ISSN 1360-9920

GREEN LEAVES

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society Vol. 5, No. 2, November 1999

THE 1999 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Eileen Roberts with Hilary Walton

The 1999 Pym Society Annual Meeting and Conference was held at St Hilda's College, Oxford, on 4th and 5th September.

On Saturday morning the Annual General meeting was held (minutes overleaf). In the afternoon Dr Lyndall Gordon, Senior Research Fellow of St Hilda's, introduced Professor John Bayley, Fellow of St Catherine's College, Oxford, to speak on the topic chosen for this conference, *Quartet in Autumn*. He said that he had recommended *Jane and Prudence* to Lord David Cecil, who was then his tutor, as Lord David had asked him what he had read recently and this was all he could think of. Bayley felt he had made a dreadful gaffe, as it wasn't a very intellectual choice, but later Lord David told him that he had now read it too, and thought it was very good! So perhaps we owe the whole Pym revival to John Bayley. He told us how he and Iris Murdoch, his wife, had met Barbara, and how Barbara was rather tall and Iris rather small, so that Barbara had written in her diary that she had towered over Iris, 'but only in height'. He added that it was interesting to see 'these two great novelists together'. He thought work and sex boring to read about in novels, and that this was why Pym featured them little—personally he preferred to read about food, especially tea!

After tea, appropriately, an open session discussion of the novel was held, in which John Bayley took part with great involvement.

Following a reception and dinner, Lesley Grant-Adamson told us how, as a journalist, she had endeavoured to publicise Pym's work and to get it re-published, and how the famous votes in Pym's favour of Lord David Cecil and Philip Larkin had turned the tide to enable these things.

Barbara Everett, Senior Research Fellow of Somerville College, spoke on *Quartet* on Sunday morning, comparing it with Pym's other 'dark novel', as she called them both, *The Sweet Dove Died*.

There were dramatized readings from *Quartet* by professional actors on Sunday afternoon.

Emma Jane Kirby attended for 'Woman's Hour', the radio programme, interviewing several members during lunch and attending the discussion session.

Ellen Miller and Beverley Bell took photographs.

John Bayley with Frauke Lenckos and Ellen Miller

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REPORT OF THE SIXTH A.G.M. OF THE BARBARA PYM SOCIETY HELD AT ST.HILDA'S COLLEGE, OXFORD, ON SATURDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 1999.

1. *Acting Chairman's Opening Remarks*

The Acting Chairman, Kate Charles, opened the meeting by welcoming members and saying how lovely it was to see so many new faces, as well as the familiar ones. Barbara Pym has become a universal figure, appealing to people of all nationalities and ages, and is being constantly rediscovered, especially by younger people. For this reason, Kate felt that a long future for the Society could be envisaged.

Committee members present were: Kate Charles (Acting Chairman), Hilary Walton, Eileen Roberts (Membership Secretary), Jean Harker (Editor—*Green Leaves*), Yvonne Cocking (Secretary,) Devon Allison, Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Rita Phillips, Louise Ross, and Michael Wilson.

2. *Apologies*

Apologies for absence had been received from Hazel Bell, Janet Cooper, Hazel Holt, Muriel Maby, Elizabeth Proud, Stephen and Jean Shell, Robert Smith, and Muriel Watson.

3. *Minutes of Previous A.G.M*

The minutes of the previous A.G.M. were accepted after the addition in para. 7 of Hazel Bell's name offering help with the Newsletter.

4. *Matters Arising from the Minutes*

Item 4. Thanks to Devon for arranging with Blackwells to have a stall at the meeting which would remain open until 2pm.As well as Pym books, there were good stocks of books by John Bayley and other authors associated with the Conference.

Item 8 (i) Fred Holman asked again about the possibility of membership by covenant, and Eileen replied that the cost of administrative time this would consume would render the exercise infeasible.

(ii) Sally Nicholls said that she had followed up the Edinburgh Book Fair suggestion, but had received an unsatisfactory response from the organisers.

However, she thought that we should continue to pursue the possibility of outside events, in accordance with the stated aim of the Society to promote Barbara's image to a wider audience. Kate said how much the Committee appreciated all the work Sally had done to this end. Elizabeth Moffat then suggested that another attempt at the book festival might be made as she has a friend (a St. Hilda's alumna) who may be able to help. Sally and Elizabeth agreed to pursue this.

Kate went on to describe the publishing "brick wall" encountered when trying to get Barbara's books reprinted. The publishers say there is little demand, in spite of repeated requests. They refuse consistently to produce hardback copies, so libraries cannot replace their wornout stock. Kate suggested that it might be time to have a letter-writing campaign to Macmillans, insisting that there is a market for these books. The name of the person to write to will be sought.

A member asked about audiotapes of Elizabeth Proud's radio adaptations of the novels. Kate said that these are sold by the BBC but are not easily come by.

The committee will seek information on the tapes which are available, and if members will let the Committee know their needs a bulk order could be placed.

Another member said that one of Barbara's books had been discussed on "A Good Read" on Radio 4. There was more discussion on instances of Barbara's work being quoted on radio and in novels, and it was agreed that contact with the writers involved might prove fruitful.

5. *Financial and Membership Report*

Eileen Roberts reported that there were now 348 members including 135 North American members. At the end of 1998 there was a balance of £4431.54 in the main account which now stood at £4326.02. Income for the year was £1400 and expenditure £1538.10. Ellen said that 135 North American members was a large increase over last year's 37, no doubt due to publicity surrounding the very successful conference at Harvard earlier in the year. The current balance in the US account is $1400, some of which will be used to pay postage for *Green Leaves* to be sent to North American members.

6. *Editor's Report*

In place of a report Kate informed the meeting that Jean Harker has resigned as Editor because her successful career as a TV children's writer is absorbing most of her time. Kate paid tribute to Jean's work on the Committee, especially as Editor of *Green Leaves*, and said that she would be hard to replace. Eileen reminded the meeting that Jean had been a member of the Society from its inception and had put in a great deal of hard work, both in helping to set up the Society and in editing the newsletter since then. Her loss will be keenly felt and she was warmly thanked. The membership will be informed when a new editor has been found.[1]

7. *Elections*

Kate, who has been acting as Chairman for the past year, was elected Chairman unopposed. Committee members Rita Phillips and Deirdre Bryan-Brown, having reached the end of their terms, are eligible for re-election for a further three years. There being no other nominations, they were duly elected. The one-year term left vacant by Kate will be filled by Triona Adams.

8. *Any Other Business*

Kate asked for questions in advance for the open discussion on *Quartet in Autumn*.

Hilary and Louise have provided a small exhibition of original reviews of Barbara's books, a photograph taken at the Booker Prize dinner when *Quartet in Autumn* was shortlisted, the leather-bound copy of her book which she received, and other primary material, which will be on show in the Senior Common Room.

Kate said that it was proposed to have a Christmas card printed, and Eileen, who has produced cards for St. Hilda's and has a printer lined up, said that a print run of 2000 could be had for about £600. Members wishing to buy such cards should indicate this on a sheet to be provided for the purpose. The price would be about £2-£2.50 for five. The message inside would be "Season's Greetings" to accommodate all religions. Various other suggestions were offered, including 'no message' cards for use as notelets, and quotations from the novels inside the card opposite the greeting. Members were asked for ideas for the illustration. Elizabeth Mott's humorous observation that everyone should send a card to Macmillans was greeted with applause, but it soon became clear that this was indeed a very good idea and should be acted upon.[2]

After further questions about the production of items for sale, Kate said that the whole matter of merchandising needed to be looked into, and someone appointed to coordinate the operation.

Hilary said that she had written a tribute to Honor Wyatt, script writer and journalist, who shared a house in Bristol with herself and Barbara, and who was a very good friend. Barbara's life would have been quite different if she had not met Gordon Glover, Honor's husband. She would probably have stayed in Bristol during the war, not joined the WRNS—so there would have been no Rocky Napier!

Hilary's appreciation of Honor will appear in *Green Leaves*. Amy Myers had attended Honor's funeral. Devon offered to do a transcript of the paper that Honor gave at the first Spring Meeting, in 1995.

Ellen Miller told the meeting that she and Frauke Lenckos were compiling for publication *A Fond Return of Love: Barbara Pym and her Readers*,[3] a compilation with original contributions from Hilary, Kathy Ackley, Hazel Bell, Kate Charles, Barbara Everett and others. Kate thanked Ellen and Frauke for undertaking this excellent work. Ellen also mentioned an email discussion group with 30 subscribers. The Pym discussion group's e-mail address is

pym-l@onelist.com

but it is accessible only to subscribers (it's free). Subscribers must go to onelist's Web site at :

www.onelist.com

and ask to subscribe to pym-l. (Note that the letter following pym is a lower-case L, not the number one.)

The Pym website number is:

http://www.spore.it./claudiadg/index.html

Eileen said that a 'Woman's Hour' interviewer might be coming to the conference to record an item for the programme.[4]

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12.40.

Yvonne Cocking

1 Hazel Bell is now the editor. For contact details see page 6.

2 The Christmas card project has proved infeasible this year.

3 The title has now been changed to *Reading Barbara Pym*.

4 A 'Woman's Hour' reporter did indeed come, and recorded short interviews with several members and parts of the discussion session. The item was broadcast on Monday 13 September; an audiotape is held by the Committee.

Honor Wyatt Ellidge 1911-1998

Honor Wyatt Ellidge died in November 1998, a few months before her 88th birthday. Many members of the Barbara Pym Society will recall the talk she gave at the first Spring Meeting of the Society in 1995 about her special friendship with Barbara. It began in Bristol in 1941, where Honor was a script-writer for the BBC Schools Department and Barbara came to work in the Censorship, and continued until 1943 when she left to join the WRNS.

Honor went on to becomes a well known journalist and broadcaster, and always kept in touch. (We collaborated on the cookery book, *A la Pym*.) She was a great music-lover, and if anyone thinks that Classic FM discovered Bizet's 'Pearl Fishers' duet, I can assure them that we listened to the Gigli and De Luca version many times during those wartime evenings at The Coppice, Leigh Woods, and it reminds me still of Honor.

Hilary Walton

Devon Allison, who transcribed the talk from an audiocassette, comments: In a way, it is a pity to transcribe this talk by Honor Wyatt, because it is impossible to convey her voice, which was so warm and full of good humour. Those who attended her talk will remember her vividly, but those who did not will still have the pleasure of reading her charming, personal reminiscences of Barbara and Hilary Pym. Her eloquence is the more extraordinary because she gave this talk without notes, as she could not see well enough to read. She was accompanied by her daughter, Prue Anderton, and introduced by Hilary.

My memories of Barbara Pym

Honor Wyatt

Have you ever noticed that when a well known person leaves this world it immediately becomes apparent that they must have had absolutely hundreds of friends?

I think I noticed this first with Dylan Thomas. No sooner had the sad news broken, than everybody one met seemed to have known dear old Dylan very well indeed. I always think of this when people say to me, "you were a friend of Barbara Pym's, weren't you?" And I hear myself saying "oh yes, dear Barbara, I knew her very well indeed." The fact is, I didn't meet Barbara until 1942, when I was already well over thirty, though Barbara was considerably less than that. When I was thinking over what I was going to say this afternoon, thinking about the beginning of our friendship, I was really rather shocked to realize that I had absolutely no memory of the first time that I saw her. But of course I didn't know that I was looking at a future novelist of great repute. I only knew that I was meeting the sister of my friend Hilary, which was a great pleasure, but not exactly earth-shattering, perhaps.

We met as we both found ourselves, because the BBC put their personnel all over the place, rather like the city—we found ourselves in a house on the Leigh Woods side of the Bristol suspension bridge, a house called—now children, what was it called? (Crowd responds, "The Coppice"!)

Hilary arrived a long time before I did in fact because she was an established member of (BBC) staff responsible for all the music and musical illustrations to the dramatic programmes and all that sort of thing But I was not, I was just on programme contract, and I came much later than Hilary and Barbara came even later than that. And the first absolutely definite memory that I have about Barbara—and it was not a visual one—was about something that she said. I remember this because it had a sequel. It must have been quite shortly after she started her own work for the censorship people, and this job must have been rather an emotional one, because she was reading very private and intimate letters very often, to and from all sorts of people. As this was wartime, obviously many of those letters were pathetic, tragic even. But also some of them, particularly I believe the love letters, could be extremely funny—not intentionally so. I remember Barbara saying, it's so maddening because I can't tell you these extraordinary things that people write, because I have sworn an oath of secrecy. So my lips are sealed. And indeed, knowing how Barbara's mind worked one can realize it must've been sheer torture—the most wonderful copy, and she wasn't able to use it. Many years later I said to her, "Barbara, now that the war is over, and it doesn't matter anymore, I expect you sometimes tell people about the things you read in those letters?" She replied, "Oh no never, I promised I wouldn't." I think that says something about Barbara's character which I needn't expand on.

To look at in those early days Barbara was not very different from how she was at the end of her life. She didn't change very much. Both the Pym sisters seem to have a secret of youth and Hilary never seems to change at all either. Every time I meet her she looks much the same. In that first moment of meeting, which I don't remember, I must, I think, have been impressed by a tall elegant girl meticulously well dressed and with a friendly, cheerful manner, but also with a certain diffidence. Because Barbara really was basically rather a shy person, and it wasn't until she really got to know you and was absolutely easy with you that the person I always think of as the real Barbara came out of her shell. I think the public Barbara was a lovely person, everybody liked her, but the real Barbara was something else, as people say these days. And of course it was in the real Barbara that her amazing talent lay. Fortunately it didn't take her very long to become the real Barbara at The Coppice, because we were on the whole a very friendly crowd, a very mixed crowd. There was one complete family, Richard Palmer with his wife and three children, and myself and two children, and there were various people who came and went on assignments with the BBC, and some friends who came down from London. So we really were a milling crowd. It's amazing to me to remember how well we did get on. Of course, occasionally there would be what Barbara would call a little unpleasantness. Somebody might be heard to remark

that it was very strange that when it was one's bath night I always find that the water's run cold. To be honest, it wasn't very difficult for the water—five inches of it we were allowed in a bath—to get cold in a very big house without central heating in the winter.

Then there were the people who were very good at gardening. Two or three of them would go out into the garden on Sunday morning happily playing with their rakes, forks and spades and then they would come in to a meal all prepared for them, and when they'd eaten the meal, they'd swan off thinking "oh we have no obligation to wash up because we've spent a busy morning gardening." A bit of muttering about that. But all this was quite unimportant. Fundamentally we really did get on extremely well.

However, there were so many of us that we did decide after a bit to split up. We originally all ate our main meals together and we all shared all the common rooms, but eventually we decided it might be a good idea to split up. So happily it was arranged that Barbara and Hilary should eat with me, and we should prepare our meals in the little cupboard downstairs called Honor's kitchen. This was absolutely wonderful because I think there's nothing more conducive to intimacy than eating meals with people. It meant too that very often they spent the evening with me and the children (until they went to bed) in my little bed-sitting room. I remember these evenings very well. We'd be sitting round the fire listening to ITMA, and perhaps mending our underwear, doing our nails (my daughter remembers sitting on Barbara's knee and peeling off the varnish), and talking about ourselves and getting to know one another. I was fascinated always of course by the Pyms' talk of their days at Oxford because I never went to a university so I was full of admiration and respect for them on that account, and I loved hearing about that, and also of course we talked, or they did, about clothes. Every evening I seem to remember there would be an in depth discussion on exactly what they would be wearing the next day. I don't think they ever went to bed without having decided which particular jumper or skirt or dress or blouse or whatever would have to be put out for tomorrow. this is the sort of thing I remember with such pleasure. But I was privileged too, to come in very early on the absolute joy of Barbara's sense of humour—more so than the rest of the people who didn't eat with me. One aspect of her humour is that she would say quite ordinary things, make quite ordinary comments, in such a way that they didn't sound ordinary at all, they sounded rather significant and often

Left to right, sitting: Honor Wyatt, Barbara Pym, Hilary Walton. Standing: Richard Palmer. Blackbourton, Oxfordshire, 1973.

very funny. Hilary has this gift as well. It didn't emerge until Barbara arrived but they were really a wonderful partnership. They seemed to knock sparks off each other. They would carry on in the most ridiculous way, which gave me such pleasure. I couldn't do this thing that they did because I couldn't imitate their voices.

Typical of the sort of thing I mean was that one evening I was preparing a chicken for supper—and this was a great treat because in those days it was about the most expensive thing you could get. I think we must have killed one of our own birds (we kept hens there). So I was in Honor's cupboard preparing this very reverently when Hilary came round the door and said "oh Honor, I'm sorry, I'm afraid I can't take chicken". She was only teasing me in fact because she liked chicken very much, but if someone else had said to me I'm sorry I can't take chicken I wouldn't have thought much of it. But it was the way she said it you see that made me laugh. Well it was exactly the same with Barbara. I remember once I had put on a record and because of Hilary's job she was always bringing them back, records, so I was constantly winding up the gramophone and we had music nearly all the time in my part of the house. Anyhow, on this occasion I put on something or other and Barbara came in perhaps a minute later, saying "Oh, Mozart, has the theme been stated?"

I think Hilary wasn't guilty of this, she was probably too musical, but Barbara and I used to tra la la with the records rather a lot. "Tra la la" we would go about the house. On one occasion when we were doing this I heard Barbara's voice coming from downstairs (very plummy tones) "Miss Wyatt and Miss Pym know *every* note", she said.

It was the *voice* that they used. They had very similar voices but they were not identical. To me Barbara's voice always held the note of slight self doubt. If she was saying something very funny she would lean forward and look in to your face and she always seemed to me to be saying, "Are you getting this or do you think I'm being silly? Are you getting the message?" Whereas Hilary's voice, to me, rang with confidence, always, and this was the difference. But they were both similar in that they were both cultured voices, clear and precise. They were just the voices for this particular trick.

Now I have to say something which is rather sad, but it must be said. Those of us who knew Barbara could still hear her voice. Now it's very curious—I can still hear her voice. I think there aren't many people whose voices persist in the head even after they have left us. I can't even hear my own husband's, but I can hear Barbara's, and when I'm reading her books, being able to hear her saying some of the things that she says in the books, it just adds a magic to it. In any case, it's funny, it's amusing, it's touching, one enjoys it; but take a sentence like "Of course, one rather dislikes Milton—his treatment of women was not all that it should have been." Or take a sentence like, "Keeping four people in toilet rolls seemed rather a burden". Both of those sentences are very nice sentences, everybody enjoys them of course, but if you could hear Barbara saying them, believe you me, it really is the cream on the top of the icing.

From the point of view of the main body of the population of The Coppice, I think what they most appreciated in Barbara was her absolute genius for bringing to life the people she had met during the course of her working day. I don't think she ever used any of her colleagues at the censorship in this way, but perhaps the shop assistants from whom she had bought a pair of stockings. Or perhaps a woman she'd had a chat with on the bus, or somebody she'd met walking home across the suspension bridge—I seem to remember one or two military types, and of course knowing Barbara there were certainly some clerics about, you could count on that, and she would report the conversations she'd had with these people in a very amusing way. But then she'd start building it up, and she'd start giving them relatives and problems so that we were sitting on the edge of our chairs wondering what was going to happen next. But I think the people that she had the most success with were herself and Hilary much older. She put them about thirty years on, and they became middle-aged sisters, unmarried, living in a little English village, very involved in the affairs of the church, and one of them had a weakness for writing and the archdeacon.

We used to say, oh, Barbara, you really ought to write a novel. We didn't know, though probably Hillary did, that among Barbara's things was a draft of *Some Tame Gazelle*. Because we lived so much together with the Pyms, in fact we were rather like a family within a family, Barbara got to know my children very well. I don't think that Barbara was crazy about children as such; she liked the ones she liked. My son Julian, who was then seven or eight, was the only male child in the house for a long time, and, my goodness, he was a Boy with a capital B: he was rough, he was noisy, he left the litter of his projects all over the place, he kept a grass snake under his pillow. But a dear really! There was one way he was very much of service to Barbara and that was when he had had his hair cut. He would come back from the barbers with his head covered with bristles because in those days it was simply not on to have the hair curling over the collar, or over the ears. So back he came with his head of bristles and it didn't take Barbara very long to discover that it was great fun to rub his head - a very nice feeling. She kept on doing this and Julian got in a bit of a huff about it, so eventually Barbara gave him a penny or a half penny a time so with all this wealth pouring in he was very happy about it.

My daughter, Prue, was very different. She was then about three or four, and, Mother's pride apart, she was an adorable little creature. Part of her charm was that she was very prim, prudish in fact. She used to go about with her lips perfectly pursed. Barbara spotted this very early on and she thoroughly enjoyed it. Prue would come toddling into the room looking for what she might disapprove of and Barbara would say "Oh, Miss Prudence Glover is so refined, she has no bosom and no behind". Prue would say "That's a rude song isn't it?" And Barbara would shout with laughter.

Barbara and I and the children went to Weston Super Mare once, and it was a very hot day, a sticky journey, and the moment we got out of the train Prue began to whinge and to whine: "Carry me Mummy", "Nothing doing", "I want an ice cream", "Nothing doing", she was hot, she was sticky... So of course I lost patience and said "Very well then, straight back to Bristol". I thought Barbara would never stop laughing. The idea of our having taken all this trouble to go to Weston Super Mare and really getting to the train and going straight back to Bristol ...we did no such thing, I need hardly say, but after that, every time Prue was naughty, Barbara would say "Very well Prudence, straight back to Bristol". It became quite a family phrase.

I would like you to meet a character who came into our lives quite a lot. It was a boy and he didn't actually live in The Coppice but he did seem to be around a very great deal. I didn't really know this chap very well. The people who knew him best were Barbara and Prue. I am now going to ask Prue if she will tell you just a little about Christopher.

Prudence: I was very privileged because Chistopher was an imaginary son that Barbara had, only I was so small that I didn't know he was imaginary. Julian, my brother, knew about him. Barbara used to arrive, and Christopher was nowhere to be seen, but he was somewhere, around, and he was very much watching what we were doing and how we behaved. I was an extremely naughty little girl, and every time I behaved badly Barbara would say, Christopher would *never* behave like that. Christopher always ate his greens and Christopher was an absolute paragon. I think Julian sussed Christopher out quite quickly. I did ask at one point, "Why don't you ever bring Christopher home?" and Christopher was always on safari or at boarding school or he was doing a project somewhere or something, but I totally and utterly believed in Christopher. Christopher was actually the bane of my life.

Honor: I think I may have given you a picture of life at The Coppice that was on the whole a happy life. There was a war on, and we knew that terrible things were going on in Europe. There were those amongst us who lived in constant anguish, not knowing what had happened to their men folk. In fact I was already very involved with my (later) second husband, and he was in the army and for months I didn't know whether he was alive or dead. So all this sort of thing was going on too, but on top of this we did seem to manage to have a happy life, in a way. But it wasn't only a happy life. Those of you who have read Barbara's biography will know what I'm talking about I'm sure when I tell you that a shadow fell over it. My point of view is that I was responsible for it. Barbara unfortunately fell in love with my husband. We were then on the point of divorce, there was no worry about that. His name was Gordon Glover, and the marriage hadn't worked but we were friends to the end of his life. Now Gordon was very fond of women, that had been the trouble of course in the marriage, and obviously he was attracted by Barbara. This good-looking girl, intelligent, amusing, and interested in serious things. They had a lot in common, books, poets, all that sort of thing. They became very good friends and they talked about serious things and so forth and so on, but unfortunately Barbara was far too honest a person to realize that sometimes people, and one has to say, particularly men, say things that they don't really seriously mean. I did try to warn her about this, I said you know he's a bit of a devil do watch out, but I didn't like to go on too much because I thought supposing this time Gordon really does mean it. I'm not going to spoil it for both of them, so I made a mistake, I mean hindsight always knows what one should have done. I ought of course to have been much firmer with Barbara, I ought to have said to Gordon now lay off, you do not play about with a woman like Barbara, she's not a toy. I didn't. The result was that unfortunately Gordon rang me up one day saying that he had a letter from Barbara in which he feared that she expressed expectations which he didn't really intend to fulfill and would I put her in the picture.

Can you imagine a more difficult situation? Here was my husband and a girl that I had really come to love. I always felt there was a sort of vulnerability about Barbara which tugged at my gut somehow. It was a terrible thing to have to do, but I had to do it. I don't really like thinking about it. As I'm sure you know she decided eventually after weeks of sheer misery, during which she behaved very gallantly, to join the WRNS and have a different sort of life altogether. It was a terrible decision for her to make, because not only was she putting behind her any possibility of seeing Gordon again, but she was leaving The Coppice which she'd really come to like and be happy in ,and going into a life that was completely alien—the forces. So it was really a dreadful thing. I remember the day she left. Hilary was at the office, working, but I worked at home so I saw her off at the station. Prue and Julian came in the taxi to the station with us; Barbara and I were both in floods of tears the whole time" It was a parting that ranks among the worst partings of my life. It was the first crack in The Coppice, but there was still a little time to pass before the war ended and the whole of The Coppice broke up and we all went about our separate ways and to our separate lives. But I think nearly all of us will remember as long as we live, those years at The Coppice during which so many things had happened. Two babies had been born, Hilary had been married, Barbara had her heart broken, various romances had flowered and faded, and so on.

Now we were going out into a future in which other things were going to happen to us. One of those things was a very happy thing: Barbara became a published author. What fun it was getting books from her, with "To Honor with love

from" and then the printed Barbara Pym crossed out and Barbara written instead. I would leave them about the house, "Yes, yes, Barbara, a great friend of mine, I know her *extremely* well." But even before this, I have a memory of very soon after the war, whent Prue showed me how much she had entered into the Pym world. Shortly after the war, I think Hilary's husband was still in the forces, and she and Barbara took a flat near Victoria Station. Prue and I were in Trafalgar Square one day when Prue was about six and a half, and there was a traffic jam and a bus with its destination at the top. Prue looked up and said (sounding out the letters) "Puh, ih, ma...Mummy, where's Pimlico?" So I said, "Oh, it's where the Pyms live." "Oh I won't bother you" she said. She thought I was making a typical Pym joke. It was very nice, I thought, she has got the Pym thing absolutely.

Then the time came when Barbara's publishers said that people weren't looking for her kind of book. This was simply terrible. Her years in the wilderness, as she called them, lasted sixteen years, during which, I know, because Hilary told me, she was constantly writing. Of course she had a job at the African Institute, and what marvellous use she made of that in *Less Than Angels*! She was a very busy woman at her job, but every spare moment, every evening, was spent writing.

Of course she was a writer—she couldn't help it, she had to write, no matter what she was told. And in the end it paid off in a very big way and it's marvellous, that she did live long enough to appreciate that. But while all this was going on, the children were growing up, and there came a time when my second husband and I had moved to Dover, where we lived in the country with our son aged about ten, and Prue was in college in London. Normally she'd lodged with Mary and Richard Palmer who had been Coppice friends, but there came a time when the Palmers were going away, so Barbara and Hilary very kindly said they'd have Prue to stay with them. Prue has never forgotten that time she spent with them. She said "It was such a happy time. I didn't hear a single word of bickering or any little unpleasantness of any sort whatsoever, it was just lovely", and she made a remark which amused me: "It makes me realize that it doesn't matter at all if you've got a man in the house." Many of us would agree with that! One day she wrote that she couldn't wait: the next day the vicar was coming to dinner. "It's going to be a scream," I think she said. Well, poor Prue, it wasn't a scream at all. This nice man came for a meal and a chat, I'm sure there was a laugh or two but not at all the sort of thing that Prue was expecting as being a Barbara thing. So I said to her, well it only goes to show that Barbara makes gold out of dross. You didn't notice any thing that evening, but for all you know something happened and you'll find it later on in one of her novels.

We saw a lot of one another so long as we lived in the London area, but once my husband and I had gone down to Dover we didn't see a great deal of the Pyms, particularly after they moved to Finstock to retire. But one memory stands out of when we were living at Dover. Barbara and Hilary came to stay with us for the weekend and it happened it was was the weekend of the village fete. This was just Barbara's thing. My young son who was then fifteen has not forgotten Barbara's way of speaking, he remembers it still with the greatest pleasure. One morning when we came down to breakfast there were a lot of jellies laid out at the end of the table because I had been doing things in anticipation of this fete. "Ooh," said Barbara, "jelly for breakfast", which made him laugh and he's never forgotten it.

Then another very nice Barbara thing happened: we discovered that the village hall hadn't got enough cups and saucers for the milling crowds that we hoped would come. So we borrowed from the vicar, he lent us his cups and saucers which were very like the village hall ones but not identical, so we had to be very careful. Somebody suggested putting a dab of varnish on the bottom of each cup and each saucer, so there we all sat round the kitchen table putting dabs of varnish on the vicar's cups, which was a typical Barbara incident I felt. The fete itself went of course as fetes do, and at the end the vicar got up and made the usual little speech—thank you so much for coming, it's been marvellous and so on. He said the food had been very good and there was quite a lot left over, and he was sure that many of you ladies had just a few pennies left in your pockets and that "on the table by the gate you will find many toothsome morsels"—it was too much! I looked wildly round for Barbara— there was she looking wildly round for me, with a face absolutely full of delight.

When I heard that Barbara had died, it wasn't a surprise because it had been expected. I knew she was very ill. I also know from Hilary that she behaved with extraordinary gallantry, through months in which she must have known what was coming, but she wouldn't discuss it. I mean, we live, we die, and what more is there to be said?

Prue mourned her as she would have mourned an aunt. It was a real bereavement, and I thought about her a very great deal in the weeks after that. What I remembered most, was those evenings at The Coppice when we sat round the fire talking and doing our nails and so on. I thought, supposing one of those evenings we had had a sort of flash into the future and had heard Julian, at that time seven or eight, playing the part based on the character of his own father in the radio adaptation of a book by Barbara Pym? If we had seen me standing up in Barbara's old college speaking to the Barbara Pym Society? We should have thought it was just a fantasy, absolutely impossible. But isn't life extraordinary? The time came when indeed we heard Julian sadly flirting with one or two or more, and madly bashing love letters on his typewriter in *Jane and Prudence*. I too seem to be here, don't I, at Saint Hilda's, talking to the Barbara Pym Society.

Well, all I've tried to do is to give you an idea of something that Barbara meant, I think, when in one of her last entries in her diary she wrote something like, 'What a mystery all this is, we come into this world and we go out in a sort of procession". I have just tried to make you understand why it is that I am so very, very grateful that my place in the procession was not very far from that of the *real* Barbara Pym.

Prue Anderton's 'Memories of my mother' (Honor Wyatt) appeared in the last issue of *Green Leaves*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pages 3-4.

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No thankless task: Barbara Pym as indexer

Hazel Holt

She would sit crouched (a favourite word) over a battered, wooden four-drawer card index of antique design, like Miss Clothier, 'moving the cards here and there with her fingers, as if she were coaxing music from some delicate instrument'. Occasionally, as I sat opposite, our desks facing each other in that small room, I would catch a murmur, like the recital of some litany: 'Abortion, administration, agesets, agriculture, amulets, ancestors, animal husbandry...'. Barbara was making another index.

For over twenty-five years Barbara Pym was in charge of the International African Institute's publications. In any one year she would edit and see through the press four full-length monographs, two volumes of seminar papers, two or three volumes of the Ethnographic Survey of Africa and one volume of the Linguistic Survey (linguists are notoriously more difficult to get anything out of), not to mention four issues of the journal *Africa*, whose Assistant Editor she was. I was her only assistant. In addition to the general editorial work we divided between us the other Thankless Tasks.* I compiled the bibliographies and Barbara made the indexes.

She loved the mystique of certain aspects of her job, such as being in charge of the Institute's collection of maps, or arranging with agencies the advertisements for *Africa*, but, best of all, she enjoyed the art of indexing. She liked making lists, particularly alphabetical ones. Indeed, her favourite way of getting to sleep was to list as many African tribes as possible beginning with one letter—Teke, Tio, Toro, Tswana, Tutsi ...

Authors of monographs usually made their own indexes (or their wives or girlfriends and once, gloriously, the author's mother), but those for the Ethnographic Survey and the Seminar volumes were done by Barbara herself. These were rather uniform and boring to do, requiring a quick professional job, but nothing to linger over with pleasure. No, the great on-going indexes, offering so much more scope, were the cumulative, annual indexes for *Africa*. The General Index was extensive but straightforward; the real challenge was the Index of Tribes and Languages. Variations of tribal names gave delightful opportunities for cross-referencing, and the special characters had to find their formal place in the scheme of things—the long-tailed S (= sh) or the Bushman 'click' (!Kung would come after Z). This was, of course, the most tiresome of all indexes to proof-read. For some reason we never formed the news-room habit of reading proofs aloud and so we employed a kind of Wimbledon swivel between text and proof that was physically very wearing. Still, as Barbara used to say, 'Thank God we don't have to proof-read lists of Premium Bond winners'.

Even after Barbara had retired from the Institute, she continued to do most of the indexes ('The author may do the index,' she wrote in the instructions she left me when I took over her job, 'or, at a pinch, Miss Pym.'). When she had a slight stroke in 1974, which left her with a form of dyslexia, she forced herself to read and write properly (and alphabetically) again with the incentive of doing the *Africa* indexes.

I think what she enjoyed most about indexing, apart from the pleasure of putting words into a certain order, was the peaceful, enclosed *space* an indexer inhabits. It requires a certain sort of concentration: you need to withdraw, as it were, into the world of that which is to be indexed, and this precisely suited Barbara's temperament. We can see this in those of her characters who do indexes, either as a job or as an expression of love: it is no coincidence that Mildred[2] and Dulcie[3] (especially the latter) are the heroines who are most like their creator.

Barbara enjoyed working 'on the dustier academic fringes', because it was a pleasant, one might almost say cosy, backwater, inhabited, for the most part, by those who were happier observing others on the hard, upward road to success rather than striving themselves. The formidable Miss Peacock (a senior Editor at the Oxford University Press in the 1940s) might declare that she would advise any daughter of hers to Go on the Streets rather than become a proof-reader, but for the excellent women in Barbara's novels this world of libraries and bibliographies and indexes was a safe place. A canon's daughter like Ianthe[4] could (in spite of the deplorable students and the ketchup-stained pages) find it 'suitable', as did Dulcie, working at home while looking after her invalid mother,[3] and Alan Grimstone deemed it a more fitting job for his wife, Caro, than working in a second-hand bookshop.' For a beady-eyed novelist, of course, it was a marvellous vantage point, there was so much richness all around: those for whom the editors, bibliographers and indexers worked—the young post-graduate students in shabby raincoats and pathetic woolly gloves, struggling to catch their Professor's eye; acerbic Librarians engaged in a constant battle to prevent people actually *reading* the books in their care; academics who spent more time fund-raising than teaching; linguists oblivious of the world about them as they pursued obsessively 'the extraordinary debility of liquids and the abundance of palatized and labialized phonemes of Gurage'.[6] Barbara observed them all and created a fictional world for them to inhabit.

'It is so seldom,' says Miss Randall, 'that one meets anyone who appreciates one's work, or who even knows that there *can* be problems of indexing.'[3] Thanks to Barbara, perhaps there are now many more people who do, though the inhabitants of that small, enclosed world will smile to themselves at some ironic stroke in her novels which only they can fully appreciate.

'The lay reader then gave a short address. He tried to show how all work can be done to the Glory of God, even making an index, correcting a proof, or compiling an accurate bibliography. His small congregation heard him say, almost with disappointment, that those who do such work have perhaps less opportunity of actually doing evil than those who write novels and plays or work for films or television.'[3]

They will understand that although Barbara was laughing, she was also acknowledging, as she so often did, the small seed of truth that lay within.

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*The original title of *No fond return of love*, in which Dulcie Mainwaring asks, 'Do we all correct proofs, make bibliographies and indexes, and do all the rather humdrum thankless tasks for people more brilliant than ourselves?', reflects, 'A book can he made or marred by its index ... remembering the wives and others who undertook what was often acknowledged to be a thankless task'; and refers to acknowledgements 'about your having undertaken the arduous or thankless—though I hope it won't be that—task of compiling the index'.They will understand that although Barbara was laughing, she was also acknowledging, as she so often did, the small seed of truth that lay within.

References

1. Pym, Barbara. *Jane and Prudence*. London: Cape, 1953.
2. —*Excellent women*. London: Cape, 1952.
3. —*No fond return of love*. London: Cape, 1961.
4. —*An unsuitable attachment*. London: Macmillan, 1982.
5. —*An academic question*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
6. Shack, W. *The Central Ethiopians: Amhara, Tigrina and related peoples*. London: International African Institute: Ethnographic Survey of Africa, 1974.

This article originally appeared in *The Indexer* Vol. 15 No. 4 October 1987, pages 236-7, and is reproduced here by permission.

Bringing Barbara to Cowbridge

Cowbridge is a busy market town, populated mainly by professional and retired people, the social centre of the Vale of Glamorgan. If South Wales has a stockbroker belt, this is it. Where better to begin my crusade to save Barbara Pym from obscurity?

Invigorated by the momentary illusion of fame created by my one-line contribution to "Woman's Hour", I approached the branch librarian, a young man named Rhodri, about the possibility of a small exhibition to publicise Barbara Pym's novels and the Barbara Pym Society.

Rhodri seemed vaguely to have heard of Barbara Pym, and was so eager to accommodate my request that he even offered to move his PC so that I could use the little table on which it normally resides. (I suppose it isn't often that he is asked to do something interesting.) We agreed that I would put a few things together and return in a week or so.

I spent some of the intervening time typing up a potted biography of Barbara Pym onto A4 and sticking it onto card to make a display. I also produced a list of appropriate titles, with publication dates, and another A4 sheet containing information about the Society, including details of the web site, contact address, etc. Armed with these, I went back to the library. Rhodri already seemed to have forgotten what we had agreed, but we compromised when I noticed a glass display cabinet that was only half in use.

Rhodri enthusiastically cleared out what remained in it, so that we could dedicate all four shelves to Barbara Pym and the Barbara Pym Society. As well as the typed notes, I put on display several paperbacks of my own, a BP Society mug, some copies of *Green Leaves*, my signed copy of *A la Pym*, and several titles from the library's own shelves, including Hazel Holt's biography.

When I'd finished, Rhodri commented that it looked "very nice", and thanked me for helping him fill his display cabinet for October. Whether we get any new members as a result of the exhibition remains to be seen, but I'll be happy if I have just introduced one or two people to the work of Barbara Pym. Why not try something similar in your local library?

Deborah Fisher

CALENDAR 2000

Barbara Pym Society of North America to meet April 1-2, 2000

The first Barbara Pym Society meeting of the new millennium will take place at Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts) on the weekend of April 1–2. Program details and registration information will be mailed in early January to members in the United States and Canada. U.K. and European members who wish to receive this mailing should contact Ellen Miller by email at:

miller@law.harvard.edu

or by writing to her at:
145 Indian Hill Road, Carlisle, MA 01741, U.S.A.

SPRING MEETING

will take place in London. Booking forms will be sent with annual subscription renewals in February.

ANNUAL MEETING AND CONFERENCE: LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS IN PYM

Saturday—Sunday, 2–3 September

Conference information and booking forms will be sent with the next issue of *Green Leaves*.

Errata - Catherine Heath

The article in the November 1998 issue of *Green Leaves*, 'Catherine Heath—another novelist from St Hilda's'(page 5), included some errors about her early life. Fuller, corrected information is given below.

Catherine Heath was born in 1924, eleven years after Pym, and followed her to St Hilda's in 1943. She likewise read English Language and Literature; her tutors were Helen Gardner and Dorothy Whitelock. She graduated in 1946. She married Denis Heath, who had read Chemistry at Brasenose, in 1948, and they adopted a son and a daughter. She was Assistant Lecturer in English at the University of Wales from 1948 to 1950: twenty-two years old, teaching returned ex-servicemen.

BP

Jane Hardy, reviewing P. D. James's autobiography, 'Time to be in earnest' in the *Sunday Times*, comments, 'Two Jameses emerge: the polite, careful writer who would not be out of place in a Barbara Pym novel, and the feistier personality who sums up Tony Blair ...'.

Indexing (and) Pym

Hazel Bell

For my own pleasure and interest, I have compiled an index to Barbara Pym's fiction, covering all her published novels and stories. It is not comprehensive, either as to references or categories. I have included three classes of entries:

1) Characters, usually indicating only which novel they appear in, and giving page number/s for first appearance/s. This enables users to place characters in the appropriate novels, and to see which of them make fleeting appearance in others besides, so that, for instance, we can confirm in *Less than Angels* that Mildred did indeed marry Everard after the close of *Excellent Women*, and follow the fortunes of Esther Clovis through several books.

2) **Quotations** or books and authors mentioned (these are all indexed under the names of the authors). This brings fascinating insights as to which were Pym's most frequently quoted or cited authors. They prove to be, at the top of the charts, jointly Wordsworth and Milton, each with thirteen references (four of them to *Paradise Lost*). Anthony à Wood comes next with twelve references; Matthew Arnold has eleven, three of them to *Dover Beach*; Edward Young has eight, six to *Night Thoughts*; Jane Austen eight, two to *Emma*. Tennyson has seven, four of them to *In Memoriam*; John Donne, six; George Herbert, Shelley, Charlotte M. Yonge and Charlotte Brontë each have five (four to *Jane Eyre*); Shakespeare, Byron, John Cleveland, Andrew Marvell, Thomas Hardy and Christina Rossetti, each four; the Earl of Rochester, Robert Browning, Henry James and Anthony Trollope each get three mentions; Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*, two. (Of course, there may be other mentions too that I missed.)

3) **Topics** such as cafés, libraries, meals, places. These prove most illuminating.

An index does much more than locate specific items in the text: another effect is to bring together all references to the same topic. One byproduct of this is to show, from the length of the collated entries, which themes and topics the author has the most to say about. The largest topic entries in my Pym index are those for: Africa, anthropology, cafés, Christmas, churches, *Church Times*, clothes, cooking, flowers, food, hymns, languages, libraries, lunches, Oxford, restaurants, Roman Catholics, tea and wine. No surprises there.

For such long entries in an index that cover copiously treated topics, subheadings have to be devised to differentiate references. These can prove most enlightening to read through, clearly showing the author's attitudes and interests. Here are some examples from the Pym index (usually giving the first page of a reference only).

food *FGL* 159
  caterpillar in *STG* 49, 50
  for cats *UA* 19-20
  church *LTA* 166-7
  clergy house *FGL* 87; *LTA* 166-7
  conference *NFR* 12, 21
  Friday *FGL* 14; *GoB* 21, 38; *NFR* 196; *SDD* 67
  gourmet *FGL* 28-30
  Greek *FGL* 86-7, 311-2
  inspection *FGL* 15
  for invalid *UA* 106
  Italian *UA*
  junk *FGL* 185
  navy, Naples *GB* 87
  processed *FGL* 185
  nutrition *QA* 54
  rationing *SVS* 275-6
  tinned *QA* 54, 129, 135, 174-5
  wartime *HF* 259
  see also breakfast; cafés; cooking; dinner; lunches; restaurants; suppers; *and individual entries*

tea (drink) *UA* 47
  abroad *EW* 32
  -bags *FGL 185; QA* 8, 129
  in cafeteria *LTA* 107; *SDD* 57
  China or Indian *JP* 199
  in church hall *NFR* 164
  at church occasions *EW* 211; *GB* 59-60; *UA* 129
  Earl Grey *GB* 111
  early morning *JP* 188-9; *NFR* 20, 26
  elaborate apparatus *LTA* 204
  in hospital *QA* 14-15
  Indian *GB* 60, 250
  in Italy *UA* 144, 146-8
  Lapsang Souchong: *GB* 57, 111; *JP* 229, 230
  making *LTA* 10-11
  in office: *EW* 70; *QA* 8
  pouring *JP* 126, 193-4; *LTA* 85-6, 204
  in thermos flask *GBC* 355
  weak *EW* 147

tea (meal) *UA* 221-3
  in antique shop *GB* 240-7
  in café *UA* 133-5
  children's *AQ* 63
  in garden: *JP* 192-7; *LTA* 87, 89; *STM*
  at jumble sale *EW* 60, 62
  strong *SDD* 57
  on train *SDD* 157-8
  for unexpected visitor *LTA* 129-30
  at vicarage *JP* 67-72

So my index shows much about Pym's literary work besides where items in the text are to be found. Moreover, I greatly enjoyed the work of compiling it. This will surprise some who attended the 1998 Pym Society conference where the motion was debated 'that *Excellent Women* has a tragic ending': some members thought Mildred demeaned by the prospect of becoming a married woman indexer; that her time and energy had been more worthily directed to the organizing of jumble sales.

Pym was herself an indexer, and loved the work, as her friend and colleague Hazel Holt points out in her article reproduced above. In 1978 the Society of Indexers asked Barbara Pym to speak at their conference. She declined, but wrote about the copy of *The Indexer* that she was sent, 'It does make one realize the enormous expertise needed to make an index, and makes me wonder how I ever had the temerity to do one (several) myself'.

No, my heart cannot bleed for Mildred Lathbury, faced at the end of *Excellent Women* with the prospect deemed so daunting at the conference, of marrying the man she loves and becoming an indexer. I don't think that Pym was being sarcastic in allowing Ianthe Broome in *An Unsuitable Attachment* to claim, 'A card index may be a noble thing'.

Parts of this article will be included in the forthcoming book, *Reading Barbara Pym*.

Barbara in the German classroom

Michael Macke

Barbara Pym tells us (in *No Fond Return of Love*), 'There are various ways of mending a broken heart, but perhaps going to a learned conference is one of the more unusual'. I suppose ve've got many vays ant means of making German students talk about English literature and appreciate it, but teaching Barbara Pym's novels seems to me the most pleasant, if maybe (still?) somewhat unusual.

I first discovered Barbara's novels as a student at Münster University almost twenty years ago, when we had to translate from English to German a review of *The Sweet Dove Died*. I hadn't read any of her novels, and the prospect of having to translate a rather esoteric review of an unfamiliar writer and an unfamiliar novel, whose title did not even appeal to me—my belated apologies to Keats—seemed boring if not daunting. Belated apologies to Barbara, too.

One of the first things I did when I moved from Germany to Aberdeen the following year was to obtain one of her novels and work my way through it. Its cosy 'Englishness' provided a fascinating contrast to my life in the granite city in bonnie old Scotland. Besides, it came in very handy when we were asked to provide a 'fill-in-the-gaps' exercise for our fellow students at the Aberdeen College of Commerce, where all the foreign-language assistants were clustered round the central (?) heating (?) and trying to swot for their Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English. My "fill-in-the gaps" exercise based on A Glass of Blessings didn't exactly cause a stir, but it did make me realize how exceedingly well written this novel is and how well and carefully the words are chosen. A year later, when I had read all of Barbara's then published novels, I was hooked and had become a true Pymmite.—So it is hardly surprising that I chose Pym's novels as one of my topics for my State Examinations in the 1980s. By that time I had learned not only who Keats was, but, thanks to Barbara's novels, I knew a bit about the lesser known but equally delightful poets, who are so obscure that even the American's hadn't done them—let alone the Krauts. I also knew how to obtain issues of *Africa* and copies of the novels of lesser known (and to my mind less delightful) women writers, and was aware of the long-standing tradition of British women writers. The more I read Barbara's novels, the more I appreciated them, and was convinced of their future impact on British literature.

When it came to teaching in German grammar schools, I was determined to pass on some of my knowledge of and enthusiasm for Pym's literary *oeuvre* to my students, and I have taught Pym ever since (admittedly with varying degrees of success). My favourite novel has always been, and still is, *Quartet in Autumn*, as my long-suffering students could confirm.

One of my main reasons for choosing this novel to teach English to German fifth and sixth-year students is a pragmatic one. Being a chronicler of quiet and ordinary lives in ordinary settings, Barbara Pym often uses everyday vocabulary and expressions that are really used in Britain, and thus is a great help to foreign students who want to minimize the risk of coming up with Baedecker phrases like 'the postillion had a breakdown". ("Anything for the post?"—"Hardly yet. The post does not have to be collected until half-past three."—"Hoping to get off early, lazy little so-and-so", does not exactly convey the idea of a breakdown but sounds far more idiomatic.) Following her characters not only into the bathroom and advising her readers on "softer and more becoming ways of colouring one's hair", but also to the local library, the British Museum, self-service restaurants, their office and other equally ordinary places, Barbara not only gives a realistic insight into everyday London but also provides the teacher with the most welcome opportunity of setting up vocabulary exercises.—This teacher has also been known to indulge in lengthy explanations about the London Underground, several London boroughs, the British Welfare System, the superiority of a certain brand of oatcakes (sugar-free), and other equally important topics and aspects of British life.

My other reason for teaching *QA* is equally pragmatic. Summer terms in particular always seem exceptionally short, and one never finds the time to do justice to a novel, although the days are much longer. So, not unlike the Cranford ladies, one has to make a virtue of necessity and cram as many items of information as possible into a limited period of time. Once the parallel and episodic structure of the novel has been explained, and its depiction of the four protagonists in similiar situations (such as their coming upon reminders of their own mortality, or their going on holidays), one or two characters can often be treated as representative of the quartet. Barbara's forte, her great ability to make one little room an everywhere, often justifies the concentration on selected passages or individual chapters (and let Pym's riches, which dispersed lie, contract into a span).

Chapter 10, for instance, which gives a detailed and almost sarcastic account of the way the four protagonists spend Christmas, helps to characterize them and explain why and in how far they fail to fulfill the expectations society has of old people. Here, it becomes once more obvious how life is dominated by norms and social patterns ("Christmas was the time for 'doing' something about old people or the 'aged', as the nobler phrase described them ...) that must be adhered to at all costs". It also shows how well the subtle social mechanisms that make people outsiders work. The detached and almost scientific treatment of social mechanisms seems to me one of the central aspects—if not the central one—of *Quartet in Autumn*. Reading this novel doesn't necessarily make you a better person, but it helps you to understand why you aren't one, and to be aware of certain codes of behaviour. This social, or even moral, aspect is—for me—one of the main didactic reasons for teaching this novel.

The other one is probably its literary quality, which can be illustrated by Pym's subtle and almost poetic use of imagery and leitmotifs such as the autumn leaves drifting on to the pavement, an image that recurs in different forms throughout the text. Despite its episodic appearance, *QA* is a carefully constructed novel with a clear and definite ending. Marcia's decline and death are well accounted for and hardly come as a surprise when you think of the detailed description of her eating habits, her house, holiday treats, the anthology of poetry by her bed and the recurring description of her outward appearance. So, her formerly "stiff lifeless hair" that "was uncompromisingly dyed a harsh dark brown" becomes "strangely piebald" and finally white, thus reminding the reader of her dead cat Snowy, and foreboding her death.

When Letty claims "that the position of an unmarried, unattached ageing woman is of no interest whatever to the writer of modern fiction", she is not entirely right. In her novel, *Mrs Palfrey at*

the Claremont, Elizabeth Taylor focuses on a group of elderly people ending their days in a small London hotel, and in particular on Mrs Palfrey and her secret love. The poet W. H. Auden describes the frustrating life and tragic death of (the brass-polishing spinster) Miss Gee, and the cruel treatment she receives. These rather sombre texts may be regarded as a modern counterbalance to Mrs Gaskell's cheerful account of the Cranford ladies, who find that "a man is *so* in the way in the house". A character in one of Angela Thirkell's novels claims that "once you get over the mortification of not being wanted", being single can be quite a pleasant state. Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, and Patricia Wentworth's Miss Maud Silver, are famous sleuths who never fail to solve a case.—Barbara Pym's *Quartet in Autumn* combines the qualities of both the sombre and the cheerful school. Irony and parody (as for example her delightful inversion of the Parable of the Good Samaritan at the beginning of chapter 2, or the equally delightful description of Mrs Pope's raid on Letty's room and her hypocritical disappointment), counterbalance the more tragic aspects of the novel (such as Marcia's treatment in hospital and her inability to realize that she is treated with the utmost indifference and cruel tactlessness), thus preventing the novel from becoming sentimental or tear-jerking. This balance may also help to define the literary quality of the novel and its place in a literary tradition.

Comparisons between passages from *Quartet in Autumn* and its literary predecessors (or even successors; Tom Wakefield's novel *The Variety Artistes* offers a hilarious dialogue between the elderly widow Lydia Poulten and a young social worker, whom her family has set on her) make rewarding exam papers, which, however, are not always appreciated by students, although they are "so very simple, if you've read the novel carefully".

Last year, the Stark Verlag, a German educational publishing company, brought out an *Abi* ('A' Level) Guide for advanced students of English. It included a wonderful and sophisticated exam paper based on *Some Tame Gazelle,* with detailed answers and comments on the effect of the quotations from the poets.

We are getting somewhere now, eventually, finding more vays ant means of bringing such a great writer into German classrooms and combining personal enthusiasm with professional interest.

*

An example of Michael Macke's use of Pym's work in teaching English and German at the Clauberg Gymnasium in Duisburg-Hamborn is a list of questions entitled, "The desire to do good". These are concerned with the episode in *An Unsuitable Attachment* when Daisy Pettigrew insists on beating a Catholic priest to the place at a café table next to an African student 'so that [he] should not feel slighted'. The questions consider racial attitudes, stereotypes, sensitivity, religious bigotry and hypocrisy, as well as Pym's means of turning an everyday situation into comedy.

Reading Barbara Pym: a new book

At the 1999 AGM at St. Hilda's, Frauke Lenckos and Ellen Miller announced that they are co-editing a new book that focuses on the relationship between Barbara Pym and her readers. Academics and admirers have formed a unique collaboration in celebration of Barbara and the very special rapport that exists between author and reader. Twenty contributors have written either personal reminiscences, articles on Pym's literary influence, or essays about the readers *in* Pym novels.

The list of contributors is indeed impressive. Headed by Hilary Walton and Hazel Holt, they include: Professor Kathy Ackley, Hazel Bell, Professor John Bayley, Ronald Blythe, Kate Charles, Paul De Angelis, Barbara Everett, Professor Jan Fergus, Lesley Grant-Adamson, Father Gabriel Myers, Professor Jane Nardin, Anne Marie Owens, Professor Anne Pilgrim, Professor Janice Rossen, Professor Dale Salwak, Professor Nancy Ellen Talburt and Catherine Wallace. Both Frauke and Ellen will also contribute essays. Adding further interest to *Reading Barbara Pym* will be a Pym story, *A Year in an Oxfordshire Village*, which originally appeared in Ronald Blythe's anthology, *Places*, but which has been out of print for twenty years.

The co-editors are currently in the process of securing a publisher, and will keep *Green Leaves* informed of their progress—and a publication date!

Availability of Pym books

Moyer Bell publishers in the US are republishing Pym. So far they have brought out: *Some Tame Gazelle* ($11.95), *A Few Green Leaves* ($12.95) and *Jane and Prudence* ($12.95). *Crampton Hodnet* will join these editions in May of 2000, and *Quartet in Autumn* in September.

The books are featured in Moyer Bell's catalogue, *The Common Reader*, for December 1999.

These may be ordered by telephoning 001 401 789-0074, faxing a request to 001 401 789-3793, emailing Moyer Bell at sales@moyerbell.com, or writing to Moyer Bell, 45 Kymbolde Way, Wakefield, RI 02879, USA. Payment must be by Visa, Mastercard or American Express, or an international money order in US dollars for the cost of the book plus handling, which to the UK is approximately $9.00 (£6).

Some of these titles are available in the UK from Pan or Flamingo.

The Amazon Internet bookshop, on a search in November, listed 77 books on Pym, Barbara, as subject (books both about and by Pym), and 48 under Pym, Barbara, as author. These included: hardcover, paperback, large print editions, a Spanish-language edition, and several audiocassettes.

Obituary notice

Fanny Simmons died in February 1999, aged over ninety, and having recently celebrated fifty years of marriage to J. S. G. Simmons. She had an unbounded admiration for Barbara Pym and an encyclopaedic knowledge of her work. A founder-member of the Barbara Pym Society, she attended the first Barbara Pym conference, held in 1986, as well as all the subsequent ones. John Simmons has now presented her collection of books by and about Barbara Pym to St Hilda's Library, where they are shelved in the English Literature section, and so are available to be read by undergraduates as leisure and recreational reading—which Miss Pym would surely have approved!

Everett on screen

Barbara Everett, Senior Research Fellow of Somerville, who spoke so brilliantly at the Pym conferences in Oxford of 1998 and 1999, and the meeting of the North American Society at Harvard in 1999, has also offered shrewd literary criticism in the cinema. She made several appearances in Al Pacino's film about Shakespeare's *Richard III*, *Looking for Richard*, explaining the implications of the text.

Translating Style: The English Modernists and their Italian Translations by Tim Parks; Cassell, 1998; £25.00.
ISBN 0-304-70098-3

This book by a professional translator who is also a novelist investigates some of the problems involved in translation by looking at various modern authors in English, and available Italian versions of their work. In the process, he also sheds light on some aspects of the novels and writers he examines.

The principal authors whose works are considered are (in order of the chapters devoted to them): D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett, Barbara Pym and Henry Green. The work of Barbara Pym's under consideration is *A Few Green Leaves (Qualche Foglia Verde* translated by Frida Ballini; La Tartaruga Edizioni, Milan; 1989).

Parks begins his chapter, 'Barbara Pym and the Untranslatable Commonplace', with these words: "Since the revival of Barbara Pym's fortunes in 1977, it has been generally acknowledged that she was a novelist of some stature, yet a certain unease and confusion remain as to the exact nature of her achievement". Both this sentence and the title of the chapter indicate something of the argument which will follow.

Parks considers the reception of Pym's books in different countries, stating that her "success in the UK has been matched and even surpassed only by success in the USA, while in Europe the translation of her novels has not brought Pym any particular acclaim, or sales". Only in the original English have her novels been "widely read and loved".

Further, he suggests that the American response has more to do with the perception of a particular sort of English "quaintness" which appeals to Americans, rather than of the actual complexities that Pym conveys to a British audience.

Parks then offers this hypothesis, on the examination of which the rest of the chapter is essentially based: "that there may be something ... that informs Pym's novels, which is not only difficult to convey in translation, but perhaps not even properly understood outside the country (if not the milieu) in which she was writing."

There is, Parks says, in this book "a cheerful willingness repeatedly to frustrate the expectations it so rapidly and traditionally sets up. ... [W]hat is disconcerting ... is not the subversion of a traditional plot, but the almost disappearance [*sic*] of any plot at all[.] ... [N]o sooner has she set up what appears to be the traditional romantic storyline than this breaks down into apparently insignificant scenes full of banal or quaint minutiae and culture-specific bric-à-brac. What is it then that the book 'means' which the author hopes will make up for ... our thwarted expectations (whether of romance or satire)?" He concludes that the discrepancies are due to a strategy or vision of Pym's which the translator has failed to appreciate: the nuances of language are designed to indicate the divergences at any moment between the different points of view (a) of the character concerned, (b) of social convention (usually expressed in a stock form of words) and (c) of the narrator.

An amusing, if comparatively straightforward, illustration of some of these matters can be achieved by imagining the task of translating into Italian for an Italian audience the sentence:

> Emma's mother had told her that before his present job he had been an Anglican priest who had 'gone over to Rome'[.]

As Parks says, "'Gone over to Rome' is a standard and dismissive expression, registering an Anglican's sense of disdain for another's betrayal". The use of 'Rome' itself in this way, and the whole Anglican context, social and historical, are "necessarily lost in the straightforward and colourless 'passato alla chiesa Cattolica'" with which the Italian version of the passage ends. Since this is precisely the sort of fictional territory with which Pym deals, the difficulty of presenting her work to other audiences is highlighted. Indeed, it is hard to see how even a translator completely at home in Pym's world could convey such matters without a barrage of footnotes.

Parks argues that "Pym's achievement lies not just in her presentation of this very particular world, but in the way she suggests how ... the pressure of detail, language and convention" experienced in everyday life "suffocates, or is allowed to suffocate, personal initiative and thus smothers the plot, while at the same time being the source of much of the book's fun and irony. As such, one begins to get a sense of local detail and conventional idiomatic expressions as sources simultaneously of pleasure and frustration. To put it another way, one cannot have Pym's richness of detail without her sense of futility, they operate together in a reciprocally tensing relationship."

But this richness of detail "is never extraordinary detail, even though it may seem so to those not familiar with the society she describes. ... The problem for the translator is that not only does Pym's detail seem somewhat bizarre when transferred into another language (as indeed it may seem bizarre when read in New York or San Francisco), but its attachment to stock phrases and thought patterns is undermined because of the inevitable difficulties of maintaining the same semantic content while finding equivalent idioms in Italian. What is lost, then, is the English reader's sense of immediate recognition, of harmony between language and detail, a recognition that validates the humour and irony but at the same time calls the reader's own way of thinking into question. If I recognize this so immediately, do I myself not act, or fail to act, in this way? Pym's prose is challenging."

After quoting the list of jumble sale items from the novel, Parks goes on to question whether "[p]erhaps Pym is not, after all, so far away from the modernist credo: 'these fragments I have shored against my ruins'." The difference, however, is that these fragments do not come from a shattered and diversified set of cultures. She does play with language but within a specific cultural context. In translation, one loses both the cultural context and the language use based on it. "Part of the charm of Pym ... is her apparent willingness to be misunderstood, to be seen for what she is not, or not entirely, a traditional writer of upmarket, genteel romance fiction, and this in order to remain passionately attached to the one small milieu which happens to he her particular consolation. ... Ultimately, it is in her apparent closeness to, but crucial distance from, the traditional genre that much of the pleasure of reading Pym lies. Unfortunately, the distinction is too subtly generated for the Italian translation ... [which by] translating only the plot ... does [however] show us quite convincingly that Pym is not a traditional novelist. For in the Italian version the book offers very little pleasure at all."

The chapter on Barbara Pym ends with "a final and curious question: is it possible that a writer might be truly great, but truly untranslatable, un-exportable? If Pym is to be considered great it is in the way she uses the claustrophobia of a particular milieu and its language to express a common human condition." Her "untranslatability" is reiterated in terms of the difficulty of recreating in Italian (or, by extension, any other language) "a convincing wealth of recognizable commonplaces while remaining within the limits of the semantic content," and secondly "in the way unfamiliarity with the milieu Pym describes, and with its idiom, may distract attention from her underlying vision." Parks ends with the view that "The question as to greatness and translatability, however, brings us, I suspect, into the realm of the imponderable."

Michael Skaife d'Ingerthorpe

Uncouth Wilmet

The presenters of the Talking Book version of *No Fond return of Love* proved unfamiliar with Pym's earlier *A Glass of Blessings*. In the scene near the end in which Wilmet orsyth and Keith visit the castle, noting that Keith had 'a flat, rather common little voice', and they appear as a couple, Wilmet too was given a most unsuitable cockney accent!