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GREEN LEAVES

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THE BARBARA PYM SOCIETY CONFERENCE 2001

Hilary Walton with Muriel Maby

The 2001 Annual Conference of the Barbara Pym Society, focusing on *Some Tame Gazelle*, was held on Saturday and Sunday, 1-2 September, at St Hilda's College, Oxford. It was attended by sixty-six, including visitors from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Scotland and the US. A welcome visitor to lunch on the first day was Miss Muriel Maby, Pym's close friend in the Censorship at Bristol, who wrote of 'Barbara Pym as I knew her' in the third issue of *Green Leaves*, March 1995. She had come from her home in Malvern, where Pym twice records visiting her in *A Very Private Eye*.

First on the programme was the Annual General Meeting, the full minutes of which appear on page 3.

With all the conference speakers considering various aspects of *Some Tame Gazelle*, a fascinating range of different opinions, interpretations and evaluations of this novel emerged over the two days. **Yvonne Cocking** opened the first session by reading papers from the Bodleian Library giving contemporary opinions of the novel expressed by Pym's friends, fans and reviewers. They appear later in this issue.

Frauke Lenckos considered the concept of gentle-womanliness, and how it is exemplified in literature of the 16th to 18th centuries, then manifested in the personalities and lives of the Bede sisters. Her full paper appears in this issue.

Barbara Everett led an open discussion of *Some Tame Gazelle*. She discussed with Hilary Walton the extent to which the novel had been revised – first written in 1934 by the youthful Pym, rejected by Chatto & Windus with recommendations for revision, and revised by an older Pym who had lived through the war, to be published eventually by Cape in 1950. The changes consisted mostly of the dropping of several extra characters and of many further quotations, as well as a section about Agatha in Germany.

Pearls on the subject fell from Miss Everett's lips. She found the book 'terribly touching', 'a beautiful little novel with a kind of radiance about it', 'fantastically funny', opening with a perfectly shaped paragraph, and with the 'extraordinary and original' idea of ageing her real-life models for her characters by thirty years; 'in some serious way, extremely good'

She thought it 'very hard to say why this is a good book', and that this was a novel that one enjoyed and appreciated more as one grew older, finding it more crystalline, stronger. The book splendidly conveyed the feeling of a country village (though this was not then a part of Pym's own experience), using life there almost as a myth or emblem – 'vicar's pastoral'. There were affinities with Lewis Carroll: Archbishop Hoccleve perhaps resembled the caterpillar encountered by Alice! By the end of the book, she considered Pym to have attained true artistic detachment, having (through representing the feelings of Belinda Bede) lost the illusion that Henry Harvey meant more to her than her artistic creativity. Relishing how awful Hoccleve/Henry is gave Pym a distinctly pleasurable aesthetic experience. There is a sense of a happy ending in the discovery of the littleness by which human beings can survive.

Barbara Everett and Hilary Walton in discussion

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Everett did not see this as a romantic novel: the blossoming of imagination is controlled, with the detachment of the observer. Pym 'seems the most romantic of novelists, but the action of the novels is cruelly unromantic', with bleak, grim insight into human relationships, especially between men and women. Neither was Pym a great plotter in her fiction – she was 'not engendered with that sense of power and manic energy' that modern reading seems to demand: instead, her writing is endowed with a highly intelligent sensitivity, giving her books an elegant shape rather than a brilliant plot. The interplay of characters is carefully worked out, with a bipartite flexibility.

After dinner, **Nicholas Bennett**, Vice-Chancellor and Librarian of Lincoln Cathedral, entertainingly described the duties of an archdeacon, citing historical and literary examples, to disclose 'The secret life of Archdeacon Hoccleve', and make out a case that 'Belinda was right after all'. Being at once an archdeacon – the 'bishop's eye', in the thick of church bureaucracy – and a parish priest, Hoccleve would indeed have had manifold duties to keep him extremely busy in their fulfillment. Bennett's paper appears (in abbreviated form) in this issue.

Sunday morning offered a choice of activities, with one party attending St Cross church, maps of a suffragettes' walk around Oxford provided for those who wished to retrace those steps, and an exhibition of 1930s memorabilia: books and magazines of the period covering fashion, entertaining and etiquette; *Good Housekeeping* for 1934; recipe books and cuttings; clothes, knitting guides and patterns; a satin nightdress with its lacy case; china cups and saucers; cosmetics (including a mouldy lipstick); cleaning products (Brasso, Robin Starch); and even, incredibly, two tins of dried egg, from the war years! One felt one had come across a hoard of Marcia Ivory's.

Robin Joyce, our first speaker from Australia, had taken as her title, 'Troublesome women: our validation in the novels of Barbara Pym, Fay Weldon and Zoë Fairbairns'. She saw these women as presenting women's negative characteristics as well as positive, contrary to women's traditional role, 'the dragons of niceness' overcome by them. In particular, she considered that Pym undermined the respect given to marriage, portraying the woman as always the stronger partner. She thought that Pym showed spinsters – at least in this first novel, first written in Pym's own youth – as content with their single state, never bitter, relishing their food, rejecting marriage proposals, teasing the reader with their joy. On the continuum leading from Jane Austen to contemporary writers, Joyce saw Pym's as subversive novels, this one demonstrating the 'sisterhood' that was to become a tenet of the 70s. The Bede sisters together show a range of characteristics with which women can identify; Harriet is the most successful character in the novel, exuberant, having achieved all she wants. Belinda has achieved her true aim of spinsterhood: she is a romantic, tragic figure only in the Bishop's false assumption that a past love of hers had died.

Dramatization of *Some Tame Gazelle*. Left to right: Elizabeth Proud, Sioned Wiliam, Christopher Scott, Bridget Guymer

Spinsterhood, claimed Joyce, is here presented as freedom, and marriage as the antithesis of romance.

Eileen Roberts gave an account, from published *mémoires*, of Oxford in the 1930s, the period when *Some Tame Gazelle* was written, contrasting events in the town with Barbara Pym's version of her life recorded in her diary. This paper will appear in a later issue of *Green Leaves*.

The final session was a **dramatization** of *Some Tame Gazelle*, with Elizabeth Proud making a welcome return to play Harriet (as well as Agatha and Miss Prior), Sioned Wiliam as Belinda, and Christopher Scott as all the men. Elizabeth explained that the version of the novel she had prepared concentrated on the the relationship between the sisters: she saw Belinda's need for something to love as lying at the heart of the book. Much laughter greeted the reading, hailed by Hilary Walton as 'just perfect'; she observed that Christopher Scott had played Hoccleve 'just like Henry Harvey'.

Hazel Bell

Photographs by Eileen Roberts and Ellen Miller

Barbara Pym Society Calendar

North American conference
23-24 March, Harvard, Cambridge, Mass.
Information will be posted on the web site:
www.barbara-pym.org

Spring meeting
9 June, St Albans, Holborn, London WC2
Fr. Gabriel Myers on Victorian hymns in the Pym novels

Annual Meeting and Conference
Unexcellent Men
7 - 8 September 2002
St Hilda's College, Oxford

Knitting Socks for the Curate
An Introduction to the Novels of Barbara Pym

A Barbara Pym Day at Lincoln Cathedral
Saturday, 9 March, 2002

10.45 a.m. Coffee in the Cloister
11.15 a.m. Lecture in the Wren Library:
"Barbara Pym and Libraries"
by Dr Nicholas Bennett, Cathedral Librarian
12.15 p.m. Break for lunch in nearby tea shops

2 p.m. Lecture in the Wren Library:
Barbara Pym and the Clergy"
by Kate Charles, Chairman of the Barbara Pym Society, and ecclesiastical crime writer
3 p.m. Tea in the Cloister
3.45 p.m. Dramatised Reading
4.30 p.m. Closing Remarks
5.15 p.m. Cathedral Evensong
Cost, including morning coffee and afternoon tea, £12

To register, please apply to Dr Nicholas Bennett, Cathedral Librarian, The Cathedral, Lincoln LN2 1PZ, enclosing an SAE and cheque made payable to "Lincoln Cathedral Library."

Book early for a very Pymmish bed and breakfast at Edward King House, the Old Palace, Minster Yard, Lincoln LN2 1PU. Formerly Bishop King's Residence, and now the Diocesan Retreat Centre, it is adjacent to the Cathedral (tel.: 01522 528778).

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

REPORT OF THE EIGHTH A.G.M. OF THE BARBARA PYM SOCIETY HELD AT ST.HILDA'S COLLEGE, OXFORD, ON SATURDAY 1st SEPTEMBER 2001 AT 11.30 a.m.

Committee members present were: Kate Charles (Chairman), Hilary Walton, Eileen Roberts (Membership Secretary), Hazel Bell (Editor – *Green Leaves*), Yvonne Cocking (Secretary), Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Bridget Guymer, Rita Phillips, Louise Ross and Michael Wilson.

Before the meeting started, Eileen Roberts introduced the new Principal of St. Hilda's College, Dr. Judith Milne, and welcomed her on behalf of the Society. Dr. Milne was unable to stay for the meeting, but offered her best wishes for its success.

1.Chairman's Opening Remarks

The Chairman, Kate Charles, welcomed the members and referred to the highlights of the past year: a very successful conference in the United States, a most enjoyable Spring meeting in London, at which James Runcie was the speaker (James has kindly accepted life membership of the Society), and the publication in *Green Leaves* of one of Barbara Pym's hitherto unpublished short stories. The bad news was that the Macmillan reprints of the novels were not ready as expected for August 2001, and were now scheduled for August 2002.

Looking to the future, Kate reported that Nicholas Bennett is to hold a Barbara Pym day at Lincoln Cathedral in the late morning and afternoon of 9th March 2002, ending with Cathedral evensong. He hoped to have Pym books for sale. Kate asked members to donate their spare copies for resale. She said she hoped the day would be a huge success. Accommodation will be available. Nicholas said he would mail details to all Society members. The aim of the meeting will be to encourage interest in Barbara's work.

The next conference in the US was to be at Harvard on 30th and 31st March 2002. [Note: the dates have since been changed to 23-24 March.] Details would be made available on Ellen Miller's website:

www.barbara-pym.org.

The Spring meeting in London would be a little later than usual, on 9th June 2002, when Fr. Gabriel Myers had agreed to speak on Victorian hymns in the Pym novels

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Hazel Holt, Muriel Maby, Maureen Lenk and Gabrielle Page.

3. Minutes of Previous A.G.M

The minutes of the previous A.G.M. were accepted.

4. Matters Arising from the Minutes

Item 8. Frauke Lenckos' and Ellen Miller's compilation, now entitled *'All This Reading': the Literary World of Barbara Pym* is due for publication in 2002. Printed details were circulated.

5. Financial and Membership Report

Eileen Roberts reported that at this time last year there was a balance of £4041.82 in the main account which now stood at £3389.36. Income for the year was £2487.86 and expenditure £3140.32, leaving a deficit of £652.46. This year's higher expenditure was on the purchase of a set of audio books (£193.10), the remaining stock of *A la Pym* (£499.50), and more mugs (£168.75), and the printing of greetings cards (£386.49).

Ellen Miller had brought money from the US account to help to pay postage of *Green Leaves* to North American members. Membership now stands at 378 of whom half are in North America. It was emphasised that the Barbara Pym Society of America is part of the main Barbara Pym Society based in England, and collects subscriptions from North American members. It has therefore more money in its account than there is in the English account.

6. Editor's Report

Hazel Bell stated that she expects plenty of material for the November issue of *Green Leaves*, including the conference report and papers, and another of Barbara's short stories. She thanked Yvonne Cocking for her work at the Bodleian Library in selecting stories suitable for the Newsletter. Kate thanked Hazel for her excellent editorship.

7. Elections

Louise Ross and Michael Wilson have completed their terms of office and are therefore standing down. Owing to Maggie Lane's resignation, there is also a two-year vacany to fill. It was proposed that Christine Ward fill this slot, and that Gabrielle Page and Maggie Parsons be elected to the three-year vacancies. All were duly elected.

8. Any Other Business

Kate said that she had been asked if the Pym Conference could be brought forward to follow the Crime and Mystery meeting, as there are many who attend both. She asked the members for their views. After some discussion, all were in favour of Phil Bacon's proposal that the date remain as it is, so next year's conference would be held on 31st August and 1st September. [Note: the dates have since had to be changed to 7-8 September.]

Kate reminded members about Persephone Books who publish beautifully chosen and produced mid-20th century novels by women authors. She said that some of the books are quite "Pymmish" in character. They issue *The Persephone Quarterly*, which includes their catalogue. Their offices are in Lambs Conduit Street, London. They also hold literary lunches – there was one on Katherine Mansfield last year. Copies of the *Quarterly* were distributed.

Kate said that those wishing to attend morning service at St. Cross Church on Sunday should meet at the lodge at 9.40.

Eileen said she could supply a map of a Suffragettes' walk around Oxford, and that there would be a display of memorabilia from the '30s and '50s in the Canada Room throughout the conference. Most of the items are from Jean Harker's mother-in-law.

Deborah Fisher said that she is a founding member of the recently formed Siegfried Sassoon Society, which will be holding its first meeting at the Malvern Festival on 14th October.

This is the centenary year of the death of Charlotte M. Yonge, so a collection of papers by CMY scholars is being assembled. No date has yet been given, but it is hoped it will be out by the end of the year.

There was no other business, so the meeting ended at 12.15.

Yvonne Cocking

The Barbara Pym Society 2001-2

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The German Baron

Barbara Pym

If he had not been a German Baron Miss Moat would probably not have looked at him twice. She and Miss Foxe used to sit in their favourite chairs in the lounge of the hotel, and watch the people who came in. Dim Englishwomen, who might be governesses or companions, as they themselves had once been, were passed over without comment.

They could tell that type at a glance, and they had only once made a serious mistake. That had been when an elderly French Princess came and sat by them with her knitting, and they had not realised until it was too late that she was something more than just another retired governess or companion.

The German Baron had happened by accident, so to speak. Miss Moat had been sitting in the lounge by herself one afternoon when this stout, jolly-looking man, rather like General Goering, had tripped over her legs. In their grey woollen stockings and black glacé kid bar shoes they were not the sort of legs he could conceivably have been admiring. The reasons for his abstraction must have been other and deeper ones. But whatever they were he tripped, and Miss Moat, ready to bristle with anger or coldly accept an apology, was so taken with his genial face and charming foreign manners, that she soon found herself having tea with him on the terrace.

He had introduced himself at once – Freiherr von Traben-Trabach zu Mosel-Trittenheim. Miss Moat knew very little German – French, and Italian had been the languages she taught as a governess – but she had always heard that *von* was a sign of nobility, and later she was gratified to hear the Freiherr addressed as Baron by a clergyman who was noted for the accurate, scholarly work he had done on St. Paults Epistle to the Ephesians.

The Baron's conversation was *delightful*, thought Miss Moat.

"It is nice here, I think," he said, waving a large hand in the direction of the mountains.

"Oh yes. The air is so bracing, and one meets really nice people in the hotel."

"In summer there is sun, in winter also much sun, I think, "continued the Baron.

"And snow too," agreed Miss Moat with enthusiasm. Some of the mountains have snow on them all the year round. They look so beautiful against the blue sky, gentian blue, you might almost say ..."

Miss Moat paused and contemplated the sky. Then she turned her attention to the other residents in the hotel. She and the Baron were in full view of everybody. A clergyman and his wife were looking in their direction. Miss Moat bowed rather distantly, and they turned away guiltily, as if they had been caught doing something of which they were ashamed.

"In winter there is very much snow, I think," persevered the Baron, "yes, much snow. It is good for the *ski-laufen*." He sighed faintly, as if thinking of past prowess at that sport, and took another cake.

They finished their tea, after which the Baron made some excuse, and hurried away without seeming to. It was Miss Moat who made it known to him that she would be in her usual place in the lounge after dinner, and that she would be interested to see his photographs of elk-shooting in Prussia.

She went to dress for dinner rather earlier than usual. Her friend Miss Foxe was out walking with a party of school mistresses.

Miss Moat was older and less energetic, a thin untidy woman, with a hooked nose and large, peering, pale grey eyes. Miss Foxe was smaller and rounder, quite comely in a way, with thick auburn hair that still kept its colour. She looked as if she ought to be the mother of several fine children.

When she came into the bedroom she radiated health and energy, making Miss Moat feel older and greyer, because she had been sitting knitting in the lounge, instead of scrambling about the mountains. But tonight Miss Moat was smiling secretly to herself as she remembered the German Baron. She looked up as her friend came in and said casually "Well, Edith, have you had a good walk?"

"Yes, it was *glorious* in the open air. I feel so fit here. I'm sure it would do you good to get out more than you do, Harriet." She flung down her walking stick, and began taking off her jumper.

Her untidiness usually annoyed Miss Moat, but tonight she felt tolerant towards poor Edith and her bad habits. Poor Edith, always suggesting things that might 'do Harriet good', such a well-meaning soul, not *quite* out of the top-drawer, perhaps, although one shouldn't notice things like that about an old friend. It was only when one met people like German Barons that one did.

Miss Moat went over to the wardrobe. In it hung several dowdy dresses of the type vaguely known as 'semi-evening'. Most of them were black or dark coloured. The brighter ones could only be described as unfortunate. One which Miss Moat particularly liked was a loose Pre-Raphaelite style of gown of bright green crepe-de-chine, trimmed with bead embroidery. The sleeves had hanging draperies, and the waist was defined by a rich golden cord with heavy tassels. It was an understood thing that this was Miss Moat's best dress, because it was never worn, but was always being kept for some great occasion in the near or distant future, which never materialised.

Tonight Miss Moat spent a long time fumbling among the dresses, with an occasional furtive glance backwards, as if she were wondering which dress to choose and feared that her choice might meet with opposition. For she had chosen to wear her best dress. Had she been alone she would have taken it out boldly and put it on, but with Miss Foxe in the room a little diplomacy was needed. Poor Edith was such a slavish imitator that if she saw Harriet take out her best dress, she would automatically wear hers as a matter of course. And this was not at all what Miss Moat wanted. She looked over towards the washstand, where Miss Foxe was washing. Her sensible figure, clothed in a dark grey lockknit petticoat, bent and straightened itself as she splashed the water about with unnecessary vigour.

Miss Moat sat down and filed her nails. After a few minutes Miss Foxe went to the wardrobe, and, without hesitating, took out her maroon marocain and put it on. Then she took her dusty, black velvet bridge-coat out of a drawer and put that on too.

Miss Moat advanced to the wardrobe and took out her best dress. She had her back turned to Miss Foxe, and she gritted her teeth, waiting for the irritating little exclamations and comments which would come when she revealed herself in the full splendour of her green crepe-de-chine.

"Why, Harriet, how grand! Your *best* dress!" Miss Foxe's fingers, which had been fastening the bridge-coat, stopped in their occupation. Her eyes moved uncertainly towards the wardrobe. "Is it some-

thing special tonight? I'm only wearing my old maroon."

"Oh no, it's nothing," said Miss Moat, trying not to let her irritation show. "Really nothing, but I see no point in not wearing this dress. It will go out of fashion if I keep it too long."

"Well, perhaps I ought to wear my blue," said Miss Foxe doubtfully.

"Oh, no, dear. It's quite new, and will be fashionable for a long time yet. It would be a pity to wear it too much now. Besides, you look so nice in your maroon."

"I shall be very shabby beside you," said Miss Foxe, knowing perfectly well that she didn't look at all nice in her maroon. "I shall have to go down as I am, but as nobody will want to look at me, I don't see that it matters. Thank goodness we don't have to be always thinking about clothes at our age," she added rather spitefully.

Miss Moat said nothing, but led the way down with dignity. She was fully conscious of her splendid appearance. She was perhaps, even more conscious of poor Edith's dowdy maroon, and the black velvet bridge-coat, which had a small but noticeable gravy stain on the front. At any rate, she kept glancing up from the table when they were eating, and after the meal was over, she made such determined efforts to shake off Miss Foxe, that the latter became quite breathless with trotting after her.

Eventually they both settled down in their usual corner of the lounge, waiting, although Miss Foxe had no idea what it was they were waiting for. Nor was she to be enlightened just yet, for the Baron did not appear that evening, and Miss Foxe went to bed without knowing the reason for the best dress or her friend's rather curious behaviour.

The next morning Miss Foxe went out alone for her usual walk. Miss Moat remained in the hotel. There was a slight coolness between them, although neither knew exactly how it had arisen. Miss Moat was glad to see Miss Foxe go, with her walking-stick and stout shoes and unbecoming velour hat pulled down over her eyes. Miss Moat waited in the hotel, but no Baron came. Where was he? Could she by any chance have imagined him? But no, she reassured herself, it was impossible that that solid, genial, Goering-like figure could have been imagined. He must be real. He was reality itself. Miss Moat was able to laugh at her fears when, at lunch-time, the Baron came in and sat alone at his table. He gave a polite bow in her direction, which Miss Moat acknowledged with more than graciousness.

Shortly afterwards Miss Foxe came in, walking lightly, her face rather flushed. She was wearing some gentains, pushed through one of the buttonholes of her cardigan. Miss Moat noticed this, and remarked, not on the beauty of the flowers, but on the likelihood of them making a stain on her cardigan and pushing the buttonhole out of shape. Miss Foxe said nothing but raised the flowers to her nose and sniffed them appreciatively. Then she looked around in the direction of the Baron, and lowering her voice began to tell Miss Moat that the stout man over there was a German Baron.

Now this was all wrong. Miss Moat was to have been the one to come out with this piece of news. As she listened to Miss Foxe's chatter she felt like a balloon which is having all the air let out of it. When Miss Foxe had done she was quite flat. It appeared that she had met the Baron during her walk and had an even longer conversation with him than Miss Moat had had.

"He picked these flowers for me," added Miss Foxe, sniffing them once more.

"He gave you *flowers*?" Miss Moat put down her knife and fork. "My dear Edith, I think you must have lost your head a little," she said coldly. "You mean to tell me that you 'picked up' this man and accepted flowers from him?"

Miss Moat certainly made it sound quite the most disgraceful thing one could have done. It was no wonder that Miss Foxe faltered a little as she continued her story. "He's asked me to go for a walk tomorrow," she said, "and he seems a perfect gentleman, if you know what I mean. After all," she added with a hint of defiance in her tone, "he is a German Baron."

"Don't speak so *loudly*, Edith," said Miss Moat in exasperation. She knew perfectly well that he was a German Baron. It was, so to speak, the crux of the whole matter. "If you take my advice," she concluded, "you'll think carefully before you commit yourself in any way."

What exactly Miss Moat meant by this remark was not quite clear, but at all events Miss Foxe did not perhaps think as carefully as she ought to have done, for on the next day she again went for a walk with the Baron.

And so it went on for several days. In the evenings the Baron would sit with both Miss Moat and Miss Foxe in the lounge, making his delightful phrase-book conversation, and showing them the promised photographs of elk-shooting in Prussia. His face shone from his conversational efforts, which, however, seldom went further than simple remarks about the mountains and snow. He never spoke about himself. This was some consolation to Miss Moat, although Miss Foxe implied that he was different on their walks together.

A week passed, and Miss Foxe grew daily more friendly with the Baron. Miss Moat sat tight-lipped and angry in the lounge or on the terrace, and defiantly wore her best dress every night for dinner. At least the Baron had done one thing for her. He had made it possible for her to wear her best dress every night without Edith making any comment. But Edith's new conversation was even more annoying. She would insist on repeating everything the Baron had said to her, especially his silly compliments. Miss Moat grew more and more uneasy, and expected a proposal any minute. She dreaded each day as it came, and sighed with relief when it passed without the Baron having said anything. She made herself into a pathetic figure, a lonely, old woman deprived of her one friend, and living by herself in a dismal bedsittingroom in North Oxford. She even put this picture before Miss Foxe, who laughed at it but did not dismiss it as altogether impossible.

"I should be very careful, if I were you," said Miss Moat one day when the Baron was away and they were out walking together. But of course if she had been in Miss Foxe's position she would certainly not have been as careful as she was now advising her friend to be.

They were a quaint-looking couple, one tall and thin, the other short and plump, both wearing drab-coloured skirts and cardigans, Miss Moat's fawn, and Miss Foxe's saxe blue. Miss Foxe walked in front, scrambling along eagerly, and rushing off in pursuit of anything interesting.

At last, when they had climbed high up, they stopped to look at the view.

"There's quite a steep precipice the other side," said Miss Foxe. "Do come and look. You can see the lake in the distance and all those mountains."

"I suppose you have been here with the Baron?" said Miss Moat rather acidly.

"Oh yes, he first showed me this way."

Miss Moat sat still, her eyes fixed on the lovely view before her. But she was not seeing it; she was seeing her life and Edith's. She was seeing Edith as a governess, always getting a slightly better post, Edith joking with clergymen when she could think of nothing to say to them, Edith stealing the German Baron, who had been her discovery. She was seeing Edith now, looking quite handsome as she picked wild flowers and chattered about anything that came into her head.

Miss Moat went to the precipice and looked over. It was not a sheer drop, but

began in a gentle slope covered with flowers – such pretty flowers.

"Look at that cyclamen!" exclaimed Miss Foxe, who had come to the edge. "I wonder if I could get it?" She looked about her doubtfully.

Oh Edith, don't be silly, the grass is dry and slippery, thought Miss Moat, but to her amazement she found herself saying in a curiously hard voice which did not sound at all like her own "I think you could get it easily; there are several good footholds."

Miss Foxe, always impulsive, started to descend the slope. Miss Moat found herself wanting to call out, but no sound came. She turned away, and for a moment everything went black, as if she were going, to faint. Then her head cleared. She heard a cry behind her. She was a murderess. She had encouraged her friend to do something that she knew to be dangerous. She could have stopped her, but she hadn't stopped her. The terrible thing was that she hadn't wanted to.

Miss Moat could never remember afterwards how she reached the hotel. She had a vague recollection of stumbling down an unending slope and hearing the sound of cow-bells, and she knew that she had managed to tell the news of the accident before she had fainted. After that they put her to bed and gave something to make her sleep.

"Well, Harriet, in your best dress, I see," said Miss Foxe, as Miss Moat advanced uncertainy towards the bed. "I hope it's in my honour."

Miss Moat did not speak, but stared at her friend as if she could not believe what she saw.

"You look ill, Harriet," continued Miss Foxe, "anyone would have thought that you'd had the accident and not me."

"She had a wonderful escape." said the English nurse.

"Fancy her coming out of it with only those bruises and a broken ankle."

"And if I'd listened to you, Harriet, I shouldn't even have had that," said Miss Foxe.

"Do you know, nurse, I've at last been punished for my impulsiveness. Miss Moat called out to me that the grass would be slippery, but I would go after that cyclamen. That's how I am," she declared rather proudly. "Oh, it was terrible that sensation of the ground slipping away. I shall never forget it."

"But, Edith, did I say anything?" asked Miss Moat, In a dazed tone. "I tried to warn you, but the words wouldn't come." Her voice faltered, and she turned away.

"But, Harriet, you shouted loudly. I thought you'd taken leave of your senses."

Miss Moat sat down in bewilderment. So she was not a murderess after all. She leaned back in the comfortable chair. So great was her relief that a wave of affection for her life-long friend passed over her. She would do everything she could for her for the rest of her life. She would lend her her cornelians and her skunk stole whenever she wanted them. She would let her marry the Baron. This was at the same time the most and the least she could do. She, an old broken woman, who had tried to take away her friend's life - for it was no use denying that the desire to murder had been there for a moment, whatever Edith may have heard her call out – would now give that life back, and with all the trimmings she could. She felt that the Baron was an elaborate and generous trimming. A life adorned by him would need no other. And in the meantime, she, Harriet Moat, would live in her dingy bedsittingroom in North Oxford, but it would not be entirely dingy. There would be something to brighten it, and that something would be the realisation of her sacrifice.

Miss Moat closed her eyes and listened to Miss Foxe proudly describing her bruises in full detail. She was exhausted with her own nobility. Her life was, to all intents and purposes, ended.

There was a knock at the door and the nurse went to open it. "Will you see the Baron?" she asked. "He has brought you some fruit. I think he can come in if he doesn't stay too long."

"Oh, how kind of him!" Miss Foxe clasped her hands, and her eyes shone with pleasure. She patted her hair, and glanced at herself in a handmirror. "I think I'm quite respectable," she said.

Miss Moat opened her eyes, and braced herself for the encounter. She wondered if she ought not to make some excuse and leave the room, but before she could make up her mind the Baron had come in. With him was a pretty, blonde young woman, very smartly, dressed.

"My wife speaks no English," said the Baron. "You will excuse her? She was sorry not to see you yesterday, but of course it was not possible."

The Baroness smiled.

Miss Moat did not look at Miss Foxe. The dingy bedsittingroom, brightened by the realisation of her sacrifice, vanished, and in its place she saw herself and Edith once more sitting in the lounge of some cheap but respectable continental hotel, watching the door. Perhaps an elderly Italian Count with a pointed beard would come in, and they would get into conversation, and Miss Moat would say, "Ah, Count, and when will your wife be joining you?"

And he would say "Alas! my dear wife was taken from me some years ago," or "Alas, dear lady, I have never experienced the great felicity of being married."

At least, Miss Moat decided firmly, he would make the position *quite clear* within the first ten minutes.

Copied by permission of Hazel Holt, Barbara Pym's Literary Executor, from MS Pym 92, folios 229-244, in the Bodleian Library Pym Archive.

The photograph shows a friend of Hilary Walton outside a restaurant she was delighted to discover in Parma, Italy. The name is given on the window-shade and the plaque by the door: MISS PYM.

Some Tame Gazelle: some views and reviews

Yvonne Cocking

It is my great pleasure as well as a privilege to start the ball rolling at this eighth annual conference of the Barbara Pym Society, in the course of which we shall consider various aspects of Barbara Pym's first novel, *Some Tame Gazelle*.

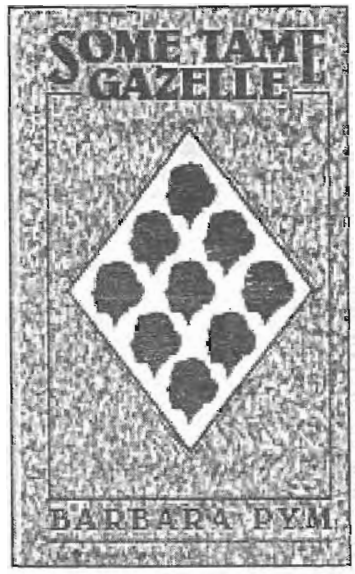
I have spent some time this year reading Barbara's papers in the Bodleian Library, primarily looking at short stories for *Green Leaves*, the first of which appeared in the last issue; the second is in this one. But I was also impressed by the large number of 'fan' letters Barbara received from complete strangers saying how much they enjoyed her books, and usually asking when she was to publish the next. Most of these, of course, came during Barbara's 'wilderness' years, when her fans simply could not understand why Barbara had stopped writing. After *Quartet in Autumn* came out, one admirer even wrote, "I am so glad that you are not dead. I was so dreadfully sorry when you suddenly stopped writing, and could see no reason other than demise..."

As I was reading these letters, I thought it might interest you to hear some of the contemporary opinions of *Some Tame Gazelle* expressed by friends, fans and reviewers. Since this was a first novel, there are not many of the 'fan' type letters, but her friends were fulsome in their praise. I trust you will not find it all a bit repetitive, but there was a remarkable consensus among her admirers.

Barbara Pym's earliest attempts to have *Some Tame Gazelle* published were unsuccessful, but in August 1936 Jonathan Cape did express some interest if she were prepared to make certain changes. Barbara did so, but was gravely disappointed when Jonathan Cape changed his mind and rejected it with what I thought a rather limp excuse.

Barbara put the novel aside and turned her mind to other projects. With the advent of war, all thoughts of pursuing her writing career had to be put aside, and it was not until 1949 that she sent an amended manuscript to Jonathan Cape. This time he readily accepted the novel.

Barbara's friends were, of course, delighted when *Some Tame Gazelle* was published in May 1950, and many wrote to say so. Some simply offered congratulations and expressed their pleasure at her success. Others gave their opinions on plot and characters. One of the earliest letters I found was from an old friend.



who went rather over the top, I thought, in her boundless enthusiasm:

> Dearest Barbara
>
> For 3 days I've been trying to think of the most "suitable" way to begin my fan letter to you, but the moment I start thinking about *Some Tame Gazelle* I get a terrific rush of superlatives to the brain and I start getting incoherent.
>
> It is a joy - something warm, comforting and rewarding. I adored every word of it and can't wait to get it back from my mother to read it again. I indulge in nice reminiscent chuckles from time to time ...
>
> It is not only extremely funny but, at times, very touching and profound. I will never be able to tell you of the pure joy and delight which reading it gave me, but as so few enjoyments in life are quite unclouded and unspoilt, will you take it on trust that the first reading of *Some Tame Gazelle* was one of those rare and treasured experiences? Future readings, and there will be many, though they might not have the delicious tang of the first enchantments, will have the cosiness of respectful intimacy...

Elizabeth Barnicot, whose husband was the model for Nicholas Parnell, wrote:

> We've both read your book already and we both love it. Of course I'm putting it on my list at Boots, and getting all my friends to do the same, so as to create a demand, but everyone is asking to borrow it...
>
> I enjoyed it all and could hardly put it down. In fact, it does what novels rarely do – goes from strength to strength...

Gordon Glover, with whom Barbara had been in love in the early forties, and who had now remarried, wrote on May Day:

> As we are going for the day to London we will make a point of obtaining *Some Tame Gazelle* – or is it "lame" gazelle? – and will read it with assured satisfaction'

About a week later he continued:

> Your Tame Gazelle, Barbara dear, arrived here on Saturday morning ... I think it is quite, quite delightful – Hoccleve and Mbawawa are beautiful creations and I thought the whole thing flowed along as easily and prettily and wittily and non-distressingly as one could wish. Only character in whom I could not altogether believe was Bianco, and perhaps I felt that the village itself was a little bit vague - couldn't quite picture it as to size, venue and so on. But that is perhaps an unfair criticism of an altogether delightful conversation piece.

Another male friend, who had presumably discussed the book earlier with Barbara, wrote irreverently

> I liked your Gazelle and finished it by agreeing with you that Belinda was really rather a silly little thing who should have had her bottom smacked (or alternatively had a night with the milkman) at an early age. But it was all great fun and I enjoyed it. I was a bit shattered by *The Observer* who said you were a bit like Trollope – whom I cannot abide. I was continually surprised at its unsophistication.

This next letter is from a lady who does not express herself very well, but I think we can understand and agree with what she is trying to say:

> I expect you are tired of letters about your Tame Gazelle but perhaps she doesn't tire easily of hearing that one's book has been liked. I do like it very much, its modest attitude and kindness are so pleasant and unusual and the smiles without feeling malicious, which is a rare pleasure. The Archdeacon is unique – you have got his detachment and the curious immunity from blame which he bears, so that his friends are driven to blaming themselves for condemning him and almost feel they *ought* to do "outrageous" things if he asks them to...

It wasn't until September that Barbara's first true love, Henry Harvey, wrote. He was now married, or perhaps

about to be, for the second time, and he quotes from a rather curious letter that Susi, his German wife, had written to him about *Some Tame Gazelle*. Susi clearly has an ambivalent attitude towards Barbara, resenting Henry's continuing interest in her, but admiring the novel in spite of herself:

> I think it is due to Barbara's book that I feel so happy. It is a good book in the human sense of the word. ... I started it yesterday...and at first was rather annoyed with a kind of amateurish clumsiness in style and the occasional thinness, almost shabbiness. I suppose I was a little annoyed about the extraordinary claim she has on you too. But soon she caught me; the book gets fuller and richer towards the middle, the flow smoother. It certainly is good in another than the human sense too. She talks about food and clothes and a few odd people, quotes bits of poetry (only too well known to me!), describes day after day instant after instant, without anything surprising happening, without sensational gossip, without even painting the characters very clearly or giving interesting details of their psyches and subconscious movements - and still she fascinates from the beginning to the end. What a good heart she must have! I don't ever want to meet her. She moved me to tears when I finished it this morning.

C.K. Meek, an anthropologist from Nigeria, who was a frequent visitor to the International African Institute, wrote:

> Dear Barbara, I just wish to say how much I have enjoyed reading *Some Tame Gazelle*. It is most pleasantly written and I enjoyed the fun you poke at anthropology, including two passages which were clearly written under the boredom of having to wade through my "Sudanese Kingdom". ...A friend of mine to whom I gave a copy says "I have read *Some Tame Gazelle* and liked it very much. I have lived in a village all my life and the book gives a very true picture of the things that go on in a small place"...

The last letter I have selected, though not written until 1977, is quite moving, the more so, perhaps, since the writer was a man:

> Dear Miss Pym, *The Times Literary Supplement* article put me on to your books. I've enjoyed reading all of them, but for some reason I liked best *Some Tame Gazelle* which I happened to read last. I was about two thirds of the way through when my father died of cancer. This was my first experience of death. We spent his last 26 hrs at his bedside. My first return to anything which wasn't mourning or turmoil was the last third of *Some Tame Gazelle* and I don't think I could have had a better balm for the spirit. To me in that situation each sentence seemed to drop its quiet grace, especially "But the place where they stood was reassuringly filled with dried Cape gooseberries and honesty." Thank you for the books and for the special help of *Some Tame Gazelle* ...

Public acclaim came in the form of reviews from a wide range of newspapers and magazines, local and national, even International. Reggie Smith wrote :

> Dear Miss Pym
>
> I'm sorry to say that *CIRCUS* for which I hoped to review your book has collapsed, or more accurately, has been overturned. [Thereby hangs an interesting tale, no doubt, but we are told no more!]
>
> He goes on:
>
> I did enjoy the book, and wish I could review it: and if my wife Olivia Manning hasn't done it for the *Palestine Post* I will.

Pamela Hansford Johnson wrote a review for the *Daily Telegraph*, but I couldn't find a copy in the Archive. L.A.G. Strong (a well-known author and reviewer at that time) did one for the *Spectator*, and Antonia White one for the *New Statesman and Nation*, and no doubt there were others.

Some shorter reviews and notices are recorded, but mainly without attribution, like this one:

> If this novel comes scratching at your front door, let the playful little thing come in. Do not be discouraged by the news that it deals with mild flirtations in the vicarage and, in particular, Belinda's 30 years of faithful love for an archdeacon, and Harriet's almost (but not quite) maternal feelings for the new curate.
>
> For this novel is in a sturdy English tradition of comedy. Its wit is so gentle that the reader scarcely notices the claws. How hard, for instance, to realise that handsome Archdeacon Hoccleve with his literary sermons is being coolly but decisively exhibited as a figure of fun.
>
> Strongly recommended to all who liked Angela Thirkell in her palmy days.

However, another reviewer disagreed:

> *Some Tame Gazelle* is as restrained as its title suggests, and describes the relations of an archdeacon in a small country town with his wife and female parishioners. Apart from an excellent parody of a "literary" sermon, the book flows cheerfully on with little wit and much incident, and many readers will compare it unfavourably with the earlier novels of Mrs.Thirkell.

That was the only one I found in that disparaging vein. All the others liked the novel, and seemed to appreciate the same virtues in it.

This one is entitled "Fun and Scholarship":

> *Some Tame Gazelle* is really very funny indeed. I may have been in a singularly happy mood when I read it; but I found it quite uproariously funny at the time. It is the story of two charming maiden ladies; one of them cherishes a comfortable, harmless romantic passion for the absurd Archdeacon Hoccleve, and the other expends her tenderness upon curates.
>
> There is a touch of Trollope here, of Mrs Gaskell, Jane Austen and Mrs Thirkell; but Miss Pym's sharp fresh fun is all her own, and her mild vein of ribaldry turns to pure joy the account of the lecture given in the village hall by the Bishop from Mbawawa.
>
> There is also an amiable air of scholarship about this novel which I find most pleasing...[It] made me very happy for an entire afternoon.

An interesting observation on the novel's potential readership is made by this reviewer:

> This excellent first novel on a theme of English village life is in the direct tradition of Jane Austen, Trollope and E.M. Delafield.
>
> To those who appreciate such a background, its quiet and good-humoured ironies will bring great delight, especially the rich comedy of the vicarage garden party, the visit of Miss Prior (the "little sewing woman") and, above all, the lantern lecture, given by the Bishop of Mbawawa.
>
> To those, on the other hand, who have no knowledge of this social background, it will probably seem as "foreign" as a novel by Dostoevsky and as "peculiar" as a short story by Chekov.

Most of the reviewers made comparisons between Barbara's work and that of other authors. Philip Day thought her "...lively, witty, sympathetic study of village, and particularly clerical, life" was "Cranfordish", being "...astringently attractive, often really funny".

Another reviewer felt that "She has applied Jane Austen's method to contemporary life".

Again:

> Archdeacons, village spinsters, garden-parties, gossips, and pale curates are the endearing substance of *Some Tame Gazelle*, in which Miss Barbara Pym has neatly compounded something of Trollope, something of Jane Austen, something of *Cranford*, and (where the willowy young clergy are concerned) more than a little of the *Punch* of the 1890s...

I should like to end by reading you Antonia White's review in the *New Statesman and Nation* for 1 July 1950. Hazel Holt quoted a passage from it in *A Lot to Ask*, but I think it is worth citing in full, not only for the quality of the writing, but also for her perceptive appreciation of Barbara's novel.

The ingredients of *Some Tame Gazelle* might suggest that the novel itself was tame. Miss Barbara Pym presents us with one of those English villages where the community is bound together by a passionate interest in the details of each member's daily life. The trimming of a hat, the question of who shall "do" the pulpit for the Harvest Festival, even the amount of luggage the Vicar's wife will take on her holiday, furnish speculative conversation for weeks. For characters she offers us two spinster sisters - one rather dashing, one faded and shy - a curate, an archdeacon and a handful of middle-aged characters, lay and clerical, who knew each other in youth and still share jokes and quotations from their Oxford days. The result, however, is far from tame. Not because anything sensational happens, but because Miss Pym, working in *petit point*, makes each stitch with perfect precision. She keeps her designs so perfectly to scale, and places one mild tint in such happy juxtaposition to another that this reader, at any rate, derived considerable pleasure from it.

Over and over again, I thought Miss Pym, skating over such thin and conventional ice, might tumble through into a pool of Miniverism, but she skims over it dry-shod. Her portraits of the three clergymen; Curate, Archdeacon and Colonial Bishop, are gentle but relentless, as a conscientious snapshot can be more devastating than the cruellest caricature. She is scrupulously fair to her characters; she allows the likeable to be irritating and the unlikeable to have charm. If she mocks the preposterous selfishness of handsome Archdeacon Hoccleve, she also mocks sensitive, ineffectual Belinda Bede who cannot break the habit of being in love with him.

Miss Pym will almost certainly – and not without reason – be compared to Jane Austen, and very possibly to Trollope. My own impression is that she is a modest and original writer who owes nothing to anyone. If my first sip of *Some Tame Gazelle* suggested this was merely a pale mixed cup such as might be served at the vicarage garden party, my second convinced me it was an authentic wine. Not everyone's wine perhaps, not one that "travels well" in the reviewing, but with a bouquet of its own and more body than you might suspect from its lightness.

Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society, St. Hilda's, Oxford University, 1 September, 2001

Moyer Bell: the newest Pym publisher

In her literary lifetime, Barbara Pym had several publishers, many of whom caused her great frustration, especially during the "Wilderness Years." Now, more than twenty years after her death, a very small publishing house in a very small American state is the only company reprinting Pym novels.

Moyer Bell of Wickford, Rhode Island, began reprinting the novels in 1999. *Some Tame Gazelle, A Few Green Leaves, Jane and Prudence* and *Crampton Hodnet* are now available as high-quality paperbacks with very attractive covers reminiscent of the dust-jackets on Dutton editions. *The Sweet Dove Died* was scheduled for publication in the fall of 2001 when tragedy struck the company. Jennifer Moyer, co-founder of the publishing company with her husband Britt Bell, died of breast cancer on 10 June, 2001, at the age of 52. She was a poet and the chairwoman of the Potter Hill School in Rhode Island. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin, Jennifer earned a master's degree in creative writing from the University of Illinois at Chicago. The Barbara Pym Society extends its condolences to the family of Jennifer Moyer.

Following Jennifer's death, Moyer Bell's operations virtually ground to a halt. Only recently has Britt Bell returned to head the company, and we spoke by telephone in October. *Crampton Hodnet* and *Some Tame Gazelle,* he said, are now available through Moyer Bell. *A Few Green Leaves* and *Jane and Prudence* are out of stock at Moyer Bell and will be reprinted in 2002 (*AFGL* and other titles are available online at Amazon and Barnes and Noble). Also scheduled for 2002 are *No Fond Return of Love* and the delayed *The Sweet Dove Died. A Very Private Eye* and the remaining novels will be published in the future, with the exception of *Quartet in Autumn* and *Excellent Women* for which North American rights are unavailable. Unfortunately for our Pym Society members in the U.K. and Europe, Moyer Bell editions cannot be sold directly outside North America, but they may be ordered on the Internet.

Asked about the Moyer Bell connection with Barbara Pym, Britt Bell replied, "Well, I had read her, Jennifer read her, and we both enjoyed her. We found out that she was out of print and asked about the rights." To their surprise, they were able to acquire most North American rights and in 1999 began republishing the Pym novels.

Moyer Bell was established in 1984 to publish art, reference and literary books, and in 1990 the company founded Asphodel Press, a nonprofit organization that publishes poetry, essays and translations. Moyer Bell also publishes the novels of Angela Thirkell, Barbara Pym's wartime contemporary, which has prompted an enthusiastic revival of interest in Thirkell's novels of English village life.

Moyer Bell's continuing commitment to Barbara Pym suggests that a steady stream of books will be available to the increasing number of schools and universities now teaching Pym. This is good news as well for the many devoted Pym readers who tend to collect all editions of their favourite writer. We congratulate Moyer Bell for its vision in recognizing the enduring literary legacy of Barbara Pym.

Ellen J. Miller

Ordering information:

The Moyer Bell Web site is at:

www.moyerbell.com

Their address is:

54 Phillips Street, Wickford
Rhode Island 02852-5126

Phones: 401-294-0106 (office)
888-789-1945 (orders toll-free)
401-294-1076 (fax)

E-mail: info@moyerbell.com

Several Barbara Pym novels are currently available at Amazon:

www.amazon.com

and Barnes and Noble:
www.barnesnoble.com.

Internet auction sites, such as

www.ebay.com
usually have many Pym books for sale.

The secret life of Archdeacon Hoccleve: or, was Belinda right after all?

Nicholas Bennett

One of the most delicious moments in the life of every hostess comes when her guests finally leave Such a moment occurs in the life of Belinda Bede at the close of the first chapter of *Some Tame Gazelle*. Her sister Harriet is bidding good-night to the curate. Belinda, relieved to have the house free of guests once more:

> took the parish magazine to read in bed. There was a nice new serial in it ... and of course the Archdeacon's letter was always worth a second reading. [STG 18.]

The reader of the novel is already familiar with the contents of the Archdeacon's letter and may be forgiven for wondering what exactly made it worth a second reading. For it:

> had a peevish and condescending tone that a stranger might have thought not quite the thing for an archdeacon...
>
> 'The Reverend Edgar Donne will be with us by the time you read these words', he wrote. 'Nobody will be more glad to welcome him than I myself, for whom these last few weeks have been more trying than any of you can possibly imagine. Without a curate it has been impossible for me to take the holiday I so badly need and I have been forced to cancel some of the services because I have not felt equal to taking them...' [STG 8-9.]

We are thus introduced straight away to one of the Archdeacon's constant complaints. He is overworked, he is exhausted, he needs a holiday. His regular protests of overwork form a common theme throughout the novel. No-one is allowed to forget how busy he is, especially not his wife Agatha, and even visitors, Dr Parnell and Mr Mold.

> 'Sunday is always a heavy day for me,' said the Archdeacon, 'and this Sunday will be particularly so. I intend to preach myself both morning and evening.
>
> 'But I take it you will accept Belinda's invitation...'
>
> 'I shall come if I possibly can,' said the Archdeacon, passing his hand over his eyes with a gesture of weariness, 'but it may be that I shall be completely exhausted by the evening.' [STG, 98.]

Indeed, when Sunday evening comes:

> The Archdeacon advanced towards an armchair by the fire and sank down into it rather dramatically, as if exhausted. [STG, 116.]

Nicholas Bennett

Later in the novel, when Agatha returns from Karlsbad, Belinda is loyal as ever in the Archdeacon's support.

> 'I think he's quite well really,' said Belinda. 'A little tired, perhaps, but then he's had so much to do while you've been away.'
>
> The Archdeacon was unable to resist joining in this interesting conversation ... to remark that he was really quite exhausted and did not know how he was going to get through the rest of the winter.

At the Bede sisters' supper party, Harriet expresses her opinion bluntly:

> [The Archdeacon] remarked that he had thought of visiting Italy in the spring, but that of course it was almost impossible for him to take a holiday however much he might need it.
>
> Oh, but I don't see why you shouldn't,' said Harriet. 'It isn't as if you had a frightful lot to do.'

One explanation as to why the Archdeacon finds life so difficult is simply that he doesn't get up early enough in the morning. When he finally does appear on the lawn:

> [He] smiled with an affectation of weariness and then sighed. 'Ah, there is so much to be done before this afternoon. I haven't been able to sleep for thinking about it. Nobody can possibly know how much I have to do,' he went on, with another meaning glance at Agatha. [STG, 84.]

The contradiction between, on the one hand, the Archdeacon's view of himself as overworked and exhausted, and on the other, the popular opinion that he is lazy and idle, is a source of much humour in *Some Tame Gazelle*. It is funny, at least in part, because many people find no small element of truth in this picture of the clergy. They find it hard to believe that the clergy can find enough to do.

This rich vein of comedy is common to much of Barbara Pym's early writing. In *Civil to Strangers*, written just after *Some Tame Gazelle* but not published until after the author's death, the Rector of Up Callow, Rockingham Wilmot, shows the familiar clerical trait:

> 'I hear that a foreigner is coming to live at Holmwood', Mrs Wilmot announced to her husband at breakfast one morning.
>
> The rector put down his paper. 'We shall see all in good time,' he said. 'In the meantime there are better things to do than gossip.' And he went away to his study to make a list of the village's cricket fixtures for the season. [CTS, 50.]

In the slightly later *Home Front Novel*, Canon Palfrey and his curate, Michael Randolph, are discussing the likely effects of the outbreak of war in September 1939:

> 'Not many people in church today', [said] Canon Palfrey ... after the service. 'I suppose it will be different later on.'
>
> 'Yes, people will come now,' [replied the curate]. 'And there will be all the evacuees. There will be great opportunities in this war...'
>
> 'Opportunities?' Canon Palfrey turned over this rather novel aspect of the situation. 'Yes, I suppose there will be. Sunday schools and all that sort of thing.' He liked a comfortable Sunday afternoon, with a good sleep. He was not sure that he really welcomed these opportunities. [HFN, 254.]

Belinda Bede, however, despite occasional moments of doubt, remains amazingly loyal to Archdeacon Hoccleve. So when Dr Parnell makes another caustic revelation about the way Henry spends his time, Belinda springs to his defence.

> 'Playing Patience is a very intelligent relaxation,' said Belinda. 'You don't realize how hard Henry works. I mean,' she added obscurely, 'there are things to do in a country parish that people don't know about unless they live in one. Your work in the Library has its fixed hours, but a clergyman is at everybody's beck and call.' [STG, 98-99.]

Is this just a case of love being blind? Has Belinda, who has loved the archdeacon faithfully for thirty years, become oblivious to his evident failings? Or does the answer lie deeper than this? We are now going to consider a startling hypothesis: that Belinda does know something that we don't about the Archdeacon. Did he really work very hard after all?

Let us take a look at the Archdeacon's parochial duties. What were all these "things to do in a country parish that people don't know about"? We know that there was a Daily Celebration but we are also told that the responsibility for this was delegated to the curate. Sunday services comprised Mattins and Evensong, with presumably at least one celebration of Holy Communion. The Christmas Day programme involved two early Celebrations, Mattins, a later Celebration, and no doubt Evensong in the afternoon. Belinda reminds us of the importance the Archdeacon attached to Sunday worship:

> 'Henry is very particular about the observance of Sunday,' Belinda went on. 'I'm sure he wouldn't like anyone staying at the vicarage not to attend Divine Service.'

Then there was preaching. Sermons were delivered on Sundays at both Mattins and Evensong. (Not everyone, however, appreciated the Archdeacon's style of preaching.)

Another parochial responsibility for the Archdeacon was the visiting of his flock. Harriet, carrying jelly to the curate, meets the Archdeacon on his rounds:

> [He] had been visiting a rich parishioner, who was thought to be dying. ... He had also taken the opportunity of visiting the workhouse that afternoon and was altogether in a pleasant state of melancholy. [STG, 54.]

Apart from the occupants of the workhouse, who were after all a captive audience, the Archdeacon confined his visiting to the rich – to the dying parishioner and, later in the novel, to Count Bianco when he is laid up with gout. Perhaps his real interest in his flock lay in fund-raising. We find him at the garden party "wondering whether Lady Clara would give some definite contribution to the church-roof fund" and accompanying her progress around the stalls with "a particularly ingratiating smile on his face".

Try as we may, we cannot award the Archdeacon very high marks as a parish priest. So are we to conclude that Belinda's high opinion of his abilities is simply the consequence of her long-continuing devotion to her "tame gazelle"?

But is there not something we have forgotten in our survey? Henry Hoccleve, as a result we are told of the scheming of his wife, the ever-efficient Agatha, has been made an *Archdeacon*. What does an Archdeacon do?

Here, we might argue, is the other side of the Archdeacon's life, the area that no-one in the novel – not even Belinda – speaks about. Here is the sphere of activity that would explain why he is always saying how overworked he is, how exhausted he is, and how much he needs a holiday. Is this the missing clue to the character of Henry Hoccleve, the secret of why Belinda has loved so faithfully and so long such an apparently unattractive man?

To those steeped in English literature, the title of archdeacon has an inevitably worldly ring to it, conjuring up visions of Trollope's Theophilus Grantly, or (perhaps less well-known today) the extraordinary Archdeacon Brandon of Hugh Walpole's novel, *The Cathedral*. The ancient title of the archdeacon was '*oculus episcopi*', the bishop's eye. Within the boundaries of his area of the diocese – his archdeaconry – it was his duty to keep a watchful eye on anything that needed correction or reform.

It was perhaps his overriding concern with practical matters – things of the world rather than things of the spirit – that gave archdeacons their air of worldliness. Medieval archdeacons had an unsavoury reputation for money-making. Not only did they collect fees in the course of their regular parochial visitations, but the courts that they held, to try matrimonial, testamentary and other cases, brought in further large sums. Indeed, it has been said of medieval archdeacons that 'There was no ecclesiastical office in which a man was more able to make money or was less hampered by purely spiritual considerations'.

It comes as little surprise, therefore, to read Langland's ironic comment in *Piers Plowman*: 'Let archdeacons be saddled with silver, so that they will connive at such sins as adultery, divorce or secret usury'. The way in which archdeacons and their officials extorted money from their people is summed up in one succinct and memorable sentence by Chaucer's Summoner (himself a minor official in the retinue of an archdeacon): ' "Purs is the erchedecknes helle," saide he.' Indeed, in the twelfth century a king's clerk named Nicholas de Sigillo expressed the doubt whether it were possible for an archdeacon to achieve salvation. It was ironic that subsequently the Bishop of Lincoln appointed Nicholas as the Archdeacon of Huntingdon. The great scholar John of Salisbury wrote to Nicholas an affectionate, teasing letter:

> I seem to remember that there was a race of men known in the Church of God by the title archdeacons for whom you used to lament... that every road to salvation was closed. They love gifts, you used to say, and follow after rewards. They are inclined to outrage, rejoice in false accusation, turn the sins of the people into food and drink... Your friends, and all good men, must thank God and the Bishop of Lincoln, who have opened your eyes and revealed to you a path by which this race of men can... attain salvation... [*Letters of John of Salisbury* ii, 24-5.]

A fourteenth-century Archdeacon of Leicester, Master William Doune, who died during the second visitation of the Black Death in 1361, repented of his extortionate ways. In his will he prayed for forgiveness for any sums taken 'contrary to justice or good conscience' and asked his executors to make restitution of all such sums extorted and received unlawfully:

> [For] I now bitterly consider in myself that many who are in authority do bear themselves very ill with those that are set under them, yea, they do slaughter them, and of the number of these men I have been, and am one – God in his unspeakable pity have mercy upon me!

Rather surprisingly, in view of all this, archdeacons survived the Reformation, and their annual round of visitations continued. Every year, the clergy and churchwardens were summoned to one of the principal churches in the district. Here they would take part in a service, and listen to a sermon. After this, the Archdeacon would deliver his Charge, an exhortation on topical and local themes to which he wished to draw their attention.

Then the churchwardens would come forward, bringing their presentments, or written statements of matters needing correction. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these might include the condition of the parish church – a leaking roof, broken windows, or cattle getting into the churchyard. The conduct of the vicar might be commented upon, particularly if he were a frequent absentee, or had introduced new-fangled liturgical practices. Finally, the behaviour of the parishioners themselves came under scrutiny. The inevitable cases of sexual immorality were brought before the visitation, but offences against the due observance of the Sabbath might also be reported – such as carting hay, playing dice, haunting the alehouse or even just sleeping during the time of divine service.

The visitation concluded with a dinner, as William Cole, the Vicar of Bletchley, noted in his diary on 17 June 1766:

> Windy, cold and rainy. I went to our new Archdeacon's Visitation at Newport Pagnell... Travel on my Dun Horse... Mr Tanqueray, Rector of Bow Brickhill, preached the sermon before the Archdeacon, who gave a Charge. The most numerous Appearance of Clergy that I ever remember: 44 dined with the Archdeacon, & what is extraordinary, not one smoaked Tobacco.

By this date, the work of an archdeacon had become increasingly formal. Churchwardens were even issued with forms for their presentations, on which had been printed beforehand the words *Omnia Bene* (all is well). But during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a change came about. Under the influence of the Evangelical Revival and the contemporary High Church Movement, the Church of England became serious. Reform was in the air. And at a local level, that reform would need to be led by the archdeacons.

These reforming archdeacons reintroduced the practice of parochial visitation, the visiting of each parish in turn, inspecting the church, ordering repairs, interrogating clergy and churchwardens about the provision of services, the state of local schools, the condition of the parsonage house and the activities of any dissenters in the parish.

The path of the reformer is not always a smooth one, however, and individual parish clergy could well prove obdurate. George Wilkins, who was appointed Archdeacon of Nottingham in 1832, found this out to his cost when he attempted to put into effect a ruling that there should be in every parish church two services each Sunday – one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Not a lot to ask, you might think. One incumbent who did not agree was the Reverend Samuel Vere Dashwood, the 'squarson' of Stanford on Soar. Dashwood was not only the patron of the benefice (and as such had presented himself to the living), he also owned the entire parish and resided in the hall. His attitude to the Archdeacon was one of total non-cooperation: he refused to answer any enquiries, at archidiaconal visitations he was conspicuous by his absence, and in general he displayed what Wilkins described as an "unbecoming tone and temper in and out of church."

Then there was the Vicar of Worksop, the Reverend Thomas Stacye, a man who had already held the living for forty years and who was rumoured to be 85 years old. Despite his age the Vicar was, in Wilkins' words, "a person of extraordinary bodily activity who bids fair to retain his strength for years to come." He also enjoyed the respect and goodwill of his parishioners. Nevertheless, he was steadily emptying his church and driving his flock away into the bosom of Dissent. Why? The problem seems to have lain in his obstinate determination not to let his physical disabilities prevent him from attempting to carry out his spiritual duties. For although (as we have said) physically fit, the Vicar it seems had scarcely a tooth left in his mouth, and this presented a serious obstacle to his effectiveness as a preacher. The Archdeacon watched with horror:

> Mr Stayce, with the view of giving utterance to his words, previously to speaking puts two or three pieces of wood into his mouth, without which, I am informed, he could not be understood at all. After he has attempted to speak, these are put into his hands, or handkerchief, until he attempts to utter again. This operation, distressing and disgusting to witness, makes him barely intelligible [even] to those who are near him and have been long acquainted with him. With respect to myself, I am wholly at a loss to comprehend him...

The enthusiasm of the Victorians for the reform of abuses in the Church grew apace, and everywhere archdeacons were to be found involved in the work: curbing pluralities, regulating non-residence, promoting church schools, urging the restoration of old churches and the building of new ones. The fervour of this movement is captured nowhere better than in the novels of Charlotte M. Yonge. With the spread everywhere of what she would describe as 'church feeling', came the growth of those organisations that would help to foster it – diocesan conferences, local committees and missionary societies. The Church of England had acquired a bureaucracy, and its archdeacons were in the thick of it.

So by the 1930s, when Henry Hoccleve (through the scheming, as I have said, of Agatha, that efficient wife and good philologist) became an archdeacon, he was joining a group of extremely busy men. As their workload had grown, so had their numbers. Between the 1830s and the 1930s, the number of archdeacons in England doubled. To find out more about these colleagues of Archdeacon Hoccleve, I did what that indefatigable researcher Dulcie Mainwaring would have done in the circumstances: I looked in *Crockford's Clerical Directory* for 1932. The surprising discovery was that, out of the 74 archdeacons in the province of Canterbury at that date, only 29 were burdened with the additional duties of a parish priest. Another 24 combined the job of archdeacon with that of a residentiary canon or a suffragan bishop, but that still left 21 who were thought to have enough work to do just being an archdeacon. So dear Henry, in having a parish to look after as well as an archdeaconry, might justifiably have considered himself to be among the more hard-pressed of his brethren.

A small number of these archdeacons of 1932 had formerly been bishops of missionary dioceses, giving rise to the tantalising thought of Bishop Grote in retirement becoming an English archdeacon, perhaps in the same diocese as Henry. Let us dwell for a moment on one of these men, the Right Reverend John Edward Hine, sometime Bishop of Zanzibar, and in 1932 a residentiary canon and Archdeacon of Lincoln. The survival of a small group of his letters throws a revealing light on what Henry Hoccleve's archidiaconal labours might have entailed.

It was the formal aspects of his duties as archdeacon that Archdeacon Hine found especially tedious. He disliked diocesan conferences with their big set speeches, and dreaded his annual general visitation. In May 1930, he wrote:

> I go to charge the faithful at Grantham on Saturday... I cordially detest these opportunities and heartily pity the unfortunate clergy and laity who have to come to listen to me. As usual when I contemplate the subject matter of a 'charge' my mind seems utterly void and my ideas formless – then little by little one thing and another crops up and I find myself in the end writing pages... surveying the world and the Church from China to Peru and not knowing where to stop. However the weather is getting warm, and the church will be warmer – and all the country clergy can take half an hour's nap: and only wake up when the archidiaconal voice suddenly ceases.

The hectic activity involved in these annual progresses through his archdeaconry can be gauged from the programme sketched out in a letter written in April of the following year:

> Wednesday to Boston, Thursday to Spilsby, Friday two visitations in Lincoln, Saturday to Grimsby for Monday and Tuesday; 22nd to Alford, 23rd Grantham, 24th Stamford, ending up May 4th at Sleaford. Oh happy day.

I suspect that Archdeacon Hine was far happier when carrying out his parochial visitations, with the opportunities that they brought for individual contact with clergy and laity, and for the pastoral care that he was so good at providing. But these too involved intense activity, as this letter of October 1931 shows:

> I have been visiting the South Grantham deanery and went to all the churches... I was struck by the large quantity of fine altar plate... You would not expect a little chapel like Humby to have such

magnificent chalices and patens... Boothby Pagnell has... some very valuable vestments: a Spanish cope of 17th cent. and other precious gifts with which the faithful have endowed that little parish of under 100 people. One poor man [Revd] J. E. Walker at Braceby was the only case of evident poverty that I met. He has wife, son at school and 2 other younger children – and not much over £200 a year net to live on. He always looks starved. They say he does not go out of the parish, nor does his wife – to RD meetings or things of that kind. I expect clothes may be the reason. [His] 2 churches (Braceby and Sapperton) were not well kept and the churchyards a wilderness of nettles and rubbish. Life must be a hard struggle there. Poor old Buss at Denton seems now rather past his work. He lives in luxury – just the opposite to Walker – beautiful gardens, etc. all perfectly kept. The only dead parish seemed to be St Anne Grantham. All the clergy regret Warner's departure as RD – and I don't see anyone in the Deanery quite fit to take his place... But why should not North and South Grantham be united under one RD? In these days of cars and motor buses, access is easy to all the villages...

So let us take another look at Henry Hoccleve the archdeacon. We are told on a number of occasions that he liked the sound of his own voice, so the delivery of his archidiaconal charge would not have been the burden that it was to Bishop Hine. On the contrary, it probably gave him immense pleasure to have a captive audience of clergy and laity. What did it matter if his visitation charges, like his sermons, were full of quotations from our greater English poets? Perhaps, like Bishop Hine, he found the diocesan conferences and committees somewhat tedious – we remember that he tended not to get on with members of his own calling – but for the same reason he surely must have derived great satisfaction from his tours of parochial visitation. We can perhaps picture him being driven around his archdeaconry in Palmer's taxi (the stuffing coming out of the seats), visiting churches and vicarages, and delighting to the full in this regular opportunity to criticise and find fault with his clerical neighbours.

I hope that I have shown that archdeacons were not necessarily as worldly as they have sometimes been portrayed. I hope, too, that I may have given you a small glimpse into that secret life of the hard-working Archdeacon Hoccleve, a glimpse that perhaps (just perhaps) shows that – Belinda was right after all!

Abbreviated version of the paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society, St. Hilda's, Oxford University, 1 September, 2001

Prowling for Pyms

Would Barbara be amused at the thought of a Barbara Pym Society member scrutinizing a public library auditorium filled with tables of used books for sale? Would she offer a rueful smile at seeing a Penguin edition of her *A Glass of Blessings* nestled in with the ten-cent romance paperbacks, then rescued by the Pym fan? Would she feel a moment of wistfulness at the rubber-stamped 'withdrawn' on the inside cover? I think she would, as expressed by Wilmet (in *A Glass of Blessings*), in a similar situation. When she and Sybil visit a second-hand bookshop, Wilmet observes 'There's always something sad about publishers' remainders ...'.

It seems that many Pym Society members are also bibliophiles, and many U.S. members are Anglophiles as well. We find our 'R and R' – rest and recreation – on weekend trips to used bookshops, antique shops, flea markets and garage sales. We cannot pass by a Pym book, no matter how worn and well-loved its discoloured turned-down pages or broken spine. (Could the stain be HP or tomato sauce, à la Mervyn's discovery in *An Unsuitable Attachment*?) The urge to Give It a Good Home is intense. Some of us keep a shelf of duplicate books, in preparation for our book discussion group's selecting another Pym for our summertime reading, and knowing that a new B.P. fan will get hooked and want to complete her collection of Pyms.

Would Barbara appreciate our need to search used bookshops where it's best to wear dust-colored clothes and where we may have to climb a tall ladder to the top shelves, digging through double-shelved rows, disturbing cobwebs? We can't miss searching the basement shelves as well, down narrow wooden stairways between white-washed stone walls where we stand on a damp concrete floor, head tilted until we're dizzy, scanning titles. We also identify with Sybil in *A Glass of Blessings*, when, browsing in a second-hand bookshop (chapter 2), she has to hold the books 'some distance away so that she could read the titles'.

Would Barbara understand our profound desire to kneel and kiss the feet of the used bookshop owners whose stock is superbly organized? Despite our frequent cry, 'so many books, so little time', this time-saver sometimes causes us to buy even more books, when we spot an author we didn't intend to pursue.

The English charity and U.S. thrift shops provide a Pymian atmosphere for the book lover. In *A Very Private Eye* we learn that Barbara wrote to Philip Larkin in 1973 that she had walked past a bookshop and 'saw your face looking out from the cover of *All What Jazz*. Next to it were placed some Victorian photographs ... There seemed no reason for the curious juxtaposition'. It is certain that Barbara's eye for detail might note the few rows of paperbacks crowded in among displays of clothing, knick-knacks, plastic dishes and crocheted doillies. Caro, in *An Academic Question*, acknowledges that Dolly keeps 'a sort of second-hand bookshop' with 'a few objects" on a table outside when it was fine' (chapter 1). The bibliophile is not embarrassed to stoop to the floor to peer at titles on the bottom row. I leave the Oxfam sticker in place on the back of my *Civil to Strangers* as a reminder of the bargain price and of a happy day in Cambridge, England.

Did Barbara also leave the price stickers on books which were bought in another country, as fond reminders of memorable holidays? I suspect the pound sign, £, is dear to U.S. Anglophiles, whether it's on a sticker or pencilled in on the back cover. Oh, to be in England on the Charing Cross Road, or that Mecca to book lovers, Hay-on-Wye, just across the border in Wales, where the endurance of even the most fanatic bibliophile is tested.

Unpacking our hoard at home, we have the delicious task of arranging the books. Does Barbara mind our placing her between Austen and Woolf? A row of dark green Viragos is on the shelf above, several orange Penguin Murdochs nearby. Would she find it unbearably twee to have a toy hedgehog residing on the shelf, to mark a place where a book is out temporarily? The Anglophile has heard that Winston Churchill used stuffed animals in this way; she would like to think this gives the idea cachet. Was Barbara slily winking at the reader with the account of Nicholas Cleveland's little soap animals in *Jane and Prudence*?

Let Miss Veitch in *An Academic Question* (chapter 25) speak for us: "I do so love a good book!"

Norma Munson

"The caterpillar in the cauliflower": defining the gentlewoman through *Some Tame Gazelle*

Frauke Lenckos

Some Tame Gazelle is perhaps the funniest and most unusual of the novels written about Oxford and its Old Students in the Thirties. As her diaries tell us, Barbara Pym first thought of the idea for this book in 1933 and began work on it in 1934. She had only recently completed her viva voce exams and returned to Oswestry to see her sister Hilary off to Lady Margaret Hall to study Classics. Thus, the experiences and friendships Barbara Pym had made at Oxford still shone luminously in her memory. And since she was to remain at home with her parents, she allocated some of her time to creating the first draft of a story that was to become one of the few humorous Oxford novels that described the great university from the woman's, or more accurately, the gentlewoman's, perspective.

It is no coincidence that on the opening pages of Some Tame Gazelle, the heroines of the novel, former Oxford students Belinda and Harriet Bede discuss whether their friends are gentlewomen enough to address a meeting of the mother's union. The ensuing discussion reveals that although Barbara Pym's story at first seems removed from the context of contemporary history, it directly reflects the debates and concerns of the day. Thus, the talk during which Belinda and Harriet firmly disqualify their friends Edith Liversidge and Connie Aspinall from the claim to gentle-womanliness reveals Barbara Pym's interest in the woman question, which was being revived in the Thirties due to dire political and economic developments. It also represents her first attempt of many, to enliven the debate about the new woman versus the womanly woman, by presenting an alternative in *the excellent woman*, or *gentlewoman*, whose history and meaning I will try to chart in this paper.

Because *Some Tame Gazelle* is such a humorous work, it is easy to forget the serious historical and personal context in which this fine novel was conceived. Somerville graduate Vera Brittain in her tribute entitled *The Women at Oxford: A Fragment of History* (1960) described the Thirties as a "time of testing." She showed that although women students of Barbara Pym's generation enjoyed more freedom than had those who attended Oxford before feminist tutors under the guidance of Annie Rogers achieved equal rights and degrees in 1920, the university was affected by the Depression and the rise of fascism in Europe. Also, as Vera Brittain's Somerville friend, the writer Winifred Holtby attested in her 1935 novel *South Riding*, many parts of Thirties' society, including members of the university, still objected to the female pursuit of an academic career, in particular in times of grave political and economic instability.

The portrayals of Oxford and its graduates by Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain are corroborated by a classical suspense story that Barbara Pym read just days before she sent the first version of *Some Tame Gazelle* to the binders. Although the book came too late to inspire her at this point in her writing, it might have influenced her later revisions of the novel. As Barbara Pym wrote on 13 November 1935:

> I am reading *Gaudy Night* by Dorothy L. Sayers and enjoying it so much. Pleasure and pain in agreeable mixture. That's what I feel when I think of Oxford and my days at St. Hilda's.

One can understand why this story impressed Barbara Pym at a time when she had just completed the story of a heroine who, like the protagonist of Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night*, looks back with a modicum of delight and regret to her days at Oxford. Similar to the ways in which the events at her college still affect Harriet Vane, so does the social and personal life of Belinda Bede continue to revolve around "the memory of [her] undergraduate days" and the friendships she forged there. Like Harriet, Belinda feels that although she has failed since, the reflected glory of *the university* as well as the sense of "a place achieved, inalienable, worthy of reference" has remained with her throughout her life.

In contrast to Harriet Vane, however, Belinda Bede's feelings of loss are not connected with a youthful decision to leave behind the safe haven of academe, but with the personal betrayal of her lover during student days, Henry Hoccleeve, who married another woman. As a result, Belinda has remained a spinster, a fact that has caused her to feel, for thirty long years, inferior to his wife Agatha, who snatched Henry away from Belinda when they were still at Oxford. Only when Belinda comes to suppose that Agatha achieved this feat by flaunting the rules of propriety and proposing marriage to Henry does she feel a sense of redemption and of self-confidence regained. However, Belinda's burst of superiority proves to be fleeting, since in the world of the Thirties, a bishop's daughter and archdeacon's wife obviously takes precedence over an unattached gentlewoman, as is shown by Agatha's almost insufferable condescension towards Belinda.

Interestingly, Agatha was also more of an intellectual during her university days than was Belinda, having gained a first in English. With less to show for herself both in terms of academic and personal accomplishments, Belinda can compete against Agatha only when it comes to kindness of heart and gentility of manners. These attributes she has in abundance, as she has the ability to be contented "with very little," which the ambitious Agatha and her inclination to scheming for social advancement, does not share. Belinda thus sets herself apart from Agatha in every respect as a gentlewoman. Whereas Agatha displays blatant disregard for womanly decorum, Belinda spends much of her time fretting as to what behaviour is "fitting to her own years and position." While Agatha took a first in English, Belinda insists that she herself read literature merely for the joy it brought her. In contrast to ill-mannered Agatha, who begrudges the money spent on food because she would rather save it for dress creations from the "best houses," Belinda and her sister Harriet are generous and gracious hostesses.

Belinda, who at some point declares that "an English gentlewoman can never come to any harm," thus wears her cloak of timid and old-fashioned respectability like a protective armour against the nastiness of her adversaries. More importantly, she understands her gentle-womanliness as a credo which inspires her to act according to her own personal, almost impossibly high standards. These, in turn, are shown to be quite independent of the fashions of the Thirties as incorporated by the selfish Agatha. They ask of Belinda an ever-present vigilance to her shortcomings and an insistence that she put the welfare of her fellow

human beings first. Thus, Belinda consistently observes and judges herself severely when she falls short of her ideal, and moreover is clear-eyed about the instances when others display similar faults and imperfections.

Belinda's insistence on the importance of behaving like a gentlewoman, and in the manner of Jane Austen's Mr. Knightley, considering others before considering one's self, is the reason why the episode with the caterpillar in the cauliflower is so important to her in *Some Tame Gazelle*. Since she has taken care not to damage Miss Prior's easily affronted social sensibility, Belinda is distressed when she discovers that Miss Prior, whom she regards as "very nearly a gentlewoman" does not care that she has hurt Belinda's feelings by not eating the cauliflower infested with the caterpillar. As Belinda stoutly asserts, a gentlewoman would have had the courage to pretend that she had not seen the animal and gone on eating the dish provided for her, not only because propriety, but because charity and generosity would have demanded it of her.

The caterpillar in the cauliflower thus indicates that the gentlewoman's credo does not promote a sentimental self-indulgence, but a rigorous self-control and a hard-won self-reliance. Being a gentlewoman is tough business, demanding from Belinda that she constantly monitor her thoughts and actions, subjecting them to relentless processes of self-examination. Yet, because of her critical grasp of her less gentle-womanly impulses, Belinda constantly develops and perfects her personality. As a result, she turns herself in the course of the novel that tells her story into a happier, more confident woman than she was at its outset – and without having relinquished her gentility and good breeding.

Contrasted with Belinda who, I would say, comes closest to the ideal of the gentlewoman, *Some Tame Gazelle* presents us with are several, less gentle women. There is first Belinda's sister Harriet, from whom Belinda has much to learn in terms of self-assertion, her friends Edith Liversidge and Connie Aspinall who depend on her, and of course, Agatha, the bishop's daughter who has taken from Belinda the man she has loved all her life. In terms of gentlewomanly accomplishment, none of these ladies qualifies, since Harriet is too quick-tempered and sensuous, Edith uncouth and blunt, Connie uninteresting and pathetic, and Agatha arrogant and ungenerous.

Belinda and Harriet's dismissal of Edith and Connie's claims to gentlewomanliness spells out clearly the subtleties and complexities that show us that being a gentlewoman is a goal almost impossible to achieve. Like Edith, a gentlewoman must come from a fine family, have a good education, have led an interesting life devoted to travel and good works, and above all, she must be unselfish. Unlike Edith, however, she also has to be orderly, well dressed in the legendary good tweeds, and possessed of an elegant turn of phrase.

Edith's relation Connie Aspinall, though, who has good clothes, plays the harp and expresses herself beautifully, may merely be termed a "decayed" gentlewoman, because she has not led a life of distinction, but merely been employed as a companion to a lady-in-waiting. Neither is Agatha, the daughter of a bishop with the benefit of an income and an Oxford education, deemed a commendable choice. Her pushy ways might have brought her both a husband and his promotion to archdeacon, but they hardly make her appear a kind and courteous person. Finally, all four women lack a sense of humour and proportion, the ability to take a step back and to take a good, hard look at themselves and the ludicrousness of their ambitions, as can the seemingly weak, but in truth indomitable Belinda.

It thus seems that no woman can in truth *be* a gentlewoman. Instead, gentlewomanliness is, and remains, a state of perfection to which a woman of good character and inclination may merely aspire. Thus, the pursuit of gentle-womanliness is a life-long passion, which for Belinda begins at Oxford in the Thirties, when her adherence to good manners perhaps caused her to lose her one chance at happiness. However, it still keeps her occupied in the prime of her life. Now, though, it represents more than an observation of the niceties, a moral armour against the temptation to make advances to a married man who, if encouraged, might well oblige her by eloping with her, as her sister Harriet scandalously suggests.

But as Belinda discovers in the course of Agatha's absence, she does not wish for change and prefers that things remain as they are. I would like to suggest that Barbara Pym celebrates Belinda's courageous spirit of resistance, not to change on the whole, but to change for the worse, in *Some Tame Gazelle*. Barbara Pym's gentle choice of a title, so different from Dorothy Sayers' ominous-sounding *Gaudy Night*, indicates her intention to create in this novel a beautiful utopia of an ideal life lived outside the confines of the dire present. In the serenely pastoral vision that ensues, the world that she creates has laid to rest all conflicts of politics and emotions, and its inhabitants look back to their days as Oxford students in varying degrees of nostalgia.

Moreover, in the depiction of the happy home of the Bede sisters, Pym creates a fine example of an ideal community of women. In contrast to the female members of Shrewsbury College (is this perhaps a compliment to St. Hilda's?), Harriet and Belinda live together in goodwill and understanding, without falling out over a matter of belief or over a man. In addition, although they are given ample opportunity to change their lives because of the marriage proposals they receive, they refrain from accepting them because they enjoy each other's company and the home they have made for themselves. Further, Harriet and Belinda extend their courtesy, hospitality and protection to other, less privileged persons, younger men and older women who have fallen on hard times, and keep an open house where friends and neighbours are always assured a kind and generous welcome.

Despite their often light-hearted banters and modest pastimes, the Bede sisters thus live by a strict moral *code of the gentlewoman*. The code of the gentlewoman, I would like to suggest, infuses not only *Some Tame Gazelle*, but much of Barbara Pym's other writings, and forms the serious background of her highly polished, elegant comedies which seem, deceptively, to be taking place entirely on the surface of things. Its conception, I think, dates back both to her years of extensive readings in Victorian literature and to her time at Oxford in the Thirties when she was shown the few, extreme choices university women faced in the wake of their emancipation. Given the exclusive alternatives of becoming either a *new woman* or a *womanly woman*, Barbara Pym, I think, rebelled. She sought and found a compromise that would allow her to remain the complex woman that she was: a gentlewoman. A woman, thus, who loved both learning and life, was enchanted with the past, felt hopeful for the future, remained mindful of old values, yet looked forward to the excitement of tomorrow.

It is perhaps now difficult for us to realize the implications of this word when she first used it in *Some Tame Gazelle*, as it has since gone out of fashion and may now be deemed politically incorrect. However, to Barbara Pym, I think the term conjured up a wealth of positive connotations that we can only understand when we think of its male counterpart, the gentleman. Like its twin, the title of "gentlewoman" once conferred status and respect upon a woman. In particular from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century

when a plethora of conduct books, cookbooks, and educational treatises devoted exclusively to the gentlewoman cemented her position in society and defined her role as a guardian of morality and breeding.

The word was taken from the Italian "mulier generosa", a gentile or generous woman. It came to mean, especially in the time of the extravagant court of the Prince Regent, later George IV, the very opposite of a fine lady who spent all her time on frivolous pursuits and self-indulgences. Whereas a highborn lady might be arrogant, haughty, and utterly useless, a gentlewoman, who was, strictly speaking, below her socially, was open-minded, helpful, and virtuous, spending her time in good works and acts of charity. Her importance for the advancement and wellbeing of society was in particular stressed by one of Barbara Pym's favourite nineteenth-century women writers, Charlotte Yonge, who wrote deeply moral novels which instructed gentlewomen in the fine art of being a useful member of social progress.

We first encounter this juxtaposition of an outmoded aristocracy versus a modern, active gentry in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen where the courageous Lizzy Bennet declares to Lady Catherine Dubourgh: "I am a gentleman's daughter". In the twentieth century, we find it again in the visits Lady Boxe inflicts upon the long-suffering *Provinical Lady*, who is in truth a gentlewoman. And of course, in Barbara Pym's own wonderfully amusing portrayals of many ladies. From the pompous Lady Clara Boulding in *Some Tame Gazelle*, of whom the narrator tells us she considers "attending memorial services in fashionable London churches and opening garden parties and bazaars her chief recreation." to poor, pathetic Lady Beddoes in *Crampton Hodnet*, who is said to have been "nothing at all" before her marriage and still leads a life that has no purpose. (110-18)

In contrast to these ladies, gentlewomen like Belinda and Harriet Bede have a firm grasp on life and a clear understanding of their role in society. Although they might not be endowed with the same degree of social prominence, they form an integral part of the community in which they reside, extending their loving care to their friends, the seemingly endless line of curates that pass through the village, and its less fortunate inhabitants. For this is the contribution that true gentlewomen like Harriet and Belinda make to society, the gift of loving care and painstaking attention that they bestow upon their fellow creatures.

Their attitude to life is further summarized by the phrase "Something to love." As the heroine of Barbara Pym's next published novel, Mildred Lathbury, only jokingly suggests as she surveys the sea of diverse human beings that crowd into a London cafeteria on a dreary workday, "although one wouldn't believe that there could be so many people... yet one must love them all." Belinda and Harriet would readily agree. They find meaning in life not in advancing the cause of the *new woman* versus the *womanly woman*, but in paying heed to all of humanity, in particular to those personalities that get left behind —the ageing, the lonely, and at times, the odd. In this respect, the Bedes reflect the engagement of their creator, who also discovered her calling when she decided to write about unattached and distressed middle and upper class women at a time when the world's attention was focused on the *new* and often the *working class woman*.

History books like *The English Gentlewoman*, written in 1987 by Flora Fraser, illustrate that gentlewomen, in particular governesses, companions, and teachers in the first part of the twentieth century, subsisted on often limited means and lived lives of silent despair. Yet, the majority of books authored by and about women in the Thirties paid scant attention to the middle-class, middle-aged spinsters of the era, and if so, often made them objects of ridicule and condescension. This attitude has not changed since the time that Barbara Pym wrote her first book about gentlewomen. Even her attempts have gone unnoticed by some, as is shown in the entry under the heading of "gentlewoman," in *The New Fowler's Modern English Usage*, which says:

> *As late as* 1932 Rosamond Lehmann could still speak of a distressed gentlewoman (meaning 'an impoverished woman of good birth'), but such people are now called distressed gentlefolk. In the complex world of social distinctions, the word gentlewoman is now only rarely called on.

Here, we have sad proof of a book published by Oxford University that ignores not only the plight of gentlewomen, but also the work done by of one of its graduates who, long after 1932, continued to attest to their importance. Barbara Pym mentions gentlewomen not only in *Some Tame Gazelle*, but also in *Excellent Women, A Glass of Blessings, No Fond Return of Love, An Unsuitable Attachment*, and the *Sweet Dove Died*. Nor are her women always shown to be distressed gentlewomen, since both Dulcie Mainwaring and Ianthe Broome are identified as gentlewomen at certain points in her stories, and neither of them is impoverished. Therefore, gentlewomen survive in Barbara Pym's fiction from the Thirties well into the Sixties and Seventies. For although Barbara Pym does not employ this term in her later novels, Miss Foxe, Letty Crowe, Beatrix and Emma Howick could certainly be regarded as forming part of the same social group, and some of them certainly share their Oxford background with the Bede sisters.

It is the passion for classical learning that, in addition to their gentile decorum and decency, further identifies and unites gentlewomen and stresses the affinity between the Bedes, Harriet and Belinda. Like Dorothy Sayers' Harriet Vane, their Oxford studies have endowed the Bedes with an "integrity of mind [that] means more than material gain." While they may not have turned their studies to their financial advantage, the love of literature they have acquired at the university and from their tutors represents a double source of pleasure and solace whose benefits last them a lifetime. As Belinda puts it: "I'm afraid I like what I remember from my student days... I hardly ever read anything new" (207). In these simple words, she pays tribute to the teachers of her old college, indicating that her studies have formed her mind in ways that still resound with her in later life.

Almost all of Pym's heroines were avid readers in their student days, none more so than Belinda. Her knowledge of English literature is shown to be vast and impressive. Instead of boasting of her substantial reading, though, as Henry does, Belinda deprecates it as "some smattering of the culture acquired in her college days". It is this modesty in regard to her erudition and the excellence of recollection that provides another key to the gentle-womanly education Belinda received at Oxford. For *Some Tame Gazelle* indicates beyond the shadow of a doubt that quoting in public and the open display of an Oxford education outside the confines of one's college and in mixed company are activities from which a gentlewoman refrains. Although Belinda constantly thinks about literature, pondering in secret those quotations that she might use if the occasion arises, or searching in her memory for the source of a literary allusion, she rarely speaks about or cites books.

By contrast, her adored Henry bores congregations and friends almost to tears by reading and reciting poetry and prose in his sermons and conversations. At a dinner given by the Bede sisters, the archdeacon and other male guests engage in what can only be termed a contest of literary recall. In addition, the Count, Henry, and Belinda's suitor Bishop Grote court the women they admire with literary allusions, with decidedly mixed results. Thus, it is the bishop who is to blame for

one of the few occasions in her life when Belinda forgets her manners, and it is hard to say whether it is the pompous style of his proposal or his faulty knowledge of English Literature that alienates her. After shocking her with his quotation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, he baffles her even more with his vague reference to Byron. Belinda considers the mention of the Romantic poet's name so unsuitable that she temporarily forgets her ladylike reserve and eagerly inquires, "Do tell me. What *did* Lord Byron say?"

Similarly, the classical quotations that flit through Harriet's mind often allude to scandalous, even passionate attachments, as for example Dido's love for Aeneas or Potiphar's attraction to Joseph. However, her daring remains firmly situated in the realm of classical allusions, and neither her fleeting interest in Bishop Grote nor Mr. Mould can tempt Harriet away from the home she has made with Belinda. Thus, while Harriet is a more womanly woman than is Belinda, who is more of a bluestocking, she, too, adheres to her strict code of behavior. Like Belinda, she refuses to relinquish her independence or to compromise her high standards of suitability. She, too, would rather read about unsuitable attachments, in the fourth book of Virgil, or even in Catullus, or the less highbrow magazine *The Gentlewoman*, than face the much less pleasing reality of the ungentlemanly Mr. Mold or the fish-like Bishop Grote.

Literature thus comprises both a source of solace for Barbara Pym's heroines and an integral part of their identity as gentlewomen. This is especially true of Belinda and Harriet Bede. Since they acquired their liking for books, as well as their awareness of being educated women at Oxford in the Thirties, this particular time and place must have been of vital importance to them in the education of their minds, hearts, and manners. The fruits of Barbara Pym's reading and the novels and poems she studied at St. Hilda's in the Thirties thus came to bear in the depictions of her excellent and gentle women who depend upon literature, rather than the fashions of the day, for their moral and spiritual edification.

Given the immense and upsetting changes taking place in the Thirties, in Oxford, in England, and in the world at large, it makes good sense that university women did not rely for guidance on the conflicting messages of fashionable political teachings prevalent at the time. It was only natural that they instead looked for more tried and tested texts and truths, and found them in their university-taught literature, their beloved poets and writers, and the time-honored ethics and values these espoused. As Dorothy Sayers has one of her speakers say in *Gaudy Night*:

> Oxford has been called the home of lost causes: if the love of learning for its own sake is a lost cause everywhere else in the world, let us see to it that here at least, it finds its abiding home.

The same creed, though put less dramatically, inspired Barbara Pym. The first draft of *Some Tame Gazelle*, and the notes that accompany it, which can be studied at the Bodleian, indicate that perhaps the majority of the 45,000 words that were cut from the text when Barbara Pym prepared the novel for publication in 1949 were quotations. While her post-war optimism allowed her to dispense with the crutch of literary references, it seemed her pre-war, younger self needed the inspiration of writers who went before her at Oxford to take her first, hesitant steps.

Barbara Pym's years of study at Oxford, so her journals and letters demonstrate, formed her character and her skill as a writer in even more important ways than perhaps did her childhood years and the war. She emerged from them an educated person, a budding author, and a mature woman who had experienced betrayal and loss, and was about to transform these unhappy experiences into a literary triumph with the talents she had honed at university. Oxford had put Barbara Pym to the test and set her on a course that she would follow the rest of her life. There would perhaps have been no *Some Tame Gazelle*, at least not in the form we know and love, had Barbara Pym not attended Oxford, and worse, there might not have been a novelist named Barbara Pym to celebrate.

Barbara Pym is important to us because she has portrayed us as not as we are, but as we wish to be: excellent women, gentlewomen, who strive for perfection, but all too often fail. But even as we fail, we know her novels are there for us. For in contrast to other writers, Barbara Pym teaches us not the importance of serious self-concern, an inborn, social dominance, but the need to find enough confidence and self-reliance to laugh, or at least smile, at our limitations. That does not mean we are relieved from the social contract that binds us all to trust in human goodness, kindness and the importance of learning. But it means that we can be human, even as we strive to emulate the fine example that she sets us. For this, I think, we owe her a debt of gratitude.

Paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society, St. Hilda's, Oxford University, 1 September, 2001

Imaginary conversations: 1

Who are the speakers in the following simulated conversation? Answers are given at foot of this column.

(1) "I'm longing to see what you've brought to wear."
(2) "It seems a pity that on the few occasions when men can wear flowers they have to be so uninteresting. Think how well a spray of orchids would look."
(3) "Perhaps someone reading Tennyson would prefer purple?"
(4) "I love those dark purply ones ... Purple's rather a sad colour, isn't it?"
(5) "It's lovely."
(6) "I'll wear the blue velvet tonight ..."
(7) "Mother was saying that my blue is so shabby that I must get something else."
(8) "She's having a dress made at Marshall's – embossed chenille velvet – though goodness knows what use that will be in the tropics?"
(9) "Of course you wouldn't see that sort of thing in France."
(10) "No, I suppose not. Oh! Let's have a cup of tea!"
(11) "Yes, that would be nice."
(12) "No. Ovaltine for me, thanks."

N. K. M.

A. L. S.

The 2002 AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies will be hosted by the Arnold Bennett Society at Burselm on Saturday, 27 April.

Answers to imaginary conversation:

(1) Rowena in *A Glass of Blessings*, chapter 3
(2) Digby in *Less Than Angels*, chapter 14
(3) Stranger (clergyman) in *The Sweet Dove Died*, chapter 21
(4) Keith in *A Glass of Blessings*, chapter 19
(5) James in *The Sweet Dove Died*, chapter 16
(6) Miss Morrow in *Crampton Hodnet*, chapter 5
(7) Mary in *A Glass of Blessings*, chapter 6
(8) Edith in *Some Tame Gazelle*, chapter 22
(9) Daisy in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, chapter 15
(10) Dulcie in *No Fond return of Love*, chapter 18
(11) Mildred in *Excellent Women*, chapter 23
(12) Jane in *Jane and Prudence*, chapter 12

Lorenzo and the Graveyard Poets

Barbara Pym's writing makes much mention of Edward Young and his major poetic product, *Night Thoughts* – which may account for the nickname she bestowed on Henry Harvey at Oxford, "Lorenzo".

Edward Young was born in 1683 at Upham, educated at Winchester, and became a Batchelor of Laws at Oxford in 1714. He was Orator at the foundation ceremony of the Library of All Souls; was granted a Doctorate, and became tutor to Lord Burleigh, elder son of the Earl of Exeter. In 1724 he became a Deacon, and with the patronage of Robert Walpole, received a grant of £200 p.a. from the King. He was presented with the Rectory of Welwyn, Hertfordshire, one of All Souls' best livings, in 1730, where he remained until his death in 1765.

Young loved poetry, especially Milton's, and wrote much himself. He became one of the 'Graveyard Poets', described in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* as '18th-century poets who wrote melancholy, reflective works, often set in graveyards, on the theme of human mortality'. Others of the school were Robert Blair and Thomas Gray – both also much quoted by Pym.

Among Young's major literary productions were *The Last Day*, 1000 lines of heroic couplets on The Last Judgement, and *Paraphrase on Part of the Book of Job*. His tragedy, *Busiris, King of Egypt*, was produced at Drury Lane, proving successful and influential. *The Revenge*, produced in 1721, was also very popular. In 1727 he wrote *Cynthio*, a funeral poem; 1728, a series of seven satires: *Love of Fame, The Universal Passion*. He refused the post of Poet Laureate in 1729 (it went to Colley Cibber). His *Conjectures on Original Composition* of 1759 was regarded as a landmark in European literary criticism. He wrote his final poem in 1762, *Resignation*.

Young's works were published in four volumes in 1757. His poetry won the acclaim of Dr Johnson, who wrote of him in his *Lives of the English Poets*, 'with all his defects, he was a man of genius and a poet'. Thackeray wrote (in *The Four Georges*, 1855) that Young 'discoursed on the splendours of the stars, the glories of Heaven, and utter vanities of this world'. Others thought less highly of his work: according to the *Oxford Literary Guide to the British Isles*, 'The bluestocking Mrs Chapone, who admired the man and his philosophy, wondered how he could have "blundered so egregiously as to imagine himself a poet". George Eliot attacked him in 1857 in *The Westminster Review*: 'Worldliness and other worldliness', calling him 'a cross between a sycophant and a psalmist'.

In 1730 Young married the widowed granddaughter of King Charles II, Lady Elizabeth Lee, who had three children by her first marriage. She died only six years later, in 1736, and her son and his wife died in 1740. Young was seriously ill himself, and with these bereavements came to suffer depression and insomnia. He then wrote *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality*.

The poem consists of nine parts, totalling approximately 9000 lines of blank verse. Part II, *Night the Second*, is *On Time, Death, Friendship;* Part IV is *The Christian Triumph*; V, *The Relapse*. Dr Johnson called *Night Thoughts* 'melancholy and angry'; William Blake provided illustrations for it in 1797. Margaret Drabble describes it in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* as:

> A didactic and reflective poem, a somewhat rambling meditation on life's vicissitudes, death, and immortality, including lines which have become proverbial such as 'Procrastination is the thief of time'. The poet deplores deaths ... loosely identified as [of] his wife, his stepdaughter, and her husband; he also addresses much reproof and exhortation to the worldly and infidel young Lorenzo. Thus a certain narrative and autobiographical interest is added to his evocations of 'delightful gloom' and the 'populous grave'.

The recipient of all the precepts of the poem is '*the worldly and infidel young Lorenzo*'? – Surely this must be why BP chose 'Lorenzo' as her private name for Henry Harvey, especially as we find in *A Very Private Eye*, in a letter to Henry Harvey, August 1936, this:

> I wish I knew something about the modern poets. Nobody will listen to me (except Jock) when I say that I am very fond of Young's Night Thoughts. I wish you would teach me about them and tell me which ones to read and how to understand them.

References to *Night Thoughts* then abound in Pym's early works. In *Civil to Strangers* (written 1936 – chapter 7) Mr Paladin tells Miss Gay, 'I agree with the poet Young, "Darkness has more divinity for me" – don't you find that sublime thoughts come most often with the darkness?'. Then, in 'Gervase and Flora' (1937-8, page 202) Flora thinks:

> All this must surely be a dream and she must really be in the drawing room at the vicarage, listening to the wireless, knitting, cutting out a dress on the floor, reading the new *Vogue*, or even Young's *Night Thoughts*. Lorenzo of the *Night Thoughts* might have looked like Ooli Ruomini-Forstenborg – thin, sharp features and bold green eyes.

Night Thoughts is frequently mentioned in *Some Tame Gazelle*. It is there on the first page:

> a light would shine in [Belinda's] mild greenish eyes ... at the mention of Young's *Night Thoughts*.

The poem is clearly a favourite of Archbishop Hoccleve's, who quotes it at every opportunity he can contrive. In chapter 8, 'in his pulpit voice', he tells Belinda: 'I have lately been reading Young's *Night Thoughts*. There are some magnificent lines in it that I had forgotten'. He quotes five of them, and goes on to pontificate on the quality of Young's theology and poetry. In chapter 10, during a sermon, having quoted six lines from Robert Blair's 'The Grave':

> He seemed to be implying that each person listening to him this morning was little better than the unknown Lorenzo, for whose edification the poem had been written

and goes on to give a reading from Young. In chapter 12, Belinda thinks of the 18th century and 'her favourite, Young'; the Bishop observes in chapter 18, 'What a fine poem Young's *Night Thoughts* is'; and Hoccleve reverts to this favourite theme when presenting Mr Donne and Miss Berridge with their wedding present (chapter 21).

There are later references too. In *Less than Angels* (1955 – chapter 18) Professor Mainwaring comments on a portrait of his ancestor, 'he was addicted to fits of deep melancholy, you know it was a fashionable cult at the end of the 18th century – Who reads those great poets – Wharton, Blair and Young – now?'

Night Thoughts makes its final appearance among the books in Aylwin Forbes' library in *No Fond Return of Love* (1961 – chapter 14). Finding it grouped there with *The Rosciad, The Pleasures of Imagination* and *The Bastard* – all in fact also long 18th-century poems, by Charles Churchill, Mark Akenside and Richard Savage – Mrs Williton assumes they are a salacious collection, and 'turned away, shocked and confused'.

Hazel Bell

Book reviews

Green Leaves commenced publication in 1994. *Ergo*, classic works on Barbara Pym published before that date were not reviewed here on first appearance. We will now provide retrospective reviews of the major three.

Barbara Pym: a reference guide. Dale Salwak. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991. xv, 162 pp. 23 cm. Index. ISBN 0-8161-9076-3

Lists more than 750 samplings of critical opinion of Pym's work, from an anonymous review of *Some Tame Gazelle* in the *Times Literary Supplement* (1950) to the US edition of Hazel Holt's *A Lot to Ask* (1991). Salwak writes in the preface, 'A representative selection of critical comment drawn from newspapers, periodicals, journals, dissertations and books has been compiled ... to reflect the fluctuations of the author's reputation both in Great Britain and the US'. (He described his work in compiling this bibliography in *Green Leaves* vol. 6 no. 2, Nov. 2000.)

The Life and Work of Barbara Pym, edited by Dale Salwak. Macmillan Press; University of Iowa Press, 1987. xv, 210 pp. 23 cm. Bibliog. index. ISBN 0-333-40831-4 (cased): £27.50

An insightful, most enjoyable, appreciative compilation of essays in three sections: as the Preface explains, 'the [four] essays in Part I consider Barbara Pym's life; those [eleven] in Part II evaluate her novels' and those [four] in Part III 'discuss her human and artistic achievement'. The writers are John Bayley ('Where, exactly, is the Pym world?'), Hazel Holt ('The novelist in the field: 1946-74'), Philip Larkin ('The rejection of Barbara Pym'), Robert Liddell ('A success story'), A. L. Rowse ('Miss Pym and Miss Austen'), and 14 more.

Muriel Schulz draws a detailed and fascinating comparison between the novelist's methods and records and those of the anthropologist, both involving research into people. Lotus Snow's 'Literary Allusions in the Novels', of which Hazel Holt wrote (in her obituary of Lotus Snow in *Green Leaves* Nov. 2000), 'it must always be required reading for all Pym scholars', is reprinted here. Snow identifies all the many quotations and allusions in the novels, drawing conclusions as to Pym's 'range of knowledge and her preferences among the English poets and novelists', finding that 'More Victorian than Romantic poets are alluded to in the novels', and 'Pym's characters are not passionate devotees of the novel as they are of poetry'.

The volume has lost none of its validity, or its appeal to Pym devotees, in the fourteen years since its publication.

A Lot to Ask by Hazel Holt. Macmillan, 1990; Dutton, 1991; Cardinal, Sphere Books 1992. xi, 308 pp. Index. ISBN 0-7474-1033-X

Hazel Holt's biography of her colleague and friend, Barbara Pym, is intended to complement *A Very Private Eye*, the volume compiled from Pym's diaries and letters; and, in Holt's own words, 'to put Barbara in her own setting, to define the manners and mores of the social scene around her, to describe her friends and colleagues, and to show how her books were moulded by her life, as well as the other way round'. It succeeds triumphantly, and with insight, in all these aims, presenting us with details of Pym's family and early home life, her first unpublished novel, life at St Hilda's, wartime activities, the WRNS, work at the International Africa Institute, growing old – 'she observed the whole process with delighted irony'–, her final illness and death. Holt also shows us the succession of men Pym loved; tells us of her favourite reading. She identifies the originals of characters and episodes in the novels, describes the gradual selection of their titles, their reception on publication, and their fate after the author's death. The correspondence with Cape over the rejection of *An Unsuitable Attachment* is reproduced. As she explains, Pym had wanted to call *No Fond Return of Love* 'A Thankless Task', quoting from there, 'dedicated to my wife, who had the thankless task of compiling the index'. Charmingly, and fittingly, then, *A Lot to Ask* includes in its acknowledgements:

> I would like to thank Barbara's sister Hilary Walton, without whom this book would not have been possible. She has, of course, been an invaluable source of information and has shown herself to be a true friend by undertaking the thankless task of compiling the index.

Hazel Bell

Pym Gleanings

In books

Four Dreamers and Emily by Stevie Davies, published by St. Martins Press, NY, in 1996 has in its cover blurb. "Barbara Pym meets Alan Partridge in this brilliantly funny, understated story of four wildly dissimilar Wuthering Heights fans."

The Penguin book of 20th-century fashion writing, edited by Judith Watt, published by Viking 1999, 'uses extracts from novels, poems, memoirs and journalism' to 'explore the robust relationship between fashion and literature'. Section 2, 'On the brink of fashion': clothes and sexuality', includes, on pages 61-2, two paragraphs from *A Glass of Blessings*, both describing Piers Longridge's gay young friend Keith: Wilmet's first meeting with him, and his photograph modelling a knitting pattern.

While in *The Perfect Elizabeth: A Tale of Two Sisters* by Libby Schmals (St Martin's Press, 2000), we find on the second page:

> "... all of life's problems can be solved by a hot milky drink."

> My sister is writing her dissertation on nurturing in the English novel. Lately, she has taken to eating only the food in Barbara Pym novels, and she is forever inviting me over for a nice cup of tea or a boiled egg on toast.
>
> "Don't you think all this food is a little bland?" I asked her the other night, over a meatloaf-like thing she insists on calling mince.

The book is reviewed as "An up-to-the-minute comedy of manners in the tradition of Jane Austen, Barbara Pym, and Helen Fielding..." [but aren't they all? – Ed.]

Indexers and Indexes in Fact and Fiction by Hazel Bell (British Library/University of Toronto Press, 2001) includes an account of the lady indexers in *Excellent Women, Jane and Prudence* and *No Fond Return of Love*.

In the press

Jane Gardam includes in her review of Salley Vickers' *Instances of the Number Three* (*The Spectator*, 4 August 2001), a reference to 'the persistent quotation of poetry, which ever since the flat-chested women of Barbara Pym has become now almost a convention in the English middle-class novel of the unfulfilled female'.

Jilly Cooper included in a list of 'My favourite romantic novels' in *The Guardian*. 2001

> *Excellent Women* by Barbara Pym. Another wonderfully funny novel, about the goings-on in a London parish. A handsome naval officer and his feckless, unprincipled wife cause havoc among the flower-arranging ladies and the local vicar.

P. J. Kavanagh, in 'Bywords' in *The Guardian*, 17 August 2001, observes, 'In her journals, Barbara Pym says she taught herself to relish degrees of boredom by regarding them as vintages of good wine, to be rolled round the palate. There is a residue of malice and masochism in that' (by way of contrast to Dr Johnson's attitude to boredom).

In *The Times*, 25 August 2001, Hannah Betts, writing on fashions in women's writing, refers to 'the comfort reading of the last century: E. M. Delafield, Dodie Smith, Elaine Dundy and Barbara Pym'.

Reviewing Philip Larkin's *Further Requirements* in *The Observer* (14 October 2001), Lachlan Mackinnon reports, 'Betjeman, Tennyson, Hardy, Barbara Pym and Ian Fleming earn Larkin's praise'.

All these from book reviews in *The New York Times*:

November 9, 1997, by Christopher Benfey, on *The collected poems of Amy Clampitt* (Alfred A. Knopf):

> The jobs she held in New York – reference librarian for the National Audubon Society, as well as various positions in publishing – make her seem at times like a Barbara Pym heroine, furtively writing poems and ... three unpublished novels at night while filing bird books by day.

June 21, 1998, by Julie Gray, on *The Return Journey* by Maeve Binchy (Delacorte):

> One story begins promisingly enough, reminiscent of Barbara Pym or Anita Brookner: "Miss Vogel was surprised that she had never married. Not so much upset as surprised."

July 25 1999, by William H. Pritchard, on *Essays on Literature and Belief* by James Wood (Random House)

> Generally Wood ... finds little to admire in English fiction of the past 40 years, judging its comedy "too easy, too shallow or too narrowly social." Would he similarly downgrade Anthony Powell, Elizabeth Taylor, Barbara Pym and A. N. Wilson, all of whom, like John Updike, are writers for whom alienation and the surreal hold little charm?

On the radio

The BBC Radio 4 quiz programme, 'Brain of Britain' on 13 August included the question, "Who published books for ten years, then went out of fashion, and was reinstated by an article in the *TLS* with recommendations from Philip Larkin and Lord David Cecil?" The answers suggested were Jean Rhys, Margaret Drabble and —? The final contestant was a clergyman; the quizmaster commented that as the novelist who was the correct answer was much admired by clergymen, he thought perhaps this contestant would know the answer – but he didn't, to the shame of the cloth!

*

Reading programme

The South Dakota Humanities Council, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, bringing together programs that use literature, culture, history and other humanities to examine life's experience for American readers, is featuring Barbara Pym's *Excellent Women* in its Fall 2001 Syllabus. Begun in 1984, the Reading Series is one of the council's most successful programs, offering communities, schools, and colleges throughout the state the opportunity to discuss significant literature. Since the program is entitled "Knowing the World Through Reading," only one semester is dedicated to "The Literature of the British Isles." Thus, the choice of *Excellent Women* is highly significant, as the book will be read as representative of Twentieth-Century British Literary History by thousands of readers. Readers will be helped in their perusal by a study guide written by Dr Frauke Lenckos and by a viewing of Ellen Miller's documentary film about Barbara Pym.

Miss Barbara Pym

If there is a Writer's Heaven
then you must be there
with your Excellent Women in their lisle stockings,
books tucked carefully into the wicker baskets on their bicycles.
If there is a Writer's Heaven
then your nervous clergymen must be there too,
serving tea at the Vicarage after Matins,
housekeepers in plain view for appearance sake.
Is the food the same as what you ate below?
An egg for tea? Some dried-up scraps of cheese and cottage pie?
Bottled Fruit? Plums and sides of bacon?
Do you have sherry and biscuits before dinner, stroll around the garden
afterwards, perhaps?
Are there dressing tables, underclothes,
draining-boards and dripping Laurels?
Are there women with mouse-coloured hair and brown cardigans,
skulking timidly in the background?
Sensible shoes?
Poets to quote?
Are the Misses Aspinall and Liversidge drooping still,
their mackintoshes sopping?
Adverts in *The Church Times*? Slide shows in the Parish Hall?
Miss Trapnell and her maroon felt hats
and Fabian Driver's handkerchiefs e'en necessary there?
Do you go to jumble sales and carry hold-alls in Writer's Heaven?
And when at last you tire for the night,
does the Angel Choir sing Bishop Heber's hymns and the Nunc Dimittis,
as you settle snug beneath a William Morris bedcover?

Judy Pollard Smith, Hamilton, Ontario