



The Persephone Biannually

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Tel: +44 20 7242 9292

www.persephonebooks.co.uk

*Reading the Letter (1887) by the German painter Peter Kraemer
(1823–1907)*



OUR BOOKS FOR SPRING/SUMMER 2017

The first of our two new books for the Spring is in some ways an ‘untypical’ Persephone book. It is a late-nineteenth century novel; by a man; translated from the German, by a man, fifty-five years ago. This is how *Effi Briest* by Theodor Fontane (Fon-tah-nuh, no silent vowels in German) came about. Two years ago we were asked to give a small lecture tour in Germany, talking of course about Persephone Books. ‘Have you read *Effi Briest*?’ someone asked. Read it? We had not even heard of it. And we had a degree in English Literature, had specialised in the novel, and for years had worked on twentieth century women writers and the tradition in which they wrote.

Yet *Effi Briest* – which is about a sixteen-year-old girl married to a man twenty years older than her because it is socially advantageous – is part of that tradition and in some ways anticipates all our books: it castigates parents for simply marrying off their daughters rather than ensuring they have a future; it castigates male coldness and complacency: the men are weak and ineffectual and nothing gives them backbone but a ridiculous and disastrous code of

honour; it castigates women’s timidity; it castigates Effi’s irresponsibility; it castigates society’s constraints: it is, in essence, about the socially unforgivable. But this plea for modern values is written in the most delicate, subtle and unharanguing language with lightness of touch and great empathy for its characters. So how can it be that *Effi Briest* remains so little known in Britain?

This is its history: it was published in 1895 by the seventy-five year-old Theodor Fontane, whose ancestors were French but fled to Germany because of religious persecution (what’s new?). During the 1850s he lived in London, reading Walter Scott and Thackeray and George Eliot’s first (1859) novel. His own first novel appeared in 1878 when he was nearly sixty, and sixteen more would be published over the next twenty years; thus Fontane was like Penelope Fitzgerald (who was clearly influenced by him) in being a late-flowering novelist.

The first English translation came out in 1914. The second, which we are using, was



An 1895 wallpaper by the Belgian artist Henry van de Velde who lived and worked in Germany.



'Bugs in Booby Traps' Ruth Adler-Schnee b. Frankfurt 1923, designed in Detroit in 1947 © Montreal Museum of Fine Arts/ Ruth Adler-Schnee.

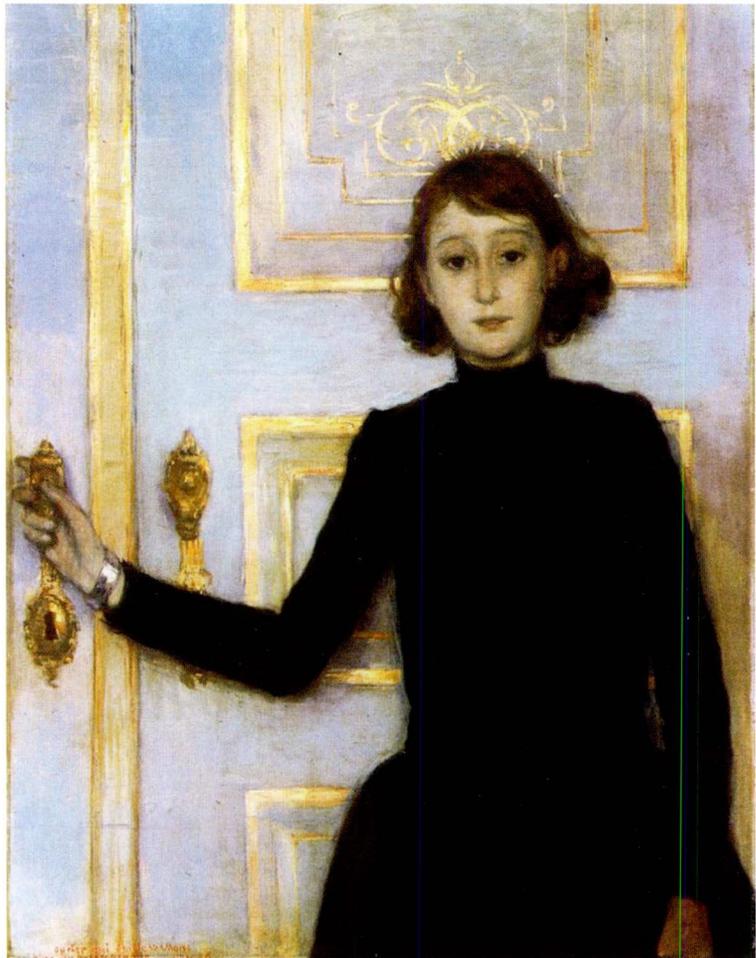
published in 1962 by the émigré German academic Walter Wallich, whose day job was working at the BBC; it is an excellent translation, sensitive to the original rather than being scrupulous (indeed, Wallich cut passages in order to make the book more accessible to English readers, and we have respected these cuts). Since then there have been three more translations in 1967, 1995 and 2015. Thus another untypical aspect of Persephone Book No. 121 is that it is already available in other editions. But does one ever see it in bookshops? No. Have most people read it? No. With the result that those Persephone readers who are reading *The New York Times* at the moment (as we are, because of its incredibly outspoken columnists) might have been a tad mystified by Richard Holmes's comment a few weeks ago that he had recently fallen in love with Anna Karenina 'and she joined my private pantheon of tragic nineteenth-century heroines: Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Madame Bovary, Effi Briest and Isabel Archer.'

We too would have been mystified two years ago. But now we have joined the ranks of the enlightened, and echo Charlie Lee-Potter's words when she writes in her new Persephone Afterword: 'Theodor Fontane is a very modern and outward-looking European novelist. It seems that our expectations of the nineteenth-century European novel have been guided by an assumption that it should be

Tolstoy-esque in length or Hugo-esque in complexity. *Effi Briest* is neither long nor labyrinthine but it is a masterpiece all the same. Its effect is mesmerising.'

The novelist and critic Anthony Quinn has written: 'Fontane gives his characters a life – and a will – of their own, yet makes their actions in retrospect seem a matter of inevitability. His portrait of a free spirit hemmed in by convention and hounded by boredom is inflected with quiet tenderness, sharp observation and rueful comedy.' While the

academic Barbara Everett compares Fontane to Henry James in what he leaves out, and to Samuel Beckett in the way he implicitly encloses his novels with darkness and emptiness: 'like Virginia Woolf Fontane creates an effect of the peculiarly real without being a naturalist or literalist.' Another critic, Inga-Stina Ewbank, commented on the influence of Ibsen and in particular *Hedda Gabler* (1890). And lastly Hermione Lee, biographer of Virginia Woolf, Edith Wharton and Penelope Fitzgerald, has written: 'I have



Portrait of ten year-old Marguerite van Mons (later Mrs Thomas Braun) painted in 1886 by Théo van Rysselberghe (1862–1926) Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent

been haunted by *Effi Briest* ... as I am by those novels that seem to do more than they say, to induce strong emotions that can't quite be accounted for.'

For this is the point about *Effi Briest*. You can't quite account for its effect on you: it's so intensely subtle. There is not much in the way of plot (because you imagine things won't end well) but from the very first page you are deeply moved by the unraveling of Effi's fate. Superficially it is an adultery novel – the saddest remark of all the sad remarks that Effi makes is 'We women must be seductive or we are nothing at all', p. 120 – but no novel about adultery says less about sex than this one: Fontane may be praised for his delicate and thorough realism and his distinction as a social satirist, but he shied away from the sexual. Which is why the most modern, 2009 film version of *Effi Briest* – there have been four previous

ones, in 1939, 1956, 1969 and Fassbinder's famous 1974 version – is absurdly 'up to date': it emphasises the erotic in a way Fontane never did.

Not long after Fontane's death the great German novelist Thomas Mann unveiled a memorial to 'unser Vater' Fontane and said that if a library had to be shrunk to only six novels *Effi Briest* should be one of them. We are pleased and proud that this 'quietly political and subversive novel, which tugs at life's restraints without ever questioning them directly' (Charlie Lee-Potter) is now in a library of 122 Persephone books.

Our second Persephone book for the spring is in one respect a love story in the *Romeo and Juliet* tradition. It is unusual in that a (relatively) happy ending is implicit in the beginning: the first sentence is 'One of the questions they were sometimes

asked was where and how they had met, for Marc Reiser was a Jew, originally from a small town in northern Ontario, and from 1933 until he went overseas in September 1942, a junior partner in the law firm of Maresch and Aaronson in Montreal, and Erica Drake was a Gentile, one of the Westmount Drakes.'

Just like *Mariana* by Mariana Dickens, Persephone Book No. 2, which first came out in 1940 and therefore leaves a huge question mark over its happy ending (for the war has only just begun), the original readers of this best-selling 1944 novel would have been all too aware that although *Earth and High Heaven* has a 'happy' ending, the war was far from over. But whether the fictional Marc and Erica live 'happily ever after' after the war is almost irrelevant. What is important is whether the prejudice and hostility of her father, and of Montreal society in general, will put a stop to their love affair; and whether Canadians would ever change their attitudes.

For *Earth and High Heaven* is a shocking book, reminding one that just as there were states in the American South where black people could not marry white (cf. the film of *Loving*) and buses where black people had to sit at the back (cf. Rosa Parks) and offices where black women had to use different ladies' rooms (cf. *Hidden Figures*), so in Canada it was entirely taken for granted that there were many aspects of



Still from Fassbinder's 1974 *Effi Briest*: Hanna Schygulla, Ulli Lommel, Wolfgang Schenk

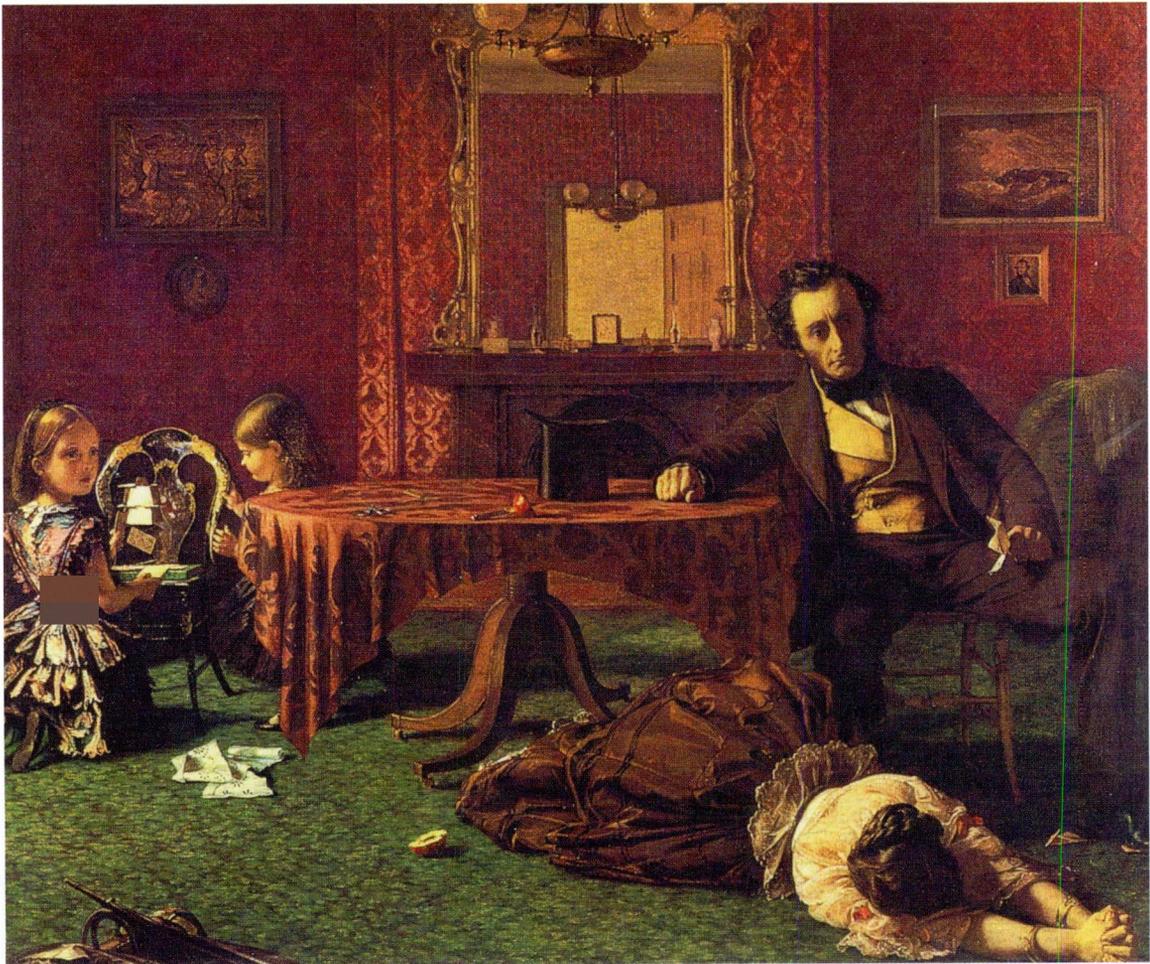
everyday life that were forbidden to Jews. But the barriers were often not clear-cut, as the second paragraph of the book makes plain: 'Hampered by racial-religious distinctions to start with, relations between the French, English and Jews of Montreal are still further complicated by the fact that all three groups suffered from an inferiority complex – the French because they are a minority in Canada, the English because they are a minority in Quebec, and the Jews because they are a minority everywhere.'

As Emily Rhodes, author of the new *Persephone Preface*, observes: 'Gwethalyn Graham sets up so many divisions in order to point out the paradox of how they are at once utterly meaningless, and devastatingly meaningful.'

Gwethalyn Graham then goes on: 'Thus it was improbable that Marc Reiser and Erica Drake should meet.' But they do meet and they fall in love. The problem is the entrenched prejudice of Canadian society: Erica's dawning realisation of

what is going on all around her begins when Marc tells her he is looking for somewhere to live. "'Didn't they have any vacancies?'" "Yes, they did have them, but the janitor told me they don't take Jews." He said it so matter-of-factly that Erica almost missed it, and then it was as though it had caught her full in the face...'

This is the key moment. Erica, who has led a life of unthinking privilege, suddenly realises what Canadian society is like. And loathes what she sees. She tries to



Theodor Fontane lived in London during the 1850s and would probably have gone to see Augustus Egg's 'Past and Present' 1858: the woman's adultery has destroyed the home it is her duty to uphold, hence the children building a symbolic house of cards.

win over her father (“After all, we Canadians don’t really disagree fundamentally with the Nazis about the Jews – we just think they go a bit too far”) and fails; and tries to get to know Marc while faced by the implacable opposition of her family.

As Emily Rhodes asks: ‘Why, in a climate of reticence, and in what is ostensibly a romance novel, was Gwethalyn Graham bold enough to confront the plight of the Jew head on?’ The answer lies in her family background. Her biographer, Barbara Meadowcroft, describes her childhood ‘in a home where international events and social issues were discussed round the dining room table.’ Gwethalyn Graham’s mother was one of the organisers of the Equal Franchise League and in the 1930s helped Jewish refugees; her father was a lawyer who supported all his wife’s causes. ‘Clearly, Gwethalyn grew up with an awareness of social issues, and a sense of moral justice, for which she knew how to fight... she believed that writers ought to engage with contemporary politics’ (Emily Rhodes).

Gwethalyn Graham (1913–65) was the author of two novels. The first, *Swiss Sonata*, was about the finishing school in Switzerland she went to for a year and was written when she was only 25; the second, *Earth and High Heaven*, came out when she was 31. The book was a massive success: it sold one and a half million copies, was translated into fifteen languages and was the first

ever Canadian book to be top of *The New York Times* bestseller list, staying on the list for 38 weeks; but it could be that its success had an inhibiting effect because Gwethalyn Graham (below) never wrote another novel. Or it could be that, like EM Forster, she had simply said all she had to say.

A Persephone reader suggested this book to us in 2008. This is what she wrote: ‘Desperate for something to read while cooped up with the family over Christmas, I bought a copy of *Earth and High Heaven* by Gwethalyn Graham. I absolutely loved it and definitely think it would do well. (I’d recommend it to anyone.) I loved the fact that it wasn’t a one-dimensional look at the effect of

racism on a relationship. It also describes perfectly the destructive power a family can have on an individual, and is additionally powerful because Erica and Marc are adults. The background of the uncertainty of the Second World War added tension but I think the book is still relevant and accessible. Most movingly, it captured how exciting it is to fall in love with the right person.’

Because there are so many other wonderful books to reprint (‘are you ever going to run out?’ people ask us!) we could have had no idea that nine years later Gwethalyn Graham’s call to arms would have become so horribly and newly relevant.



OUR BLOGGERS WRITE

‘Every book I read over the next eleven months will be judged against *Long Live Great Bardfield*. Each page comes alive with the minutiae of Tirzah Garwood’s relationships and marriage, England’s art scene during the thirties, and village life. It’s also the story of a woman who bravely faces the many challenges of raising a family with an often absent husband, having her creativity put on hold, standing up to others when she is firm in a decision and facing cancer with a remarkable lack of complaining despite situations, such as Eric’s affairs, when it would have been perfectly understandable to unleash a tirade. I’m left with the sense that Tirzah knew her value, kept a bit of her heart for herself, and admirably dealt with certain dire situations with an incredible amount of decorum. To anyone interested in a long list of topics such as the interwar period, artists, social history, women’s rights, village life, domestic history, World War II, England, etc, I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Also, for anyone contemplating a good read for a book group this would make a wonderful choice. I knew very little about Eric Ravilious and nothing at all about Tirzah but was completely swept away.’ Cosy Books

‘*The Godwits Fly* is an autobiographical novel by

the New Zealand author Robin Hyde (born Iris Wilkinson). The prose is glorious, poetic and continually a delight to read. Hyde’s descriptions of landscape particularly are sumptuous as are the snippets of poetry we get throughout the novel. However, while there is nothing to actually dislike about this novel, I found myself slightly underwhelmed though I don’t know why. Perhaps I just expected a little too much, it is still a very good novel. Robin Hyde’s writing style is not always easy, her prose as I have said is wonderful, but it isn’t always straightforward, not always conventional, the perspective alters a little as the characters in the novel grow up. All in all, there is an awful lot to like in this book, and thinking about it retrospectively now, my slight feeling of being underwhelmed might have had more to do with my mood than anything else.’ Heaven Ali

‘Amber Reeves is very clever at pointing out the way things function in the real world. Notice how the title says *A Lady and her Husband* and not the other way round: the heroine realises that there are two different worlds, that of a man and that of a woman. This said, the novel is in no way a dreary read about business politics and class struggles. There are hints of sarcasm and humour throughout and the writing has a steady pace and offers a mix of political and

feminist ideas mixed with the trivialities of a normal family. I found Amber Reeves to be a charming writer and the book to be a brilliant one on British social reform. When I read the ending, I must say I was a bit surprised. I was hoping for a feminist cliché ending. However I was able to appreciate the thought process of the characters and arrived at the conclusion that it was a good ending indeed.’ The Book Satchel

‘I found it hard to shake off that sense of impending doom for the duration of reading this gripping book. Here is an example of fictional autobiography with Edgar unwittingly revealing his own misguided and misplaced sense of self by his attitudes and his reactions. Honestly, you’d think all this would be enough to make me put the book down and go and pick up something nice like *Greenery Street*, wouldn’t you, but I was riveted start to finish. *The Hopkins Manuscript* is a brilliant study of people under duress. It could still arguably be read as a metaphor for any action that might have serious consequences for the planet and seems as relevant and prescient today as it must have done in 1939 when it was first published; the book was very well-received and must have had an impact in the run up to the outbreak of war.’ Dovegrey-reader

‘**M**adame Solario is the story of a woman who became the obsession of more than six men. Each of these obsessions caused different forms of strife. It makes you wonder if Madame Solario welcomed their attentions or abhorred them. Was she an attention-seeking and vain creature or just a victim of circumstance? Or just a plain victim? This is one of those books that remains with you after you finish it. Could the characters have done other things to alter their outcomes to make them happier or did some form of narcissism or self-importance win out in the end? The European setting of the early 20th Century before The Russian Revolution and WWI helped to amplify the proceedings. I would highly recommend this story to readers of Vladimir Nabakov, Leo Tolstoy, Angela Carter, and Margaret Atwood.’ Quirky Reader

‘I read *The Blank Wall* in its entirety on a plane journey, which gives you an indication of how quickly I was able to race through around 230 pages. It is certainly a page-turner – maybe even a thriller, though there is nothing particularly tense or terrifying here. There is very little in the way of a mystery to solve (though the reader does wonder if the carpet will be pulled from under their feet). Raymond Chandler called Elisabeth Sanxay Holding ‘the best character and suspense

writer (for consistent but not large production)’ and particularly championed this book and in this case he has picked a charming writer. Her strengths perhaps lie more in character than in suspense (though I suspect suspense has taken more of centre stage in the decades since Chandler made that pronouncement), but *The Blank Wall* was certainly an extremely entertaining way to pass a flight.’ Stuck in a Book

‘**T**he *Sack of Bath* was an attempt to bring the attention of the wider public (and indeed the world) to the fact that

the authorities in Bath were undertaking a large-scale, wide-ranging demolition programme, bringing down buildings that although not Grade I listed, had immense historical significance. Much of the problem seems to stem from the local authorities at the time having no real expertise or overview, and relying on a series of experts who really didn’t know what they were doing. The book itself is a short and fascinating read, capturing a moment in time when a call to action was made. It’s liberally illustrated with a large number of photographs, most notably several by Lord Snowdon, and



Philip Hardwick’s Euston Arch (built in 1837) in 1960. ‘Owing to the malice and philistinism of British Railways and Harold Macmillan’s government, its unnecessary destruction commenced a year later.’ Britain’s Lost Cities by Gavin Stamp.

these are an essential and integral part of the book; and it makes you think deeply about the bureaucracy and red tape in the country, and the people we put in charge of making decisions and plans on our behalf.' Kaggsty's Bookish Ramblings'

'This reprint of a 1930s novel by RC Sherriff, is an absolutely enchanting account of a retired couple who find a new lease of life after buying a house in the country. *Greengates* is a truly wonderful book that I raced through, so caught up was I in the lives of Tom and Edie, both very real and sympathetic characters, whose ordinariness makes them recognisable and irresistibly endearing. This was pure and simple comfort reading and a book I know I will delight in sinking into any time I want to be reminded of the many wonders of my distinctly ordinary existence. It's just the sort of thing to curl up and read on a cold winter's evening, and I can see it becoming a perennial favourite. *Greengates* is such a truly delightful story, I can't recommend it highly enough. Don't let it pass you by!' Book Snob

'*The Victorian Chaise-Longue* is a real curio in the history of writing-about-being-a-woman, as well as an intriguing venture into the fantastic. It is extremely subtle in its telling. There are various relationships and events that Marghanita Laski doesn't spell out, but leaves us to discover

piece by piece – it is very clever, and must have taken some restraint on her part, and trust in her readers. Equally interesting is the way in which Laski compares the 1950s and the 1860s – there is much to think about, even in this brief, story-driven novella. But one query I had the first time I read it, and this time, was whether it is in fact scary? P.D. James's introduction calls it terrifying; other readers have said the same. I didn't find it scary for a moment. But is it good? I absolutely think so – a great demonstration of the power of restraint and efficiency in fiction writing.' Vulpes Libris

'*Miss Ranskill Comes Home* is both funny and heartbreaking. I thought the writing was so good – lyrical and descriptive in places, funny in others. As the book opens, our heroine is doing some painful and very difficult physical work, and we soon learn that she is burying and mourning for the Carpenter, a beautiful soul with whom she has been (literally) marooned on a desert island for four years, after falling overboard when she tried to rescue her hat. When she manages (on her own) to return to England, it's during the Second World War, and she is re-immersed into a world – with bombs, and ration books, and clothing coupons, and hearty village women – that she knows nothing about. There's a lot of humour, in her encounters with an oblivious old school friend and

her own disapproving sister, but it's also a little heartbreaking to see her making her way home in a country that has changed and doesn't immediately welcome her. Miss Ranskill is a wonderful, feisty, beautifully-drawn character, and I loved spending time with her. I found myself rooting for her and so happy for her at the end.' Books As Food

'*A London Child of the 1870s* is a bittersweet book in which readers are treated to a glimpse of real, day-to-day life in Victorian London from the perspective of a young girl. Molly was the youngest child in her family, and the only girl, with four elder brothers. The construct of it is that the author, as an adult, is reflecting back on her early childhood – a time in her life which was punctured by a catastrophic event revealed in the final pages. Until then, however, *A London Child of the 1870s* is quite joyful and exuberant. Would I recommend it? Yes, I would. It not only gives a heartfelt and touching portrayal of daily life for a Victorian child, but shows that the stereotype of that life is not necessarily the reality. It also provides a perspective from which a modern reader can analyse the societal changes that have taken place and impacted on our lives in all sorts of ways. As with all books that have been republished by Persephone, it is beautifully written and quite poignant throughout – a touching and memorable book for sure.' Books for Years

'REFUGEE BLUES' W H AUDEN

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions,
some are living in holes:
Yet there's no place for us, my dear,
yet there's no place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you'll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear,
we cannot go there now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,
Every spring it blossoms anew;
Old passports can't do that, my dear,
old passports can't do that.

The consul banged the table and said
'If you've got no passport, you're officially dead.'
But we're still alive, my dear, but we're still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year:
But where should we go today, my dear,
but where should we go today?

Came to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said:
'If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread': he was talking of you and me, my dear,
he was talking of you and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying:
'They must die':
We were in his mind, my dear, we were in his mind.

Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin,
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:
But they weren't German Jews, my dear,
but they weren't German Jews.

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear,
they weren't the human race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,
A thousand windows and a thousand doors;
Not one of them was ours, my dear,
not one of them was ours.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear,
looking for you and me.

©The Estate of WH Auden 1939



Red Shirt Seamstresses Odoardo Borrani 1863. The women are sewing red shirts for Garibaldi's soldiers who had been fighting for Italian unification.

OUR REVIEWERS WRITE

‘In 1930, Tirzah Garwood and Eric Ravilious were married, in spite of her parents’ disapproval. Like her husband, she was a highly original artist. But she was also a wonderful writer, and Persephone has republished her singular autobiography **Long Live Great Bardfield**, a book she began while recovering from a mastectomy early in 1942, and completed the next year, by which time she was a widow (Ravilious, a war artist, was reported missing in September 1942, his aircraft having been lost off Iceland; she died in 1951). This edition couldn’t come at a better moment. Not only has interest in the set she depicts so vividly never been higher, thanks to the Dulwich Picture Gallery’s acclaimed 2015 retrospective of Ravilious’s work; last autumn she became the 60,000th entry in the Oxford *DNB*. I like everything about her book, from its confidential tone to its cast of characters, among them the artist Eric Gill, the architect Oliver Hill, and Edward Bawden and his wife, Charlotte, with whom Ravilious and Garwood lived at Brick House in the Essex village of Great Bardfield. Most of all, I love its author’s attitude to life. Affectionately flexible in matters of the heart – she and Ravilious were both unfaithful, but continued to love each other all the same – she was never prone, even in the worst of times, to self-pity.’ Rachel Cooke in the *Observer*

‘First published anonymously in 1956, **Madame Solario** by Gladys Huntington is a tale of infatuation, deception and abandonment. Set on Lake Como in 1906, it vividly captures a leisurely, lost Edwardian world – the ‘voluminous chiffon veils’ thrown over women’s large hats, silk parasols, the ‘almost excessive beauty of the winding lake surrounded by mountains’ and ‘classical villas standing among cypress trees’. In this sensuous atmosphere, impressionable young Englishman Bernard Middleton is instantly attracted to Madame Solario, a beautiful woman with a shadowy past – just as mysterious as the author herself. Gladys Huntington died shortly after this book was published to great critical acclaim. Enchanting, if a trifle long.’ Rebecca Wallersteiner *The Lady*

‘I want to write my life while I am still happy.’ Tirzah Garwood wrote these words in the spring of 1942. She had reasons not to be happy but her delight in life, which irradiates this fascinating memoir, cannot be suppressed. “The smell of May wafting over the orchard wall ... The pony munching the sweet clover ... the cuckoo is cuckooing down in the willow grove.” She is embraced in a cocoon of home and family and has the gift of living in the moment: “I am so happy sitting here that I find it very difficult to write at all.” She wrote for her

descendants, not for a publisher. Her daughter Anne Ullmann has done an excellent job of shaping her large, sprawling memoir without losing the spontaneity and looseness of style that is part of its charm; she has filled gaps with brief explanatory notes and extracts from letters, and illustrated it with family photographs and with Tirzah’s rich, humorous, evocative woodcuts. Tirzah was not a natural historian and narrates in a kind of singsong which, disconcertingly, gives equal weight to events great and small. But her voice is always compelling. She and Eric were at the heart of the Great Bardfield artistic community, now recognised as of considerable importance.... Her account of it will be invaluable to cultural historians.’ Charlotte Moore in *The Oldie*

‘England in the 1930s and ‘40s is the setting for **Every Good Deed and Other Stories**. Dorothy Whipple is adept at convincing, unpleasant and manipulative characters, and situations spiralling out of control. Her stories ring true with acerbic wit and subtle observations. She vividly evokes an era when middle-class women had pretensions, household staff and time for tea: a world of dance halls, boarding houses, fish knives and smog. Unputdownable.’ RW *The Lady*

THE PERSEPHONE 122

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 Beuman

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 Beuman

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 1946 film. Afterwords: Terence Handley MacMath and Christopher Beuman

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 Beauman

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 Houlst 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 Victorian parents gave birth to daughters 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,

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' said the 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 1955 novel by the author of *Mariana* about a widow with three rather unsympathetic daughters who finds happiness in the end. Afterword: AS Byatt

91. Miss Buncle Married by DE Stevenson A very 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 and path-breaking 1911 suffragette novel about a mill girl and her aristocratic friend. Preface: Lydia Felgett

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 Bunclie' 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. Illustrated by Arthur Watts. 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) is illustrated by a dozen beautiful wood engravings 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. An unparalleled description of the last days of the Occupation in Paris. 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 girls in her husband's chain of tea shops are underpaid – and does something about it. Preface: Samantha Ellis

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

118. Every Good Deed and Other Stories by Dorothy Whipple A 1944 novella and nine short stories written between 1931 and 1961 which display the author's 'wonderful power of taking quite ordinary people in quite unromantic surroundings and making them live.'

119. Long Live Great Bardfield: The Autobiography of Tirzah Garwood. This touching, funny and perceptive memoir first came out in a limited edition in 2012. Our version has many wood engravings and photographs (including one of Tirzah's husband Eric Ravilious).. Preface: Anne Ullmann

120. Madame Solario by Gladys Huntington Published anonymously, in 1956, this superb novel in the Henry James/Edith Wharton tradition is set on Lake Como in 1906. Its incestuous undertones made it a *succès de scandale*. Afterword: Alison Adburgham

121. Effi Briest by Theodor Fontane. A classic of European literature written in 1895 by the great German novelist: neglected in the UK yet on a par with *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary*. Afterword: Charlie Lee-Potter

122. Earth and High Heaven by Gwethalyn Graham A 1944 Canadian bestselling novel, winner of the prestigious Governor-General's Prize, about a young woman falling in love with a Jewish man and her father's virulent and upsetting anti-semitism. Preface: Emily Rhodes



'TO OPEN A DOOR'

BY KATHLEEN WARREN

All during her morning around of shopping people kept on congratulating Mary Henderson because her sister was coming to see her today. The grocer, the butcher, stray acquaintances encountered, all harped on this one theme, smiling glibly: 'So your sister's coming back for a little visit, Mrs Henderson? I expect she'll see some changes.'

They all sounded very complacent about the changes, obviously improvements to the town. But Mary, even while she agreed in her gentle voice, was thinking: 'But will she? I can't think, really – what changes are there?'

And all she could actually remember were the new council houses along Turnpike Road; she'd forgotten they had been up twelve years and Helen had been away sixteen. Was it possible?

When she got to the green-grocer's she suddenly thought that she must get some brussels sprouts, because Helen had always declared, with her extravagant turn of phrase, that she could eat them 'forever' and never bother with other vegetables. So Mary was actually holding open the imitation leather shopping bag to receive them before she thought again: 'Will she still like them?'

Years of living abroad, and certainly luxurious living, might have dulled her palate to so ordinary a vegetable. And Mary

remembered reading during the war that all American soldiers had united in a common hatred of the English sprout. Helen had been in America for ten years. Mary stared in dismay now as they cascaded into the bag, imagining her sister's bravely concealed disdain, but it was done. She accepted her change and the young assistant's remark:

'Glad it's a nice day for your sister, Mrs Henderson,' with the same mild smile. No one could have told how this plump little woman with her childlike blue eyes and soft mouth, her clothes worn for comfort rather than show, was becoming racked with worry and indecision.

At first Helen's letter had brought stunning surprise and then delight, a feeling she couldn't describe – her sister, the person who had known and shared the details of their home, the exultancies of Christmases and birthdays, was coming home. No one could ever know you like a sister or a brother, until they branched off into adolescence, though even some of the strands remained firm.

So Mary had felt that a part of her own body was returning, something she had subconsciously missed all these years, uncompensated even by her husband and children. But now, ridiculously, the sprout incident made her think:

'What's Helen going to be like?'

Helen, who was a well-known figure, an actress, a woman married to a very wealthy man, a woman who had written several times a year in the generous manner of a benefactress and had sent them food parcels and presents. It would be that Helen who was returning, not the girl whose photograph stood with Mary's, the rather sulky girl with the plaits.

Waiting in the bus queue, the bag dragging her arm, she was daggered with nervous anger at the coming visit.

'Coming here to be superior, I suppose. I expect she'll even sneer that I'm still living in our old house, as though my husband couldn't afford to buy a new one. But I'll explain that Mum and Dad wanted me to, that after they'd saved all those years to buy it they couldn't bear it should go when they died....'

All this was churning in her mind while she swayed on the bus, and Mrs Parsons, with the badly-fitting plate, mouthed:

'How excited you must be. Such a famous sister....'

Famous? Yes, Helen had been in three films, and that meant fame nowadays; only Mary had never really recognised her in that toweringly dramatic creature whose pictures she had obediently patronised when they reached England.



Morning 1860 by Moritz von Schwind

When she dressed to go to the station she felt dissatisfied with her best costume and thought her hat looked stupid with that pom-pom of feathers. She stared at her face as she whacked powder on to it, and thought of Helen living in Hollywood with Max Factor on the doorstep, so to speak. The house quietly watched her, as it had watched the girls long ago, and, in a last minute of panic, she went from room to room, nervously flicking dust away and straightening pictures. Normally, she was proud of the small improvements they'd made in her parents' house, but today it all looked gimcrack, like an old person trying to disguise age by a new suit or hair-dyeing. Only as she went down the gravel front path could she feel a tiny flame of pride in the asters – at least she still had her green fingers.

The train was five minutes late, and she stood gulping because

she'd practically run up Station Hill. She peeked into the slot machine mirror to tuck away threads of hair and remembered how once Helen had used some counters on this very machine, defiantly banging them in almost under a porter's nose. The chocolates had tasted gritty with guilt on Mary's tongue.

The signal fell, the train came round the bend, and a sudden cry rose in Mary's throat, overwhelming all petty nerves: 'Oh, let it be Helen – Helen as she was – my sister...'

But it wasn't. It was a tall woman in black, with that fantastic familiarity of face which film actors possess when they acquire another dimension. Helen was there, but overlaid by the woman who walked so beautifully and said:

'Mary, darling, how lovely to see you again....' in the husky voice now known to millions. Mary stammered pitifully, feeling she ought to explain –

something – to the gaping ticket collector. It was so odd to have an actress walking at her side, exchanging suitable remarks about husbands and children, and to be saying they could take the station taxi, as easily as if the Hendersons always used it.

Of course, the actress was very kind, obviously accustomed to dealing with people, listening to all Mary's faltering remarks about the town. But could sixteen years have taken away all that girl who had shocked people by wearing green velveteen trousers and announcing: 'The whole damn town is dead'? Or the child who had played in the recreation ground and giggled with the Grammar School boys?

Everything seemed so small when they got in, and Mary madly tried to create more space by throwing open doors as they went along. When she suggested Helen should go up and put her coat on the bed, her sister laughed queerly.

'Your room? The parents' room, I suppose?'

Mary stared back, almost surprised.

'Why, yes, the parents' room – it's the biggest.'

'We were never allowed in there alone after that time I dressed in father's best suit and nagged you into wearing mother's voile dress. Remember?'

Then Helen laughed again and took a gold cigarette case out of the bag with what Mary feared was a real diamond monogram, and the recollection was gone.

In the bedroom Mary fidgeted

while Helen smoked and said:

'A real modern suite – what would they have said, my dear?'

'Well, that brass bedstead, they loved it, naturally, but it looked old-fashioned if my friends came.'

Mary defended herself, not sure whether Helen was really attacking, and continued quickly: 'Will you excuse me if I just go and see to the vegetables?'

'Don't you have anyone in to help you, darling?' asked Helen, as if she'd really forgotten some people didn't have maids.

'No, just a woman three mornings a week for the rough,' answered Mary, and paused in the doorway as one of her small worries returned like a persistent bee. 'Helen, do you still like sprouts?'

'What?'

Helen looked as if she'd forgotten their existence and then laughed gaily. 'Oh, darling, such a thing – I suppose I do. Look, I'll forage round the house while you cook, if I may?'

'Of course – Peter has our room and Jennifer what was the spare – the box-room is the spare now.' She hesitated a second, then said, 'They're all coming home to lunch, by the way – I have quite a job every day, with a husband in an office in town, instead of going to London.'

'I imagine so.'

So Mary went downstairs, hoping the children would behave and not show off because Helen wouldn't understand if they did, having no children herself – it was very difficult.

Helen missed the old bath with its wooden surround; the porcelain one was completely mass-produced, and the room was all white tiling and oilskin curtains. The spare room was now definitely a schoolgirl's room, with pictures of ballet dancers everywhere. The box-room was disconcertingly clean and bare, except for the bed and wardrobe; she wondered where the two children played on wet days, for she and Mary had loved the cobwebby seclusion of the boxes. And now, Peter's room, which had been theirs; her hand hovered on the door knob.

She didn't see the cricket bats and conkers, the large boots and roller skates. As soon as she stepped inside, the past stepped with her. She had been holding it off successfully during that ride through town and the exploration of the other rooms. But in here she had whispered with Mary away from the parents' indulgent supervision; in here she had fulminated rebellion to the scared sister, wearing those green trousers. And in here she had lain awake while Mary slept, those glorious nights when she and Hugh found they were in love, and she dreamed without sleep. And on those other nights, after she had said to him, 'You'll stick – you'll never get out and try to succeed. Well, I shall...'

She had; she'd gone on the first wave of that tide; she'd stayed away, gradually swept further and further. The amazing successes, the travellings, her marriage to

Edward – but perhaps she wouldn't have stayed so long if Hugh had waited. Gentle, tender, lazy Hugh. All the sweetness of her life had been spent in this room – there had been none left over to mingle with the success.

She was crying now, in the effortless way which had delighted so many producers. Unnoticed, the house had been filling with the sound of children's voices, and Mary had come up to fetch her, opening the door and saying: 'Dear, are you...?'

She checked in shock as Helen turned and for that minute they saw each other clearly, as sisters, as they had been. Then Helen smudged away the tears, smiled brilliantly, and said: 'Darling, I'm being silly. Are they here?'

'Yes, they're – all here...'

'Good...'

Helen came downstairs with that beautifully controlled walk, and Mary felt more dumpy than ever as they entered the drawing room where the two children waited, the stocky, dark little boy, and the rather lanky girl in the first restless stage of adolescence, heavily breathing as they gazed at their romantic aunt. And the slim man with the gentle brown eyes and nervous smile to whom Helen went at once, with both hands outflung, crying:

'Hugh – darling – how lovely to see you again...'

John O'London's Weekly January 5th 1951. The author wrote three novels: The Locked Gates (1950), Intruder in the House (1951) and The Long Fidelity (1952), then silence.

ADÈLE GERAS ON WHIPPLE'S EVERY GOOD DEED

It is a matter of some perplexity to me that Dorothy Whipple is not better known and more widely read. She is a writer who combines accessibility and good writing in a way that I find compelling. Her critical reputation was once high. I have written about her (mostly on blogs) in a crusading mode, trying as hard as I can to persuade everyone to read her. I have given her novels away as presents many times over and I have a 100% success rate in creating Whipple fans. Not one single person to whom I've recommended her has come back and said: she's not for me. This applies to men as well as women, even though, on the face of it, her subject matter is what would now be classed as 'women's fiction'.

I have heard it said more than once that her surname does her no favours. But let me dispel some myths that might cling to the name. She is not a soppy writer. She is not a sweet and sugary writer. She is never sentimental. She looks at the world, and at people clearly and shrewdly. She does not shrink away from horrors. In *They Were Sisters*, PB No. 56, she created perhaps the most horribly abusive husband in modern fiction. She understands money: both the good things it can do and the harm it can cause. She is very aware of class

and has strong views about good behaviour. She is a moral writer and a Christian. She is not a little Englisher. She is as sharp when writing about France and the French as she is when closer to home. It's true that her fictional universe, both in the novels and in the short stories, is limited. That is to say: if you are looking for stories about tiger hunting, deep sea fishing, spies, murders, skulduggery of various kinds or any kind of high-octane adventure, then Whipple is not the writer for you. However, there are plenty of thrills in the interaction of seemingly civilised people; many ways in which they can injure one another; lots of small deceptions and unkindnesses and tiny, domestic horrors that even those most closely connected by blood and affection can inflict upon one another.

In *Every Good Deed and Other Stories*, Persephone Book No. 118, the people you meet are spinsters, married men, bossy husbands, handsome young chaps, widows, childless rich sisters, maids, shop workers and several children. Whipple is very good at depicting children, neither bestowing on them some kind of sanctity on account of their age, nor failing to understand that they can be just as sensitive as adults. The women we meet are young, middle-aged and elderly. There are flirts,

pretty women, plain women, bossy women, entitled women, snobbish women and women who are undeservedly hurt very badly indeed. Some grow old during the course of the story, as in *Every Good Deed*. The snobbish and over-critical get their comeuppance, as in 'Exit' and 'Boarding House'. Those who are nasty to their relations sometimes have a surprise when they see the results of their unkindness, as in 'Miss Pratt Disappears'. In this story, and one called 'One Dark Night', Dorothy Whipple writes of people literally stumbling round in the dark and the cold, and the way they find the light again is metaphorical as well as literal. She is often a hopeful writer, although there are stories whose endings are as bleak as can be.

Her subject matter, both in the novels and the stories, is not of the sort to excite attention. It can be summed up in a few words: ordinary people leading ordinary lives, quite often of quiet desperation. She is very good at conveying the horror of disappointments, both serious and trivial. She excels in catch-ing the exact tone of contempt that some of her characters feel for others. She is superb at making us feel for the un-regarded in society: the single, elderly woman with no decent relations, the childless,

the poor; the ones with no golden future to look forward to, who nevertheless do their best to go through life with as much decency as possible. It's mostly a middle-class world, which annoys some readers though I have no idea at all why this should be. Middle-class people exist and they read books and have just as much right to be depicted in fiction as anyone else.

But Dorothy Whipple is far too good a writer to fill her stories with unalloyed misery. There are happy endings for some of her characters. There is one story called 'Sunday Morning' which has, untypically, a punch-line, and a very amusing one at that if you have a slightly wicked sense of humour. There is also one story which is rather different from the others. It's called 'The Swan' and is in the first person; this, and the lack of a real plot, make me wonder whether this is fiction, or an anecdote about something Dorothy Whipple experienced herself. It is short and beautiful, and shows a slightly different aspect of her writing style.

So what about the style? What about JB Priestley's claim that Whipple was the 'twentieth-century Jane Austen'? Let's set aside the obvious truth that no one can ever be compared to the divine Jane and see whether his remark has some value. I think it has. Dorothy Whipple shares with Jane Austen certain important characteristics: the small and (some would say) rather

restricted canvas on which she works; the concentration on domestic affairs, love, the home, and interactions between relations and neighbours; the sharp gaze which takes in and understands people's qualities and foibles and sets them down for us. Then there's the matter of the prose itself, for example, from *Every Good Deed*, this perfect description (which speaks volumes in a most economical way) of two sisters waiting for their reprobate nephew: 'So they waited up for Philip in dressing gowns they would once never have dreamed of wearing. They made tea, they talked a little and sighed a good deal without knowing it. Each sometimes noticed that the other sighed and was compassionate, without noticing that she sighed herself.'

At the risk of stating the obvious, the short stories collected in *Every Good Deed* are just that: short stories. There are disagreements about where short stories end and novels begin. I would call the title story, *Every Good Deed*, a novella. It's much longer than the other stories and is divided into chapters, for one thing. For another, we follow the characters through a much longer timeline and see what happens to all of them. There are more protagonists than we usually find in a short story and the tale deals with many different kinds of emotion. But some of the stories in this volume are obviously short stories and could not be anything else: 'Exit', 'One

Dark Night' and 'Sunday Morning' are about an event or a short span of time in the life of its characters which reveals some truth about them, or causes some change in them and their attitudes. When you finish reading such a story, if it's good, ripples of thought spread through your mind and questions come up. *What happened next*, you wonder. Sometimes: *Why didn't I see that coming?* Other stories here, for example *Every Good Deed* itself and 'Boarding House', take longer to unfold and the characters are more fully developed. But above all Dorothy Whipple cares about the people in her stories, and it's her great gift to make us care about them, too. She is a warm-hearted, elegant and supremely emotionally intelligent writer.



This is a newly-discovered photograph of Vere Hodgson (author of PB No.9 Few Eggs and No Oranges), a writer who would surely have been great friends with Dorothy Whipple if they had known each other – Vere was eight years younger but so like her in temperament (although their lives were very different).

'MRS MALAISE' BY BARBARA NOBLE, AUTHOR OF *DOREEN*

I write this doggerel verse in
praise of Mrs Malaise.
An odd and rather comic name,
But after all, its owner came
From Belgium, when that hapless
nation
Was under German occupation
In WWI.
Determined to escape the Hun,
A widow, with two children under
three,
Better, she thought, to be a
refugee,
And sought involvement in a
daring plan
To smuggle people in a baker's van
Across the border into Holland.
They must lie
Under the floorboards, with the
children drugged for fear
they cry.
Why did the Hun allow this weekly
journey unpoliced?
It was to fetch the village's supply
of yeast.
I only wish I had learned more
about the plot;
Alas, her English left a lot to
Be desired, and I'm no polyglot.
(She had a charming version of
n'est-ce-pas – 'Is not?')
All that I know is that she left
The children 'with the nuns' and,
thus bereft,
Journeyed to London, there to
earn her bread
Armed with the only weapon that
she had:
Her needle.

I was never one to wheedle
For confidences if they did not

freely flow,
But I would dearly like to know
How she embarked. A sweat-shop
in Soho?
What Snakes and Ladders fortune
did she undergo
Until (by now the war was over),
She found herself in veritable
clover –
Well-treated, trusted and, no
doubt, well-paid,
In the position of a lady's maid
To an American, herself well-
heeled,
With good connections in the
social field,
The world of night-clubs,
Charlestoning in tails,
And even dancing with the
Prince of Wales;
And sometimes he and others
would end up
At the American's, to breakfast
or to sup
On scrambled eggs at three or
four a.m.
Mrs Malaise, it was, who cooked
for them,
Bearing no grudge. Her disposition
Was one of gentleness and of
submission.

But what of the children in the
orphanage?
No longer babies but by now an age
To wonder and to query?
And were the nuns a little weary
Of their responsibility? When
would Madame Malaise
Reclaim the little boys whom she
had borne but they must raise?
Could she not now afford to visit

them, the little brothers,
To reassure them that they had
a mother
And one day would live happily
together?
Also, I wonder whether
The dead young father had not
some relation
Willing to keep in touch and make
donation?
(She had a faded photograph of
him; a serious face,
Not handsome, but with a look
of race.
'He was Professeur,' she would
say with pride,
So he had made his mark before
he died.)
All this is mere conjecture, a
'perhaps',
And one of many that I need to
fill the gaps.
One thing is certain: thanks to the
intrepid baker
She finally attained the status of
dressmaker,
With her own business. Now at
last, at last,
She could salute the future and let
go the past,
Be reunited with her children and
support them.
Mankind may gender plans but
Fate abort them.
She had not understood, or was
not told
The elder brother would be (just)
too old
To qualify for entry to the U.K.
(I hope the Law would be more
lenient today.)
Entry was granted only to the

younger brother.
 The elder never did forgive his
 mother.
 Even in middle age, rich and
 successful in his field,
 The suppurating wound remained
 unhealed.
 Was there some sibling jealousy to
 boot?
 At any rate, it was beyond dispute
 That, once they were together,
 she adored
 The son whom fate had finally
 restored.
 He was precocious, too, and could
 divine
 When fashions changed, and then
 design
 Clothes which their customers
 thought chic.
 One of the things of which she
 loved to speak
 Was of their expeditions late at
 night
 To the West End, to gaze into the
 bright,
 Lit windows of the stores, and try
 to memorise
 Ideas to copy for their own small
 enterprise.
 They prospered, and perhaps it was
 the happiest period of her life –
 Although he married and she did
 not like his wife.
 And then he died, and her World
 crumbled for a second time.
 Did she no longer have the
 strength to climb
 That steep, steep hill again?
 I think, too, failure went hand in
 hand with grief and pain:
 His skills went with him and,
 besides, their trade
 Had now a deadly rival – the
 cheap ready-made.
 Now comes another gap to baffle
 me:

When did she make the move to
 North West Three,
 To the vast basement flat, to earn
 as best she could
 A now precarious livelihood?
 No longer making individual
 ‘creations’,
 She was reduced to
 ‘alterations’...
 Take in, let out, hems up, hems
 down (and very useful too),
 Although her customers seemed
 sadly few.
 To try to join the ends
 She took in lodgers; one couple
 became friends;
 But the wife died and poor Jack
 took to drink.
 But she refused to let him sink
 Into despair; fed him at least one
 meal a day,
 Ensured he kept his job, and in
 a way
 He almost came to be another
 son,
 And loved her quite as much as if
 he had been one.
 Then a rung lower, on the sweet-
 shop’s board
 A notice: ‘Wanted...’ She could
 not afford
 To let a cleaner’s job affront her
 pride.
 And so, at last, she and I coincide.

 I have not yet achieved a single
 phrase
 Which could explain the spell
 Mrs Malaise
 Cast on me; or by which direction
 Respect and liking turned to true
 affection.
 Her personality was gentle,
 Was almost timid, but not
 deferential;
 Exquisitely polite, and grateful
 For kindnesses, like one who had

known hateful
 Treatment from others in past
 years. She spoke
 In the beguiling accent of her
 Belgian folk.
 How long she stayed with me in
 this employ
 I can’t recall; did she by chance
 enjoy
 Some better fortune? All I know
 Is that in time it was my turn to go
 On errands to *her* door. The
 sitting room,
 Shabby but vast, her fitting room,
 The gas fire always lit ahead for
 me,
 And chocolate biscuits with my cup
 of tea.
 And in those quiet and
 companionable sessions
 She gradually made me the
 confessions
 By which I sought, from an
 existence rife
 With such disparate incidents, to
 trace the pattern of her life.

 So the years passed, and once
 she went away;
 Her son had written, asking her to
 stay –
 For ever, if she chose. But she
 returned
 And in the course of time I
 learned
 The reason. With humiliation and
 distress
 She said: ‘His life is bad. He has
 a mistress.’
 Though inwardly I smiled, I could
 not query her decision,
 But I regretted it. Her supervision
 Would have relieved me; as I once
 had planned
 To ask her parish priest to lend
 a hand.
 But Mrs Malaise, though Catholic,

never went to Mass.
 The explanation that she gave me
 was:
 ‘There is no need. I know that I
 am good.’
 Which anyone who did not know
 her would
 Think rather smug. But it
 conveyed the sense
 Of earnest, child-like innocence
 Which permeated her whole
 personality,
 And made it irresistible to me.

But she was growing old and
 worn and bent;
 The will to battle on was nearly
 spent;
 Her shuffling footsteps slowing
 more and more,
 The while I waited, apprehensive,
 at the basement door.
 My last commission went,
 perforce, unfinished;
 For, worst of all, her eyesight had
 too much diminished.
 There was a birthday spent in
 hospital; I took a cake;
 And Jack was there, sober and
 spruced up for her sake.
 When he had left, she told me,
 almost with dismay,
 She never saw him now, but I had
 learned he visited each day.

After he died, Benevolent
 Authority came on the scene.
 The time had come, it felt, to
 intervene
 In her own interests, and in a
 while
 A further page was added to her
 file,
 And someone, somewhere, passed
 a resolution:
 Mrs Malaise must go into an
 institution.

The one selected had a lot of
 merit
 And really did Authority much
 credit.
 The first time that I went, I ran
 Into her oldest friend, who was
 Italian,
 A pleasant woman, and we mostly
 talked together,
 About the traffic and the weather.
 Mrs. Malaise herself spoke little,
 but her face
 Showed only pleasure, not a trace
 Of apprehension or distress;
 Also, she was the sole mistress
 Of a small room, much better than
 a ward,
 We left her feeling somewhat
 reassured.

The second time I went, the
 warden asked to see me.
 She told me, ruefully and with
 apology,
 That Mrs Malaise had turned
 herself into an inmate
 With whom they could not now
 communicate.
 She had gone back in time, back
 to the days when she was
 young,
 And could no longer speak nor
 comprehend the alien tongue.

It was another room, which she
 must share
 With someone else, but only she
 was there –
 Smiling and laughing like a happy
 child,
 With all the charm with which she
 had beguiled
 Me for so many years, but with no
 sign of recognition.
 I thought: ‘I have delayed my
 mission
 Too long.’

I spoke of Jack, but it evoked no
 spark;
 Poor Jack’s fidelity had left no
 mark.

And then I thought of my old
 childhood times
 And of the many favourite nursery
 rhymes
 My mother used to sing to me, as
 ‘Frère Jacques...’ ‘Il était une
 bergère...’
 And the best loved for verse and
 tune:
 ‘Au clair de la lune...’
 And as I sang them now, I was
 content
 To see her little wrinkled face
 alight with merriment.
 When I had sung them twice or
 thrice, I rose to go.
 I said that I would come again,
 although
 I knew the words could make no
 sense
 Enough to penetrate that total
 innocence.

Next time I rang the Home, the
 warden said
 That she was sorry, but my friend
 was dead.

I wrote this doggerel verse in
 praise
 Of one I truly loved: Mrs Malaise;
 Telling her story with but minor
 skill
 And doubtless many errors; but no
 other will.

*This previously unpublished poem by
 Barbara Noble, author of **Doreen**,
 Persephone Book No. 60, was found among
 her papers after her death © The Estate of
 Barbara Noble.*

HETTY DORVAL, PB. NO 58, BY ETHEL WILSON

We have had the Canadian writer Ethel Wilson's 1947 novel *Hetty Dorval* in print for several years – but wish it had more attention from our readers. A superb novella about the malign (or is it?) influence of an older woman (Hetty) on a young girl (Frankie), it has the same hugely topical Donne frontispiece quote that is on the Wolfgang Tillmans poster in the shop window: 'No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde.' (Ethel Wilson chose not to modernise the spelling.) However, the impetus for this piece is our comment on the *Letter* that our American and Canadian books never sell as well as the English ones: a reader suggested we focus on one in the *Biannually* – which is what we are doing.

Of course the first place to go when focusing on one of our books is the *Persephone Forum*. (We shall have reached PB No. 100 later this year and are planning a book in 2018 to be called *The Persephone Forum 1-100*.) 'Country Cousin' writes: '*Hetty Dorval* is careless,

lacking in care, not cruel, but a Menace to those who find themselves caught in the slipstream of her charms. She considers herself to be no more responsible for their effect than the sullen, opaque Fraser River is "responsible" for overcoming the dancing, blue-green waters of its tributary Thompson River... A childhood infatuation turns almost imperceptibly into a battle between two adult women, in which moral strength is almost but not quite equal to the potency of beauty.'

But is this so, or is it a point of view? We turned next to a revealing essay by Faye Hammill. In 'Ethel Wilson and Sophistication' she begins by quoting a couple of comments. One is that 'Ethel Wilson was a quirky and sophisticated writer' and the other that her writing has 'a sophistication of vision and style that set her work apart from other Canadian novelists.' The essay then explores wherein lay this sophistication: 'There are different ways *Hetty Dorval* can be read, depending on whether sophistication is seen as desirable (and compatible with innocence) or as dangerous (and precluding innocence). Which is why the critic Verena Klein points out that nearly all critical accounts have focused on "the simplicity of the novel's plot and on its straightforward style", interpret-

ing it as an allegory of good and evil in which Frankie is an innocent victim and Hetty a femme fatale or even a psychopath.' And Faye Hammill mentions a review in the *Spectator* of our edition of *Hetty Dorval* in which Charlotte Moore described Hetty as 'a Jamesian character, tainted by the corruption of the Old World, aloof yet predatory' and 'with a terrible past' who is eventually 'defeated' by Frankie.

The 2003 biography of Ethel Wilson also presents Hetty as dangerous. It describes the 'forbidden, romantic picture of sophistication and freedom which she represents for the young Frankie, who makes a transition from innocence to experience under the sullyng influence of Hetty.' However, 'sophistication', as embodied by Hetty, is not deceit but difference, and a form that arises from a direct, unrestricted and thus innocent response to life; it is this sophistication (experience, worldliness, taste) which causes Hetty to be distrusted (exactly as Ellen is distrusted in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*). 'Thus Frankie eventually comes to share, at least in part, her parents' view of Hetty as a vicious character. In fact the more experience of life she gains, the narrower and more conventional her judgments

become. She becomes more “shockable”, implying a timid acceptance of conventional moral standards and an excessive respect for propriety and appearance: the sophisticate is rarely shockable. As Frankie becomes more shockable she becomes less innocent – that is, less instinctive in her responses, and more influenced by notions of propriety and respectability.’

In conclusion, Faye Hammill proposes that it is sophistication that sets Ethel Wilson apart from her contemporaries, a sophistication aligned with artifice rather than authenticity, with irony rather than earnestness, and with cosmopolitan detachment rather than nationalist commitment. And finally she mentions a critic who demonstrates in detail that there is no textual evidence for Hetty’s depravity, that everything said against her is based on hearsay, and that the truth of her past is never revealed. Beverley Mitchell said: ‘If *Hetty Dorval* is concerned with evil as an “obliterating force”, perhaps it is the insidious

evil of malicious gossip which has such tragic consequences and which human nature apparently is so prone to accept as “truth”. Because a “very ugly story had followed Hetty from Shanghai to Vancouver and so to Lytton” the Burnabys feared Hetty’s influence on Frankie. Consequently, they nicknamed her “The Menace”. That Ethel Wilson was more concerned with the injustice which may have been done Hetty than with Hetty’s alleged “immorality” may be inferred from the epigraph with which she prefaced the novel. The consequence of involvement, namely that “any mans death diminishes me” is illustrated by the manner in which Frankie concludes her narrative. It is as if she were overwhelmed by the accumulation of evidence that her fear of Hetty, based on “hearsay”, has been the “black godmother” of cruelty in her attitude towards her. Whether Hetty was guilty or innocent of the charges gossip laid against her is beside the point, for Frankie realises that she has “driven Hetty off” to

probable death.’

For the last sentence of the book is: ‘Six weeks later the German Army occupied Vienna. There arose a wall of silence around the city, through which only faint confused sounds were sometimes heard.’ Final thought: should *Hetty Dorval* (1947) be read as in some respects a companion piece to *Earth and High Heaven* (1944)? It is after all about what people think; scurrilous gossip; the outsider; the person who is different from the others around them; the tolerance of the sophisticated and the prejudice of the unsophisticated; our involvement one with the other (‘No man is an Iland’). In conclusion: the main theme of *Hetty Dorval* is similar to that of *Miss Bunclie’s Book*, *They Knew Mr Knight* or *House-Bound* (to take three almost random examples from our list). Is Hetty a malign influence or is she a victim of unthinking, prejudiced, unsophisticated gossip? This would be an excellent book to discuss in a book group!



The Foundling Hospital in the eighteenth century. This would once have been the exact view from the end of Lamb's Conduit Street i.e. if you came out of the shop and looked to the left.

FINALLY

Persephone readers know how we feel about leaving Europe. We certainly did not choose to break away from the 27 ‘in a strange little-England huff’: the words of *The New York Times*. It added: ‘The liberal order has lost its centre of gravity. People without memory are on the march. They have no time for the free world if the free world means mingling and migration.’

Since the values of liberalism, mingling and migration are at the very heart of Persephone Books (as we explain to the occasional person who writes to us to complain about our political stance: publishing is political, after all) we are naturally in despair. For one of the very many reasons we feel so connected to Europe is that our books are printed in Germany. The reason, apart from GGP’s efficiency and, yes, kindness, is

the ‘dispersion binding’ (so called because of the way the glue is dispersed on the spine): it means the books lie flat and you don’t have to ‘crack the spine’ in order to read one of our books comfortably. No printer in the UK does this, or wants to, as it’s more expensive and in any case they have printed books in the same way for decades so why should they change now?

The upshot is that, if the worst happens, Persephone Books would be deeply affected by bureaucracy, delays and extra costs to get the books to our warehouse in King’s Lynn (which at the moment is a seamlessly easy and efficient process).

Another problem is financial. The visitor from abroad now finds our books oddly cheap; yet the cost of books in the UK has risen by 4% in the last year

alone: and many UK prices are now slowly going up. So, very reluctantly, we are putting up the price of our books, which has been £12 since 2010, to £13 or three for £33, or £10 for each Classic. Also, each year Royal Mail puts up its prices, but we have not done so for years: alas, this month postage will go up from £2 to £2.50 (£4 for Europe, £6 for Rest of World).

Our three books for the autumn are *For a Small Moment and Other Stories* by the 1930s short story writer Malachi Whitaker; *Emmeline* by Judith Rossner, a 1980 novel about the fate of the real-life Emmeline Mosher who, aged 13, is sent to work in the mills at Lowell, Massachusetts; and *Guard Your Daughters* (1953) by Diana Tutton, a novel about five sisters: a darker but hugely enjoyable *I Capture the Castle*.

WOMEN
WRITERS
FOR
EUROPE



Edward Bawden illustration for *Good Food on the Aga*, PB No. 45: the etching shows Edward and Charlotte Bawden and Eric and Tirzah Ravilious.

EVENTS

On *Thursday 18th May* from 6–8 there will be a *Possibly Persephone?* event when we ask people to suggest books for publication; focusing this time on WOC and LGBT novels. Wine and cheese straws will be served.

On *Thursday 8th June* there is a trip to the *Towner Gallery* in Eastbourne where the new exhibition, *Ravilious & Co: The Pattern of Friendship*, contains work by *Tirzah Garwood*. We shall assemble at 12:30 for lunch, go to the exhibition, and then have a cup of tea at the Towner café.

Dr *Clara Jones*, who teaches at KCL, will lead a walk on *Wednesday 14th June* retracing the route from Dean's Yard in Westminster to Bond Street taken on a 'Wednesday in mid June' 1923 by Mrs Dalloway in Virginia Woolf's novel. Lunch will be served afterwards at the shop.

Professor *Philippe Sands QC*, author of the prize-winning *East West Street*, will talk at 6pm on *Wednesday 21st June* in the shop about anti-semitism in fiction with reference to *Earth and High Heaven*. Wine and cheese straws will be served.

On *Thursday 29th June* at a *Lunch from 12:30–2:30*, Dr *Charlie Lee-Potter*, author of the Afterword to *Effi Briest*, will be 'in conversation' with Nicola Beauman about the C19th 'adultery' novel.

On *Thursday 6th July* from 6–8 there will be a reading with actors of the new play *The Long Bones* by the actress and writer *Juliet Aykroyd*. It is about the last days of the poet *Alun Lewis* on leave in India and with the army in Burma in 1944. Wine and cheese straws will be served.



PERSEPHONE BOOKS
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On *Wednesday 12th July* in the shop we shall show the rare and unforgettable 1924 silent film of Dorothy Canfield Fisher's *The Home-Maker*, PB. No. 7. At 4 there will be a cream tea, and the film will be shown at 4:30.

And we shall show the famous 1974 Fassbinder film of *Effi*

Briest on *Thursday 14th September*; again tea will be at 4 and the film will be shown at 4:30.

On *Tuesday 19th September* there will be a trip to the *Fry Gallery* in Saffron Walden where there is an exhibition called *Exploring: Inspirational Places for Great Bardfield Artists*. We shall meet at 12:30 for lunch, go to the exhibition and then have a cup of tea. (The closest station is Audley End; there is a frequent bus to nearby Saffron Walden.)

On *Wednesday 27th September*, by kind permission of the Leifer family, there will be a *Tea from 4–5:30* and a short talk in the Downshire Hill house in Hampstead lived in for sixty years by Amber Reeves, author of *A Lady and Her Husband*.

On *Wednesday 4th October* there will be a *Lunch from 12:30–2:30* to celebrate the paper-back publication of *Angela Thirkwell's Rosalind: A Biography of Shakespeare's Immortal Heroine*, 'a model of popular Shakespearean scholarship, engagingly accessible and contagiously enthusiastic.' Angela will talk about the book and the actress Michelle Terry will read some of Rosalind's speeches: they are curiously twenty-first century.

All the events cost £25 (apart from the first, which is free); please ring the shop to book.

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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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TEL: 020 7242 9292

www.persephonebooks.co.uk sales@persephonebooks.co.uk