of "traditional and regional recipes suited to modern tastes contributed by English men and women between 1399 and 1932".' the *New Statesman*

**J**acqueline Mesnil-Amar's *Maman, What Are We Called Now?* is an exquisite book, a dramatic snatch of history, written in the form of a diary – passionate, indignant and beautifully expressed. It begins on July 18th 1944 with a one-line entry, the chilling words: "André hasn't come back tonight." The story is almost familiar: hero husband taken, desperate wife defiantly searching for him. But this is insistently real, more surprising than any artful, fictional account: she is distracted with worry, but retains a writer's eye for detail: "I have meetings with 'contacts', the ex-mistress of a colonel in the Gestapo (busy painting her toenails when I arrived). Lawyers working for the Germans reply condescendingly that 'no one is shot straight away unless they are armed.'" Yet, despite her pain, she notes that the "elegance of some Parisian women is almost provocative, wearing wide hats with veils and bright lipstick, deliberately nonchalant as they stare coldly ahead on the metro." This is a breathless, beautiful book, in a lovely presentation from Persephone, a perfect piece of written heartbreak.' Anne Garvey the *Jewish Chronicle*

# VIRGINIA AND DIANA

Clara Jones, who used to work at Persephone Books and is now a lecturer at King's College, London, has just published *Virginia Woolf: Ambivalent Activist* focusing on the details of VW's involvement with, for example, the Women's Co-operative Guild and the Rodmell WI. This spanned the years from 1910 when she asked a friend, 'would it be any use if I spent an afternoon or two weekly in addressing envelopes for the Adult Suffragists?' to 1940 when she wrote in her diary, 'Aren't I on the Committee of the WI – don't I go to a meeting on Monday?' That she joined the latter was partly at the instigation of her friend and Rodmell neighbour Diana Gardner (author of PB No. 64 *The Woman Novelist and Other Stories*). In *The Rodmell Papers: Reminiscences of Virginia and Leonard Woolf by a Sussex Neighbour* (Cecil Woolf 2008) DG described how 'as part of [her] war work' she acted as secretary to the Rodmell WI under the presidency of the 'very determined, socially-minded Mrs Chavasse' who, having moved to Sussex from a comfortable life in the Midlands, 'decided to give the village and the WI her generous time.' It is unclear whether DG means this drily or not or how ironic is the following passage: 'Naturally, the members, in that rather sad, draughty village hall, painted dark green and brown and approached quite

often through nettles, were impressed and many were grateful, for the majority were the wives of farm labourers; only a few were not and these were the wives of farm bailiffs, of the blacksmith, the daughter of the man who had been the miller and one or two "educated" women, but not many.'

Clara sees a homage here to *Three Guineas* since this was written as 'an educated man's daughter'; and explains that Mrs Chavasse and the women of the village had their differences. So when DG asked VW to join the Rodmell branch 'VW at first demurred; she was not entirely in sympathy with the WI; it was run always by middle-class women and not by the village women themselves.' Her criticism of the class formation of the WI is consistent with her view expressed in *Three Guineas* that for working-class women to obtain political determination they must organise themselves. She wrote in April 1940, 'Oh dear how full of doings villages are – and of violent quarrels and of incessant intrigues... We're thought red hot revolutionaries because the Labour party meets in our dining room.' But she agreed to give a talk about the Dread-nought Hoax, a 1910 escapade starring her younger self, Virginia Stephen, when she became an activist for one day. Her biographer Hermione Lee reads the hoax as both a joke

and a political act, in its 'ridicule of empire, infiltration of the nation's defences, mockery of bureaucratic procedures, cross-dressing and sexual ambiguity.' In her talk, however, VW 'deliberately presented the hoax as more of a lark than as action against authority' as she described how she and her friends darkened their skin, put on turbans and false beards, and dressed up as an Emperor and his Princes from Abyssinia (now Ethiopia).

Audience members remembered the occasion for its hilarity. Mrs Decur referred to Virginia's 'never to be forgotten talk' and that 'it really was one of the most amusing talks we have ever had in our WI. We were very nearly helpless with laughter': a fitting reminder, 75 years after VW's death, that she could make an audience laugh so much.



DG's thatched cottage, Rodmell 1936

# EVENTS

The first event of the early summer is a **Lunch** from 12.30–2.30pm on **Wednesday May 18th** when Ann Thwaite (who wrote the Preface to *The Godwits Fly*) and the poet Fleur Adcock, a New Zealander by birth who lives in England, will be ‘in conversation’ about Robin Hyde.

On **Friday June 10th** Nicola Beauman will be giving a teatime talk about Dorothy Whipple at the second **Derby Book Festival**.

On **Sunday June 12th from 12–6pm** we shall be open as part of the Lamb’s Conduit Street **Celebration of the Queen’s Birthday**: there will be a free cream tea and general merriment. Just for that day all Persephone books bought in the shop will be £8.

On **Thursday June 16th** at 4 o’clock we have been invited to Prendergast School Adelaide Avenue Brockley SE4 1LE to see the murals painted in 1933–6 by Evelyn Dunbar (joint author of *Gardeners’ Choice*, PB No.114). Afterwards we shall have tea at the Hilly Fields Café.

On **Wednesday July 6th** at a **Lunch from 12.30–2.30pm** Samantha Ellis will talk about Amber Reeves and *A Lady and Her Husband*, PB No.116, for which she has written the Preface.

The 1953 film of *Little Boy Lost* (PB No. 28) starring Bing Crosby will be shown on **Tuesday July 19th** at 4.30 with a cream tea being served beforehand at 4 o’clock.

The biographer and historian Anne Sebba will give a talk at a **Lunch from 12.30–2.30** on



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**Tuesday September 14th** about her new book *Les Parisiennes: How the Women of Paris Lived, Loved and Died in the 1940s*, with particular reference to Jacqueline Mesnil-Amar and *Maman, What Are We Called Now?* (PB No.115).

Jonathan Smith, who wrote *Wilfred and Eileen*, PB No. 107, has recently written a book about Churchill and this was filmed by ITV as *Churchill’s Secret* starring Michael Gambon, Lindsay Duncan and Romola Garai. On **Tuesday October 4th**, after a cream tea at 4 o’clock, Jonathan will introduce the film and answer questions afterwards.

A reminder: the **Persephone Book Group** is on the first Wednesday of the month at 6.30. Madeira and bread and cheese are served. On **May 4th** at 6.30 Nicola Beauman will lead a discussion of *The Victorian Chaise-longue*. On **June 1st**, the group will be led by Lydia Fellgett and will discuss *The Home-Maker*. On **July 6th** Miki Footman will lead a discussion about *Good Evening, Mrs Craven*.

All events cost £20 except the free *Queen’s Birthday event* and the *Book Group*, which is £10.

The new books to be published in October are *Every Good Deed and Other Stories* by Dorothy Whipple, *Long Live Great Bardfield: The Autobiography of Tirzah Garwood* (who was married to Eric Ravilious) and *Madame Solario* (1956) by Gladys Huntington. There will also be a *Persephone Diary* for 2017 featuring the endpapers and first sentences of all (by then) 120 Persephone books.

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

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