ISSN 1360-9920

GREEN LEAVES

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society Vol. 11 No. 2, November 2005

THE BARBARA PYM SOCIETY CONFERENCE 2005

A few lemon leaves: an individual view of the 2005 Conference

held 2-4 September, on the theme of *An Unsuitable Attachment*

Michael Collard dines with Hilary Pym Walton in his garden at Finstock

When I begin my drive up to Oxford for the annual conference, it is always with a keen sense of anticipation. This time round, my eagerness was almost unbounded, since I was looking forward to being part of a unique event - and I was running late! Would I arrive at Blackwell's in time to snap up any of the treasures salvaged from Barn Cottage after Hilary Pym's death? I had no idea what to expect, and I was certainly not disappointed. The goodies laid out so temptingly on the top floor of Blackwell's ranged in price from about £2 to over £1000. How on earth did the Pym sisters cram so many books into such a small house? Even more curiously, how did it come about that there was something for everyone in this bottomless bran-tub? I didn't meet anyone in the course of the weekend who hadn't found a book they really wanted at a price they could afford.

For me, the challenge was to find some evidence that Barbara Pym had ever read the work of Siegfried Sassoon. I speculated on the possibility in an article I wrote for *Green Leaves* a couple of years ago, and now I have confirmed my educated guess. The ideal would have been to find a copy of *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, but the next-best thing was what I actually did find: Sassoon's *Collected Poems*, with Barbara's own "Ex Libris" label inside the front cover. It had been given to her in 1931, by someone named Simon (further detective work is required to discover whether this was a relation or perhaps an early boyfriend).

This was the first time I can recall an *official* event taking place on the Friday evening of conference weekend (oh, please, let's do it again). By the time the sale was over, not only had most of us bought several books, but we had also drunk copious quantities of wine. The result was that we were in good spirits as we took possession of our giant table at Pizza Express, and personally I didn't notice that it took a long time to order and obtain our meal. It was lovely to be able to extend the weekend in the company of long-standing friends.

No, I did *not* have a hangover on Saturday morning. I was out shopping in the city centre by 9am. For one thing, I had forgotten to bring a notebook to jot down notes for my report on the conference. As usual, the covered market attracted me, but for a change I didn't venture into any bookshops - I had already overdosed. So it was back to St Hilda's for morning coffee and the buzz of conversation as new arrivals converged in readiness for the first session. The different accents emphasize that this is a truly international occasion, with regular visitors from the USA, Germany and Austria, not to mention Scotland, Wales and Ireland. In fact, our first three speakers were Eleonore Biber "from the Vienna woods", Orna Raz from Israel and Robin Joyce from Australia, which added to the cosmopolitan atmosphere. Eleonore and Robin are of course old friends from past conferences, but this was the first time for Orna, who impressed us with her learned approach to Pym as she talked about the social context of the West Indian immigrants in *An Unsuitable Attachment*. The idea of Barbara as a serious social commentator, though obvious when one thinks about it, seemed strikingly new, and Orna clearly knew the books in great detail. It is so interesting to discover that someone from a country as different as Israel can find so much in the work of our favourite novelist.

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It was a lucky day for us when Yvonne Cocking met Orna at the Bodleian.

Eleonore Biber dealt with the literary tradition of the Italian journey, a tradition I confess I was barely aware of. Robin Joyce, meanwhile, drew comparisons with modern writers, such as Fay Weldon, in questioning the reasons for publishers' rejections of Barbara Pym's work during the 1960s. Bringing up the rear was Eileen Roberts, the surrogate mother of all Pym Society members (irrespective of age). Eileen used Barbara's own diaries and the comments of her friends to focus on her own "unsuitable" relationships with men such as Henry Harvey and Gordon Glover.

The St Hilda's kitchen staff further transcended national boundaries by producing a special Italian meal on Saturday night, for the annual dinner. It's not often that I've been impressed with the output of my alma mater's dining hall, but this was one of those occasions. The after-dinner speaker, Michael Collard, had come to know Hilary and Barbara as a result of living near them in their retirement village of Finstock. They shared interests such as music, and Michael's descriptions of outings to the pub and other social occasions reminded us strongly of the zestful Hilary we knew. We also had the opportunity to view Michael's personal photo albums and enjoy the informal images of happy times. It was one of those nights when no one wants to leave, and quite a number carried on socialising into the small hours, discussing possible topics for next year's conference. In case you haven't yet heard, the theme chosen by the membership from the alternatives proposed by the committee was "London".

Sunday morning is a time for all kinds of optional activities under the general umbrella of the conference. Being a Presbyterian, this was the first time I had ventured to the morning service at St Cross Church, joining the group traditionally led by Kate Charles. It is indeed a very attractive and interesting medieval building, and we had the added pleasure of a sermon that referred directly to Barbara Pym's work. The Reverend Rowland Meredith admitted that he had been swotting up on the subject, and also let slip the intriguing information that his father had been curate of Oswestry during the 1920s.

Sunday morning's discussion on "unsuitable attachments", chaired by Michael Wilson, Triona Adams and Deirdre Bryan-Brown, attracted lots of contributions, but did not attempt to draw serious conclusions. There seemed to be many new faces present, possibly attracted by the Blackwell's event, and it was wonderful to welcome them into the fold. We had hoped to have time for a "show and tell" session about the treasures from the book sale, but it was not to be. Don't forget that if you want to tell the world about your find, you can still e-mail the information to ellen@ellenmiller.net, and Ellen Miller will add it to the Society website.

Sunday afternoon is always the time for "dramatized readings". In the past we've gone from having professional actors and actresses to having our own members take leading roles, and this year it was the turn of the Guildford School of Acting, courtesy of committee member Bridget Villatoro. The adaptation of *An Unsuitable Attachment* was not without its flaws. Some highly significant scenes were omitted, but the humour was conveyed, if not always understood, by the team of students and former students of GSA. If I were to single out any of the cast for praise, it would be Annabel Field as Penelope and Christopher Hawes as John, both of whom I thought brought out the essential traits of their characters clearly. It was in fact the first time John had appeared to me as a believable character. The talented Amanda Fawsett, besides being the author of the play, also did a creditable job of bringing Ianthe to life in our midst.

And so another annual chapter in the great book of the Pym Society comes to an end. Thankfully, there are many aspects of Barbara's work that remain virtually untouched by our attentions. With fresh faces attending every time, and new angles on the Pym canon being discovered by speakers from all over the world, the future looks very bright, and I confidently expect my next ten years of conference-going to be every bit as enjoyable as the first ten.

Deborah Fisher

Hilary Pym: the wild beast!

This was the startling title of the presentation jointly given by Elizabeth Proud, the first Chairman of the Barbara Pym Society, and Sioned Wiliam, currently Controller of Comedy, ITV, on Sunday 5 June at St Alban's Centre, Holborn. They told us of their memories of Hilary Walton Pym, Barbara's sister, through the years in which they were collaborating on radio dramatizations of Barbara's novels, basing their account on the diaries they kept through the period.

Sioned had found in Pym 'a writer who made me laugh, touched me, wrote of people I felt I knew', and wanted to do a dramatization of one of her novels. She approached Elizabeth, who had already adapted *Cold Comfort Farm* for a radio presentation, and they agreed to produce a radio version of *Crampton Hodnet*. The pilot they made in 1990 was never broadcast, but after their version of *A Glass of Blessings* was heard in March 1991, with a cast including Hannah Gordon, Joanna David and Miriam Margolyes, *Crampton Hodnet* was recast and broadcast in 1992. *Jane and Prudence* followed in 1993, with Julian Glover playing Fabian, the character based on his father Gordon, and Elizabeth Spriggs, Samantha Bond and Penelope Wilton.

This was also the year of St Hilda's' first conference on Barbara Pym, which Sioned and Elizabeth attended and taped, producing a documentary programme, 'A Very Suitable Occasion', the broadcast of which at the end of 1993 resulted in the formation of the Barbara Pym Society.

Hilary Pym and Hazel Holt cooperated fully in the productions, with huge enjoyment. Elizabeth remembered Hilary as 'a spirited, twinkling person having the time of her life', relishing the many occasions she now had to go to, becoming a big celebrity to the BPS. Sioned thought she was 'sometimes overwhelmed by the Oxford meetings, which brought her emotions to the fore, memories of her sister — but gosh, she loved it so!'.

Sioned had tried hard to get dramatizations of Pym's novels onto television, particularly hoping for a sequence consisting of *Jane and Prudence* and *Crampton Hodnet*, but by the mid-1990s it was felt that there was no place for this type of entertainment; not enough interest.

Sioned saw the Pym sisters as having lived a sophisticated life together, never losing the ability for enjoyment; and perhaps having had a full romantic life that we do not know about, which

they preferred merely to recollect. 'Hilary had a racketty time out in Italy — and who is Rocky Napier based on?' Perhaps 'they had a better time together than with men'.

And the strange title of the presentation? Elizabeth had accompanied Hilary to Oswestry when a plaque was installed on the house where the Pym sisters had been brought up. Remembering childhood days there, Hilary herself recounted an anecdote in which 'Barbara tied me into the cot because I was a wild beast'.

Hazel K. Bell

The Barbara Pym Society Archives and Memorabilia

Since taking up the position of Archivist in 2003 I have been given an appreciable amount of material which it seems appropriate that the Society preserve. This includes books (largely about Barbara and her work rather than by her), unpublished papers, reviews of her work and of works about her, and a great deal of other material, some ephemeral, and mostly dating from after the deposit of her papers by Hilary in the Bodleian library. I am in the course of listing these, and I intend to spend some of the coming winter evenings continuing this work. We are indebted to Kathy Ackley who has donated her complete set (six volumes) of *The Barbara Pym Society Newsletter*, a private enterprise publication, the earlier editions of which predated the formation of the Society.

In addition to this written or printed material, there are also works in most of the other modern media: audio tapes (dramatized readings etc.), video tapes (television programmes), a CD (*Dear Miss Pym, Dear Mr. Larkin*; see review below on page 14), and a DVD of Eleonore Biber giving a talk for an American TV station. There is also a large collection of photographs, mainly of those attending conferences, the annotation of which will present a problem as I cannot identify many of them. I shall need some help with this.

All this may be considered an archive as defined, but there are also several items which do not fit this category. Firstly, the table upon which Barbara penned most of her work, and which was subscribed by the membership; we hope that this will be installed, with a suitable plaque, in St Hilda's College Library's new extension, which also includes an up-to-date Archive room where we hope to be allowed to store the material I have described above. Next, a framed embroidery in coloured thread, almost certainly worked by Barbara herself (Hilary did not happily employ a needle), which came from Barn Cottage, very kindly donated by Michael Collard, the sisters' good friend in Finstock; and a pen-and-ink drawing of the cottage and the bottom of the High Street, also framed, which the artist, J. B. Shaw, gave to Hilary, and which now comes to us also through Michael's kindness. It would be nice if these could be hung adove the table.

I did not know the fate of the Barn Cottage books until Michael told us that Blackwell's had bought the whole collection. This was on a day last March when Deirdre and I had lunch with Michael Collard on the occasion of his giving us the picture and the embroidery. After lunch he and I went straight to Blackwell's where I was introduced to David Retter, the Manager of the Second-hand Book Department, and a Finstock resident. David immediately agreed in principle to the sale, and indeed made all the arrangements for that very successful event, which Deborah has described so well in her conference report above .

We were delighted to receive from David Retter, as a gift to the Society, Barbara's own signed copy of *Excerpta e Statutis*, a book which I assume was given to all new undergraduates, laying out the University's requirements as to dress, deportment and behaviour, particularly of women students, as well as examination rules. Some of it is in Latin, which most students at that time would be expected to understand!

At the sale itself I bought a few items on behalf of the Society, the most interesting, perhaps, being the *British Red Cross Society Nursing Manual No. 2*, fifth edition, 1939, bearing Barbara's signature and the date 28th June 1939. In a letter to Henry and Elsie dated 11th May 1939 (printed in *A Very Private Eye*), Barbara, referring to preparations for war, says, "I am going to get a First Aid certificate which ought to be quite useful even if there isn't a war – I am going to classes every week. Fancy me learning how to make splints and bandages! I rather look forward to it." She also learned how to make beds appropriately for patients with all manner of injuries, for at the back of the *Manual* I found two folded sheets of paper with Barbara's written notes on the subject neatly tabulated.

If any member has material of the kind I have described and would like to donate it to the archive I shall be very happy to accept it.

Yvonne Cocking

BPS US local events

Twenty-six BPS members from the Boston area and beyond gathered on a perfect mid-July Sunday afternoon for a garden fête at Tom Sopko's home in Cambridge, Massachusetts (the *other* "other place"). The food and drink were contributed by the guests, who outdid themselves in their efforts to recreate an authentic English tea party. The collation included silver trays filled with cucumber sandwiches, chicken mayonnaise in puff pastry, chocolate-dipped strawberries, assorted biscuits, cakes and scones, and authentic fairy cakes, as well as champagne punch and lemonade. An abundance of floral print summer dresses, several suitable hats, and one fabulous parasol as well as a visit from a neighbour's cat added to the Pymian ambience. A garden shed was available in case Miss Morrow and the Rev'd Mr Latimer might need shelter from the rain, but the fine sunny weather made it quite unnecessary.

Sixteen members of the Boston-area Barbara Pym Society welcomed Kate Charles to an afternoon tea held in her honor at the Inn at Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts on Saturday, 8 October. This was the first stop on her four-week American tour to promote her new book, *Evil Intent*, published in the United States by Poisoned Pen Press. In the evening, Kate read from her book and signed copies at a local bookstore, the Harvard Coop. According to Kate, *Evil Intent* will be published in paperback in the UK in February. Tom Sopko arranged Kate's appearance at the bookstore (and hosted Kate in Cambridge), and Ellen Miller organized the tea.

REPORT OF THE TWELFTH A.G.M. OF THE BARBARA PYM SOCIETY HELD AT ST HILDA'S COLLEGE, OXFORD, ON SATURDAY 3rd SEPTEMBER 2005 AT 11.30 a.m.

Committee members present were: Deirdre Bryan-Brown (Chairman); Eileen Roberts (Membership Secretary); Chris Rutherford (previously Ward; Secretary); Ellen Miller (North American Organizer and Website Co-ordinator); Hazel Bell (Editor, *Green Leaves*); Yvonne Cocking (Archivist); Phil Bacon; Kate Charles (Immediate Past Chairman); Maggie Parsons; Bridget Villatoro; Michael Wilson; Maureen Woolley.

1. Chairman's opening remarks

Deirdre Bryan-Brown thanked everyone for coming and told them of an auction planned for Sunday morning of two first editions of *A Very Private Eye* kindly donated by Jill Stevens.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence and best wishes were received from Gerald Irvine, Stephen and Jean Shell, Moyra Forrest, Elizabeth Mott and Jennifer Poston.

3. Minutes of Previous A.G.M.

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

4. Matters arising from the Minutes

There were no matters arising from last year's Minutes.

5. Financial and Membership report.

a) The Pym Society account as of 2 July 2004 stood at £2,250.00

Income during the year was £3,500.83 and expenditure £2,587.43, leaving a balance of £3163.40 at 1 July 2005

Expenditure included:
Newsletter Nov 2004 £635.00
Newsletter May 2005 £500.00
Directory £478.01
Requiem Mass £567.00
CDs (Larkin/Pym letters) £143.07
Barbara Pym's table cost £150.00

The table appeal raised £424.10: £116.10 from North America and £308 from members in the UK & the rest of the world.

The table is still in store owing to building work, staffing issues and so on in St Hilda's library. We could have a Spring Meeting in Oxford when the table will be in place.

b) *No Soft Incense* has sold 254 copies so far; we need sell 326 to break even.

c) Membership on each side of the Atlantic is just under 300. For convenience, North American subscriptions are banked in the US. The North American account is approximately $2000. Some of the money supports the US conference as the fees do not cover its cost.

d) The Membership Secretary has saved money on postage by taking copies of *Green Leaves* to the US when she visited and posting them there; she asked whether anyone else could do the same. Deirdre expressed thanks to Ellen Miller, the North American organizer, for the excellent running of the US organization.

e) **The Directory**: Members have to sign at the bottom of the membership renewal form if they wish to be included, in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

6. Editor's Report

We can now produce *Green Leaves* in PDF, so it could be printed separately in US and UK, but the costs are complicated. There is a lot of material in hand. The Editor's term of office had ended but Hazel Bell had kindly agreed to produce the November 2005 edition of *Green Leaves*. After that Ellen Miller will take over as Editor, with an editorial sub-committee comprising herself, Hazel Bell and Maureen Woolley with the Membership Secretary and Chairman as *ex officio* members. The Chairman and members warmly thanked Hazel Bell for her contribution as Editor of *Green Leaves*. She would now leave the committee.

7. Elections

Phil Bacon and Maureen Woolley had each completed one term of office; both were eligible for re-election. Rita Phillips nominated Phil and Michael Wilson seconded; Kathy Ackley nominated Maureen and Christine Shuttleworth seconded. Both were elected *nem con.*

Kate Charles had completed her *ex officio* year on the committee as Immediate Past Chairman, and would no longer be on the committee.

8. Any Other Business

a) **The Folio Society** were to publish *Excellent Women* in November, with an introduction by A.N. Wilson.

b) **Archives**: Yvonne Cocking reported that the Society does not own a complete set of Barbara Pym's novels, but we have lots between us so it should not be a problem. Yvonne has a lot of original material including articles, gleanings not in *Green Leaves*, dramatizations, obituaries, memorials, tapes, videos and photographs. She had compiled a list of these which she would leave on the conference-room table for members to consult. Any member of the Society who would like to access the list should contact Yvonne, as should anyone who has material they could add, or sees articles in the press about Barbara Pym. It is hoped that the Society's archives will eventually be deposited in the new St Hilda's College library. Eileen explained that this new library has a climate-controlled archive store, office and reading room.

Bona fide scholars can have access to the **Bodleian Library** with a supporting letter from Eileen Roberts. Hilary Walton's papers have been deposited there but have not been catalogued so they are difficult to use at present.

Eleonore Biber reported that she has a video/DVD of a TV programme broadcast in the US in which she talked about Barbara Pym.

c) Eileen suggested that a **questionnaire** be sent out with the renewal of membership notices to get some information on members' backgrounds with a view to finding speakers, or finding people who could recommend speakers; who might be willing and able to serve on the committee; who might suggest themes for conferences. A previous questionnaire was very successful and many of the ideas in the feedback had been used. Members were asked if they knew of any Pym fans who might be potential speakers, as this had been so successful in the past.

d) Kate Charles invited everyone to join her in attending St Cross Church for Sunday morning worship.

e) Ellen Miller reported on the success of **regional meetings** in America: informal meetings such as tea parties, garden parties, lunches and so on, which continue the relationships among Pym aficionados. Eileen suggested that anyone willing to plan one of these events could contact her or Ellen.

Former Chairman Kate Charles was congratulated on the success of her new book *Evil Intent* which has sold out in hardback. Paperbacks can be ordered from Amazon.co.uk for next February.

The **Pym/Larkin meeting** held in April had been very successful and some Larkin members had subsequently joined the Barbara Pym Society.

The next Conference, the theme of which will be *Pym in London*, will be held at St Hilda's College on 2-3 September 2006.

Christine Rutherford

The Barbara Pym Society 2005-6

Chairman Deirdre Bryan-Brown
Membership Secretary Eileen Roberts
Secretary Chris Rutherford
(formerly Ward)

Committee
Phil Bacon; Maggie Parsons;
Michael Wilson; Maureen Woolley;
Bridget Villatoro (formerly Guymer);
co-opted: Beverly Bell
Yvonne Cocking (**Archivist**)
US Organizer, **Editor** and
Website Coordinator Ellen Miller
email: ellen@ellenmiller.net

Society correspondence and queries to:

The Barbara Pym Society
The Development & Alumnae Office
St Hilda's College
Oxford OX4 1DY
tel. 01865 276867
fax 01865 276820
email: eileen.roberts@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk

Pym website address
www.barbara-pym.org

Barbara Pym and social anthropology

Peter Lloyd

Barbara Pym worked for twenty-eight years – almost her entire working life – at the International African Institute (IAI); throughout this period she edited the Institute's prestigious quarterly journal, *Africa*, scores of scholarly anthropological monographs, and over sixty volumes of the *Ethnographic Survey of Africa*. Few professional anthropologists can have given such scrutiny to so much ethnographic literature. With most of her authors she corresponded; but many would call at the Institute to discuss manuscripts, have a cup of tea and chat. Thus many of the characters who appear and reappear in her novels are anthropologists; but it is only in her fourth novel, *Less Than Angels*, written *c.*1953-54, after seven years at the Institute, that they take the centre stage. As Barbara Pym herself wrote, "It is surely appropriate that anthropologists, who spend their time studying life and behaviour in various societies, should be studied in their turn" (LTA blurb).

The central figure, better developed some say than most of Pym's men, is Tom Mallow, an anthropology graduate student recently returned from his African field work. The theme, in this 'almost-a-love-story', is his relationship with three women: Catherine Oliphant, a slightly older writer of popular fiction who befriended him on a cross-ferry steamer, offered him a bed, and with whom he then lived on his returns to London in an ill-defined relationship; she mothers him but has little empathy for anthropology. Second in order of appearance is Deirdre Swan, a first-year anthropology student who quickly developed an infatuation for Tom; and lastly Elaine, his childhood sweetheart of days long before his commitment to anthropology. Then we have Mark Penfold and Digby Fox, final-year undergraduates, and three older anthropologists who appear repeatedly in the narrative: Alaric Lydgate, Father Gemini and Jean-Pierre le Rossignol. Their interaction mainly takes place within an academic scenario – Professor Felix Mainwaring's Foresight Centre for Anthropological Research with its bevy of lady functionaires, and a domestic scenario – the home of Deirdre's mother and aunt. This is Barbara Pym's field of study.

Today, ethical rules of social science research urge that informants should be shown its results, before publication, for their comment. Sadly, in a most un-Pym like device, Tom was killed in Africa before the novel ends. It has thus fallen to me, rather belatedly, to assess Tom's reaction to his portrayal in the novel.

My qualifications for this task: I am almost of the same age as Tom (26 years in 1953), was an anthropology graduate student doing fieldwork in Nigeria in the early 1950s and shared apparently many of Tom's interests in land tenure, chieftancy, local politics. At Oxford 1945-48, reading Geography, I attended anthropology lectures; during a year at London School of Economics (LSE) before leaving for Nigeria I became close friends with several students of Daryll Forde, Director of the Institute and Professor of Anthropology at University College, students who later arrived in Nigeria. I was never his student, though he did much in later years to help me in my career. I first visited the Institute in its Lower Regent Street home, and subsequently, in the '50s and early '60s during my home leaves, was a fairly frequent visitor to the Fetter Lane office – discussing my own publications, chatting and taking tea.

Furthermore, I grew up in a very church-oriented family – though not quite so High Church as Barbara Pym's; my own faith lapsed in my late teens so that, whilst I could appreciate Pym's world of clergy and excellent women, I could no longer share it.

*

I will comment on Pym's picture of academic life at the Institute and the world of anthropologists – faculty and students. Pym makes no overt classification of her anthropologists – but she does in fact skilfully delineate their differences, and these I shall explore. This will give me the opportunity to contrast her craft as a novelist with that of the social anthropologist. Returning to my main theme, I shall show how the popular image of anthropology in the early 1950s diverged from the reality of the social anthropological milieu experienced in the Institute. I think it was Pym's difficulty in reconciling these that influenced her novel. Whilst I feel, on Tom's behalf, that she has given a very fair and not unflattering picture of him, both he and I are most distressed by the disparaging image of him attributed to Pym by her subsequent commentators.

*

The atmosphere at Professor Mainwaring's research centre portrayed by Pym is so close to my own memories of the Institute that whenever Mainwaring's beard is mentioned, a voice within me expostulates 'but Daryll didn't have a beard!'. So close too is her description of the public lectures. The alternate solidarity between students and their rivalry for awards and patronage is finely drawn. But there is little specifically anthropological here — there were many similar professional bodies in London, and students of all disciplines are alike in the respects noted.

The Institute was founded in 1926 as the International Institute for African Languages and Cultures by senior administrators – Lord Lugard and French counterparts, missionaries, and academics – Westermann, a German linguist. Bronislaw Malinowski, founder of the new social anthropology and professor at the London School of Economics (LSE) quickly lent his support. So in the '30s the Institute was a centre attracting not only academic anthropologists – several of Malinowski's earlier students were funded by it – but also administrators and missionaries, amateur anthropologists of an earlier period guided by the now notorious manual, *Notes and Queries in Anthropology*.

Typical of the former was Alaric Lydgate, a prematurely retired administrative officer who had spent eleven years of his service in the area where Tom Mallow carried out his field work. He came to live next door to Deirdre. From the copious notes collected a few minor publications had resulted; but most lay, unsorted, in his trunks. His feelings of duty to write these up finally cracked with his recognition, prompted perhaps by Catherine, that his material was now obsolete, redundant. Typical too of this period were the missionaries whose faith in proselytising and pastoral work was failing and who turned to linguistic study; however academic their approach, the long-term outcome could be a vernacular translation of the Bible – and this enabled them to remain within their church, free to practise their personal

faith according to conscience. Father Gemini is the exemplar here.

But from the late 1940s these ethnographers, as I shall term them, were being overtaken by the professional social anthropologists, trained by Malinowski himself and by his own students located primarily in the LSE and Oxford.

Malinowski's contributions lay both in his concept of anthropological practice – extensive fieldwork rather than flying visits, and theory – the functional interdependence of all aspects of culture.

Following his example, his students spent long periods – then often one and a half to two years – in the field, with hopes for return visits. They lived in the villages with their informants; (a biographical film of Malinowski is entitled *Off the Verandah*). They learned the local language and not only observed but participated in the daily lives of 'their people'. They tried to grasp the view of the world experienced by their informants as well as offering their own explanations.

Fieldwork of this kind in an alien, exotic culture was a traumatic experience – an initiation or, as some might add, the equivalent to undergoing psychoanalysis. One was not a 'proper' anthropologist without this – fieldwork in one's own culture would not do. The returning fieldworkers were hailed in their departments as heroes; they regaled their juniors with descriptions of 'their people – the most wonderful that you could hope for' and of their excellent rapport with them – for such was necessary to validate their data. Mark and Digby revered Tom; Deirdre was infatuated.

In focussing on the interdependence of the parts of a society, social anthropologists studied a process – how did societies reproduce themselves, or change – and this posed a problem to be studied. They were no longer 'butterfly collectors' of discrete cultural traits studied for their own sake or because they might be forgotten; nor, *pace* Professor Mainwaring (of the generation trained at the turn of the century) was the collection of data intended for the use of missionaries and government officials to aid them in their work (LTA p15).

*

Between these social anthropologists and the older ethnographers there was inevitable tension, manifest in *Less Than Angels* in the altercation over the garden fence between Alaric Lydgate and Tom Mallow. The ethnographers accused the social anthropologists of spending much less time in the field than they had, and of therefore knowing less. In these battles Barbara Pym is even-handed. In the face of Tom's thesis, Alaric burns his notes in a Guy Fawkes bonfire; but Father Gemini persuades the benefactress Minnie Foresight to switch her funds from Mainwaring's fieldwork fellowship to his own project on the origins of the word *hyaena*. In the unperformed radio play, "Parrot's Eggs", it is Canon Song who rightly understands the significance of the gift, not the middle-aged woman social anthropologist Miss Jellink; but their rivalry ends in marriage. Honours even!

*

Barbara Pym herself drew attention to the similarity between her own craft as novelist and that of the social anthropologist – though there are differences too. Both participate in the arenas they describe – she was an active member of her church. Both carry, figuratively, their little notebooks, but whilst she notes only the comic or bizarre, the social anthropologist – impossibly obliged to record everything – nevertheless notes the mundane, for one never knows when it might prove significant. Pym the novelist catches the nuances which so vividly characterise a relationship; the social anthropologist is building the bare bones, the basic rules of the structure.

Both emphasise 'detachment', but they imply different things. The social anthropologists contrast the world view of informants with their own external appraisal. They must behave even-handedly towards all sections of the community, not being partisan towards any one faction. In the early '50s they displayed a range of attitudes towards ongoing social change. Some saw it proper to remain in their academic ivory towers, doing nothing to change the society studied; others, I suspect the majority, whilst not actively intervening in the process of change, hoped at least that their studies might prove useful to their informants. Tom certainly felt this, as he expressed in his crisis of conscience just before completing his thesis (LTA p 105).

For Barbara Pym, however, detachment is being 'the fly on the wall'– not the participant observation of the social anthropologist. Her 'excellent women'are always peeping behind curtains, from upstairs windows; she herself eavesdrops in cafés, on the buses. This derives not from the novelist's craft but from her own personality. Though quite active in her church and community, she was never involved in movements, protests, major projects – and neither are her characters. Her novels are static – the scene at the end is the same as at the beginning, though individuals may have moved their positions.

This seems well exemplified by her portrayal of Emma Howick in *A Few Green Leaves*. Emma, an LSE Social Anthropologist graduate in the early '70s, returns to her village to write up a report on her field study in London. She feels an urge to record village life – she methodically lists all the residents, describes a coffee morning, but apparently cannot conceive any process of change, any problem in the village; she does not become involved in its activities except passively. In the end she decides to write a novel; I think that her LSE tutors would have been most disappointed in her lack of imagination.

Barbara Pym continually alludes to the contrast between rich imagination displayed in the novel and the turgidity of academic anthropological writing. But we are all following conventions. Commentators compare Pym with Jane Austen. The career path of the professional social anthropologist demands a doctoral thesis and academic publications, the style of both being pre-ordained. Few have had time or energy to go further in their writing, but it is possible. (My own Oxford supervisor, Paul Bohannan, and his wife Laura, herself a trained social anthropologist, in the course of a decade wrote reports for government, articles for *Africa* and two IAI monographs, an Ethnographic Survey volume, a literary essay on telling the story of *Hamlet* to Tiv elders and a fictional autobiography of fieldwork! Whilst not writing for *Africa*, I was in the mid '50s contributing popular articles to the weekly *West Africa*.) In their everyday conversation, with their tales from the field, social anthropologists can be scintillating company; they need not be boring or unintelligible.

Pym calls for more imagination from the anthropologist. Little can be expected from the ethnographer supplying data for the checklists enshrined in *Notes and Queries*. But the social anthropologist is giving us, though this is realised more now than in the '50s, an interpretation of the society studied; as some of us now assert, the academic monograph tells us as much about the author as about the people and societies described.

In some further ways, *Less Than Angels* is like an anthropological study. The good social anthropologist clearly distinguishes his own analysis from the views held by the subjects of study; similarly, Barbara Pym expresses through some of her characters a conventional view of anthropology which differs from her own experience. But whilst she, I feel,

grapples with this difference, her commentators ignore it – becoming like the bad social anthropologist who confuses his own perceptions and those of his subjects.

*

In *Less Than Angels*, and indeed in several other novels, Barbara Pym presents a view of anthropology, and anthropologists too (not classified by type as I have done) conventionally held by the English middle classes – who at that time had very little acquaintance with the discipline. As Minnie Foresight remarked in justifying her bequest to Father Gemini rather than to Professor Mainwaring, she couldn't see the difference. Presumably this was the view held by Pym, too, before she joined the Institute.

I would term this view of anthropology as 'all sex and savagery'. The novels are full of illustrations almost all originating with the excellent women or the older generation of ethnographers. Mainwaring describes his colleagues hacking their way through the Congo forests. Deirdre's aunt assumes Tom to have been killed by violent natives with poisoned war spears; strange diseases are rampant; people eat everything except hyaenas. The accoutrements of anthropology are the exotic masks. Anthropologists are forever reading professional articles on sexual practices, steatopygia ... So it goes on. Exotic though anthropology certainly is, it is also futile – endless classification of artefacts and traits, searches for the origins of vernacular words.

Such an image demeans the anthropologists themselves. They become weird adopting native customs (Tom is imagined by Deirdre's aunt wearing native dress), often unable to recognise the norms of their own society (Alaric Lydgate beats his carpets on the lawn in the evening). They are not only anti-social but un-social; Graham Pettifer bores his pub companions with his stories; much talk is about sex and so unsuitable for female company. Consequently anthropology is of low social status – both Professor Mainwaring and Tom disappoint their families, the former in not entering an expected diplomatic career. In short, anthropology is unsuitable.

But anthropology in the early '50s was not like this – at least not at the institute which Daryll Forde was transforming into a most highly respected academic centre, focus of the new social anthropology.

I have noted the titles of over fifty articles which appeared in *Africa* in 1952 and 1953 – all edited presumably by Barbara Pym. Only one refers to masks and initiation rites, one to puberty rituals, one to an obscure linguistic issue. Many are straightforward descriptions of social structure; many deal with contemporary problems of chieftancy, law or land tenure. There are articles on migration, urbanisation, investment and economic development. Tom's own interests, noted above, fall within this spectrum of *Africa* articles – for most were written by the likes of him and his peers. The contrast is exemplified too in Professor Mainwaring's comment to his students that they will hear the roar of lions in Africa, to which Mark replies that the only roar that he is likely to hear is that of "the high powered car of one of the urbanised anthropologists" (LTA p214).

In *Less Than Angels* it is the ethnographers who are exotic – Alaric Lydgate, handsome like an Easter Island carving, inappropriately wearing his African masks; or figures of fun – Father Gemini bundled into, or unbundling himself from, his clerical garb. But these in fact lived in Africa within European enclaves – the government and mission stations. In contrast the young social anthropologists are so ordinary, in spite of their close sojourn with the indigenous peoples. Catherine surmises that, being trained to observe norms of behaviour, they are self-consciously well behaved; though it is only the Frenchman, Jean-Pierre le Rossignol, who overtly adapts to the norms of his hosts. In Pym's descriptions they are most ordinarily dressed (as impecunious students); they are often shy (Rupert Stonebird) and so unlike the charismatic image of big game hunter, colonial overlord ... Even their social origins are ordinary – Tom comes from an upper-middle class country estate in a small Shropshire town, not too unlike Pym's own family home. Training in social anthropology is but a veneer; Digby succeeds to Tom's grant (and also eventually marries Deirdre and becomes a professor); but Mark, after graduation, goes into his future father-in-law's financial firm in the City. And finally, of course, Tom died by accident, a chance shot fired in a local political *fracas*.

I therefore see in *Less Than Angels*, and in the other novels too, though less overtly so, the contradiction which Barbara Pym experienced between the conventional image of anthropology which she had shared, enhanced perhaps by an unfulfilled wish for the exotic – for more Alarics – and the very prosaic presence of us social anthropologists who visited her in her Institute office. Yes, we did have our professional jargon and kinship diagrams, but the mother's brother (subject of Tom's thesis) is but an uncle; and what are the Pym novels about but aunts (if not uncles)? As many of her social anthropologist characters observe, the customs of the English are no less quaint than those of the African. This dichotomy between the conventional and the experienced view of social anthropology does not occur in the other novels – the descriptions of events in the world of church and excellent women are not contrasted with an outsider's expectations.

Here Barbara Pym had a problem. Social anthropologists live with those whom they study. By preference, she rigidly segregated her home and office life; none of her close personal friends was an anthropologist. It would have been, in any case, impossible for her to enter into the world of social anthropology. She had no access to student departments, observing us in seminars and coffee bars (though in her early years in the Institute she did attend, for one term, one of Daryll Forde's courses of lectures at University College); we are given to understand that Tom and Deirdre spent much time together – but we are not privy to their conversations. Most of the time we were in Africa; she never visited Africa, let alone shadowed an anthropologist there. It is not even clear where Tom did his fieldwork; there are hints of an urban location, yet he lives in a 'hut'. We were shadowy and transient figures. Barbara Pym and Hazel Holt used to invent families and backgrounds for some of their visitors – and then could not remember which was fact and which fiction! It is almost as if one were to base one's novels about priests and excellent women on observations and interviews in the local supermarket, because one had no access to the church and its parochial activity.

Thus *Less Than Angels* deals, perforce, with anthropologists in a very particular manner. It sees them on the fringes of typical Pym territory. The novel focuses on the relationships between Tom and the three women in his life and between the several sets of anthropologists – between the students themselves, between students and academic hierarchy. But the focal location of the novel is Deirdre's house; it is next door to Alaric Lydgate's (whose sister works in Mainwaring's centre); it is here that parties are held; it is here that Catherine retreats after Tom's death. We have no clear picture of Catherine's flat, and only the briefest sight of Tom's digs with Mark and Digby.

The anthropologists are marginal –

between the assumed exotic world of their discipline and the 'normal' local community. Observers may see their movement between these two worlds as problematic; how can one live for over a year in the most primitive of conditions, far from any European contact, and then, after a day's flight, merge back into one's former environment as if one had never been away? Perhaps only those who have done it know how easy it is. Cultural relativism enables the social anthropologist to feel at home in any society. Thus the ethnographer Alaric is "saved" by Catherine and restored to respectability, but we have no explicit statement of the social anthropologists' own view of their lives. Tom wonders, quite reasonably, how different his life would have been had he not taken up anthropology but assumed his expected role in the family business. But he is clearly a very able and successful scholar; he completes his thesis in remarkable time. He seems well organised – having written all his Christmas cards before his death. His highest career aspirations are met with an award enabling him to return to Africa where he hopes that his research will benefit his subjects. To describe him, as commentators have done, as confused, a tribeless wanderer in pursuit of triviality, seems a crass misinterpretation.

Furthermore, *Less Than Angels* is seen as falling into the typical Pym pattern with strong women, weak men. Tom is clearly attractive to women and retains the love of his three consecutive paramours, but none of these is an obviously suitable wife. Elaine lives in the conventional past, interested in dogs and without a shred of understanding of social anthropology; the mothering Catherine seems to have little interest in the discipline; Deirdre is the starry-eyed adolescent – Tom is not averse to her charms but is quickly bored with her company. Catherine's retort that Tom is returning to Africa because he cannot cope with his relationships with these women –

> Your people wait for you. How soothing it will be to get away from all this complexity of personal relationships to the simplicity of a primitive tribe (LTA p186).

seems a particularly bitchy remark, though appropriate to a jilted woman. This cannot be Pym's own view of Tom. It is in examples such as this that we must be careful in distinguishing between the belief and sentiments attributed to individual characters and the author's own intentions and viewpoint.

*

So, to conclude: what would Tom have made of the novel? As in the other novels, Barbara Pym's characterisations seem brilliant; she gives us caricatures which are immediately recognisable – whether in individuals, in professional gatherings or organisations, even when they reflect no exact likeness. Tom would have been happy with the image of himself presented in the novel – at least, as he interpreted it.

As an anthropological exercise, one of the prime merits of the novel is the delineation of the several types of anthropologist and of the conflicts between some of these. Time and again little incidents reflect these tensions, which, however, passed unnoticed by those not immersed in the discipline.

This leaves us all with an enigma. Barbara Pym knew so much about the anthropological world and its practicitioners; but she remained distanced from it. She excluded it from her 'private' life; I suspect that she did not really understand the theoretical basis of social anthropology; (she had had no formal training in the social sciences). The 'fly on the wall' cannot really comprehend what is going on (or so a social anthropologist would hold). *Less Than Angels* is about anthropologists, for such are most of its principal characters; but mostly it is about the discordance between a popular image of anthropology of the early 1950s and the reality of a new social science discipline. Barbara Pym herself was caught between a romantic yearning for the past and an obvious, and certainly appreciated, affection for her younger authors – the Tom Mallows of this world.

References are to the 1955 edition of *Less Than Angels* published by Jonathan Cape.

Peter Lloyd is Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Sussex.

Paper first presented at the Barbara Pym Literary Weekend, St Hilda's College, Oxford, 20-22 August 1993, and read again at the conference of the Barbara Pym Society, Oxford, 30 August 2003

A genius for quotation

Katherine Duncan-Jones

In the autumn of 1934 Robert Liddell wrote to Barbara Pym, who had come down from Oxford that summer, after reading the typescript of *Some Tame Gazelle*:

> I think you have a genius for quotation which has probably never been equalled—not only have you put the culture you have acquired here [i.e. in Oxford, where Liddell worked as a librarian] to extremely effective use, you have also permanently increased your readers' knowledge of English literature.

Barbara Pym was one of the most devoted and creative products of Oxford's Honour School of English Language and Literature. In her day, half of the nine compulsory written papers on which award of the degree depended concerned Old and Middle English, studied largely from a philological and historical rather than a literary angle. The prevailing view — which survived even to my own undergraduate years, 1959-62 — was that serious scholarship could be pursued only in this earlier part of the syllabus. This view is reflected in allusions to mediaeval scholarship in the novels, such as that pursued by Archdeacon Hoccleve's extremely formidable wife Agatha in *Some Tame Gazelle*. The syllabus as studied by Barbara Pym had been revised in 1922. Post-mediaeval literature was studied only up to the year 1830. There was an optional paper on nineteenth-century literature, but this had to be taken as an extra, making a total of ten rather than nine three-hour exam papers in all. As a contributor to Brian Harrison's 1994 *History of the University of Oxford: the twentieth century* observes, Barabara Pym succeeded in combining her study of English Language and Literature with 'a full social life'. So far as I can discover, although she certainly did read many Victorian poets and novelists for pleasure, she did

not take this additional paper. In Pym's time, as in mine, all candidates were examined orally as well as by written paper. The oral examination, or 'viva', was an integral part of the examination. Any candidate who failed to appear for it, in late July, after written papers which had been sat in early June, could not be awarded a degree. Though the majority of candidates received, as Pym herself did, a formulaic five-minute viva, all those whose written performance placed them on a borderline between classes – Fail/Pass, 4/3,3/2,2/1 – received longer oral examinations. Their purpose was to raise their performance, though to candidates under interrogation it often didn't feel like that. Such critical vivas could last between half an hour and two or more hours. Some candidates were reputed to have risen all the way from a 3rd Class to a 1st, while others, after an equally long grilling, stayed exactly where they were, perhaps in the 4th or 3rd Class. Barbara's recorded relief at receiving only a five-minute viva, and being placed in Class 2, should be put in context. No St Hilda's candidate had received a First since 1929, when Helen Gardner, later to become Merton Professor of English Language and Literature, had done so. It was quite usual for St Hilda's students of Eng. Lang. and Lit. to fall short of Class 2. In 1930 one 3rd and two 4ths were awarded to St Hilda's candidates; in 1931 two 3rds and one 4th; in 1932, one3rd and two 4ths; and in 1933 three 3rds. There was one 1st in Barbara Pym's year, 1934, which went to Mary Sharp. However, two St Hilda's students were awarded 4ths that year, one of whom, Mary Blunt, was among Barbara's closest friends.

Compulsory vivas made it prudent to learn as much literature as possible by heart, both as preparation for the gruelling written papers, and for use, if required, during the oral examination. Neither in Barbara Pym's time nor mine was there any emphasis on criticism or secondary reading, apart from a few classic texts such as Aristotle's *Poetics* and Samuel Johnson's *Preface* to his edition of Shakespeare. Little attention was given to literary genres other than poetry. When Barbara Pym's heroines turn, as they so often do, to poetry, read or remembered, in the watches of the night, or times of anxiety, they are not being precious or pretentious. They are simply showing themselves to be, like Pym herself, genuinely receptive to their reading. In *A Glass of Blessings*, when Wilmet is about to have Mary Beamish to stay, one of the most urgent questions is the choice of books to put beside her bed. Wilmet decides on 'some anthologies of poetry and good novels by female authors'. And when Pym heroines turn, as they quite often do, to post-1830 poets – for instance, Pym applies Robert Browning's 'you know the red turns grey' to pussy willow – they show that their love of poetry extends well beyond what might have been required of them at Oxford. Even in my day an interest in Browning was considered rather daring.

In terms of the witty and apt deployment of quotation, *Some Tame Gazelle*, Pym's first published novel, is also one of her most brilliant. The title itself derives from one of Belinda's favourite quotations, taken from the works of a minor English poet:

> Some tame gazelle, or some gentle dove;
> Something to love, oh, something to love!

Thomas Haynes Bayly (1797-1839), whose 'Something to Love' was included in his posthumously published *Songs, Ballads and Other Poems* (1844), really is a *very* minor English poet. I must confess that until I began to prepare this paper I had never explored his oeuvre, though I did know, without knowing the lyricist's name, two of his most famous poems set to music, 'She Wore a Wreath of Roses' and 'We met! 'Twas in a Crowd!'. Another Bayly lyric that was both extremely popular in the nineteenth century and much ridiculed was 'I'd be a butterfly'. Staying a little longer with *Some Tame Gazelle*: Archdeacon Hoccleve's surname is in effect a literary allusion, being the rare and unusual surname of the minor fifteenth-century English poet Thomas Hoccleve (?1369-?1426), whose many poems about being ill may have appealed to Barbara Pym. And Count Ricardo's dead friend John Akenside shares a surname with the minor eighteenth-century poet Mark Akenside, best known for his long reflective poem *Pleasures of Imagination*.

Some Tame Gazelle is unlike Pym's later novels in so far as it is a male character, Archdeacon Hoccleve, who indulges most obsessively in literary quotation. Harriet Bede, and even at times her besotted sister Belinda, find his passion for quotation distinctly tiresome. Here, for instance, are the Archdeacon's reflections on parish visiting:

> 'When I visit these simple people,' he said affectedly with his head on one side, 'I am reminded of Gray's *Elegy*. He began to quote:
>
> Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife
> Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
> Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
> They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.
>
> 'Oh, *quite*,' agreed Harriet, annoyed at being delayed. 'One of the finest poems in our language,' she pronounced, hoping that there the matter would end.

A little later, the Archdeacon tries out exactly the same remark, and exactly the same quotation, on Belinda and his own wife Agatha – who got a First Class degree in English Language and Literature at Oxford, and is a learned mediaevalist. Agatha is about to riposte with a bit of *Piers Plowman*, and would have quoted from this,

> ... had not the Archdeacon suddenly been reminded of Wordsworth and some suitable lines in *The Excursion*. Then he began to read from *The Prelude*.
>
> Belinda thought Agatha looked rather bored and fidgety.

Later still, the Archdeacon, prompted by the sound of a clock striking, quotes from Young's *Night Thoughts* (published 1742-3), beginning with the words 'We take no note of time/But from its loss ...'. However, while Belinda praises him, she reflects silently

> that when she heard the clock strike her thoughts were on a much lower level. She suspected that even dear Henry was guilty of more mundane thoughts occasionally. At four o'clock in the afternoon surely the most saintly person would think rather of tea than of his departed hours?

In this first novel Barbara Pym's practice of associating literary quotations not only with Eng. Lang and Lit. graduates but also with distinctly un-poetical, un-literary characters, is already well in place. When Harriet receives a surprising proposal of marriage from the librarian Mr Mold, whom she has met only twice before, the narrator observes:

> Harriet was the kind of person to believe with Marlowe that
> Where both deliberate, the love is slight:
> Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?

This is especially comic because Harriet is so firmly described as un-poetic – not very likely to have read Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*. I will cite just one more passage from *Some Tame Gazelle*, one of its most richly comic. The colonial bishop Theo Grote, while attempting clumsily to compliment Belinda with an aptly chosen quotation, manages to in-

sult both her looks and her familiarity with the English poets:

'Ah, well, one hardly looks for beauty at our time of life,' he said, with a return of his usual complacency. '*She is not fair to outward view* ...how does Wordsworth put it?'

'Not *Wordsworth*,' said Belinda automatically. 'Coleridge, Hartley Coleridge, I think.' She felt rather annoyed. Not even a middle-aged spinster likes to be told in so many words that she is not fair to outward view.

I will now consider two slightly later novels, *Less than Angels* (1955) and *A Glass of Blessings* (1958), in both of which literary quotations are used with especial brilliance.

In *Less than Angels* the heroine, Catherine Oliphant – who herself sports a literary name, that of the Victorian novelist Margaret Oliphant (1828-1897) – has a florid compulsion to quote from and discuss poetry on all occasions. Many of her friends, especially her male friends, find this habit baffling and disconcerting. In the end, however, Catherine's habit proves to be a source of great strength.

Other characters in the book are rather literary, too. Professor Mainwaring exclaims Miltonically, as guests arrive for an anthropological sherry party in the library

'Well, well, Comus and his rabble rout!', cried Professor Mainwaring, clapping his hands.

A bit later, hoping for a cup of tea, the Professor greets the young woman who brings him a cup:

'Ah, a fair tea-maker!' he exclaimed. 'Wasn't it De Quincey who described her thus?' He plucked at his beard and glanced at her quizzically, making her giggle and leave the room hastily.

'Young men nowadays cannot afford to take opium', said Miss Clovis briskly.

It is striking that Miss Clovis immediately picks up, and responds to, the allusion to De Quincey. Later still, Professor Mainwaring connects a large girl called Barbara with the willow song in Shakespeare's *Othello*, with its introduction by Desdemona – 'My mother had a maid called Barbary'. This is one of Pym's habitual glances at herself, usually as a clumsy woman of little talent or success.

But Professor Mainwaring's tendency to allude to Eng. Lit. is as nothing compared with that of the novel's heroine. Catherine Oliphant has an absolute passion for literature, especially poetry. She puzzles – even antagonizes – young Tom Mallow by going off into a rhapsodic meditation on Shakespeare's Sonnet 19, 'Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws', at the mere glimpse of 'a row of houses whose gate-posts were ornamented with stone lions'. Another line in the same sonnet, 'Nor put no lines there with thine antique pen', leads her to notice that even young Tom's face has 'a few little lines that I hadn't noticed before'. Her misquotation of this line – it should be 'Nor *draw* no lines there with thine antique pen' – shows that Pym herself knew the sonnet by heart. Catherine Oliphant continues to ramble on about the sonnet, being eventually cut short:

'I think this must be the house,' said Tom rather coldly.

Even Catherine's cooking is infused with English poetry, as we discover in Chapter 9:

'Tom, the bay leaf I'm putting in this {boeuf a la mode} was plucked from a tree growing in the garden of Thomas Hardy's birthplace', Catherine called from the kitchen ... she went on, almost to herself, 'I wonder if it's *wrong* of me to use it in cooking? Perhaps I ought to have pressed it in *Jude the Obscure*, or the poems, that would have been more suitable. Those sad couples he writes about seem to me a bit like us, sometimes. I wonder if, when I'm old, you'll offer me the hand of friendship down life's sunless hill, or whatever it was. Will you?' she raised her voice.

'I don't know what you're talking about, sweetie,' said Tom in an abstracted tone.

By the end of this chapter Tom is getting seriously annoyed by Catherine's constant use of quotation:

'... Now I can see what Donne meant when he wrote about love making one little room an everywhere. And it will be such a *very* little room, quite poky, you might say...' she began to laugh in an uncertain way.

'Catty, please don't' responds the increasingly bored and irritated Tom. His inability to take any interest in Catherine's freely-associated links between daily life and lines from the great English poets makes the ultimate non-sustainability of their relationship painfully clear.

Nevertheless, Catherine herself derives great comfort from the poets at moments of loneliness and desolation, very much as Pym herself did. She is not to be parted from them. After meeting Tom's new, younger, girlfriend Deirdre, Catherine

... was saying to herself like a chant two lines of verse which often, though for no apparent reason, came into her mind at moments of stress or emotional upheaval:

What was he doing, the great god Pan,
Down in the reeds by the river...

It was a jingle, perhaps with some long-forgotten comic significance, but it persisted, over and over again like a blue-bottle buzzing in a closed room.

Perhaps Pym herself was again quoting from memory, and had forgotten that these are the opening lines of a celebrated poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, rather sentimental and with no 'comic significance'.

At the end of *Less than Angels*, after the shocking news of Tom's sudden and pointless death in Africa, it is poetry that carries Catherine through. Even though she recalls clearly that 'Tom hadn't liked poetry, except Housman when he had been at school', she knows for sure that it is in poetry that she herself will find effective consolation. Picking up an anthology of English verse,

she skimmed through the book from the beginning until she came to Vaughan, where she read:

He that hath found some fledg'd bird's
nest, may know
After first sight if the bird be flown;
But what fair Well, or Grove he sings
in now,
That is to him unknown.

The quasi-maternal tenderness of this image, with its suggestion that, though lost to 'sight', Tom's spirit may inhabit an unseen realm, is perfect. For Catherine Oliphant, as for Barbara Pym herself, poetry *works*. Even when she is deeply sad – or most of all at such a time – it has the power to mitigate disappointment and loss.

I will now turn to what I personally consider to be the most perfect of Barbara Pym's novels: *A Glass of Blessings*. Here, too, she draws on rather obscure Eng. Lit. For instance, the heroine, Wilmet, is named after the heroine of Charlotte M.Yonge's novel *The Pillars of the House*; her friend Rowena bears a name made famous by Sir Walter Scott in *Ivanhoe*. The affected and fastidious Father Thames is not so much a literary character as a literary symbol. Pym, who wrote several essays on the poetry of Edmund Spenser for her tutor Eleanor Rooke, will have known his *Prothalamion* (1596), with its wonderful refrain, echoed by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*, 'Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song'. *Prothalamion* is a poem celebrating a double marriage. I think it was prominently in Barbara Pym's mind when she structured this novel, whose closing events are two rather surprising mar-

riages – those of Sybil Forsyth to Professor Root, and of Mary Beamish to Marius Ransome. The retirement of Father Thames – who, however, is by no means 'sweet' – will ensue.

Many of the poems drawn on in *A Glass of Blessings* are modern, and the quotations used are subtler, briefer, less florid but more telling, than in the earlier novels. For instance, most readers will begin to suspect, even though Wilmet herself doesn't, that there may be some hidden sympathy, even kinship, between the glamorous heroine and the dowdy church-worker Mary Beamish when they turn out to share close knowledge of a poem by Walter De la Mare:

> 'Do you know that poem: [says Mary]
> There is a wind where the rose was;
> Cold rain where sweet grass was;
> I felt horribly embarrassed [Wilmet tells us]. I remembered the poem and a later line about 'tears, tears where my heart was', and although I did not imagine it could have any personal significance for Mary, I felt I could not bear to be invited to a womanly sharing of confidences.

Several chapters later, when Wilmet meets Wilf Bason, the new housekeeper at the clergy house, she sees that he carries a piece of paper covered with writingin purple ink in a large bold hand:

> 'Just a few suitable dishes that occurred to me,' he explained. 'I've been carrying the list round with me in case anything strikes me'.
> 'Like a poet jotting down felicitous lines and images', I suggested.
> 'Exactly, Mrs. Forsyth. And what poetry there is in cooking!'

Though no specific poem or poet is mentioned, it shows, as does Catherine Oliphant's poetry-infused beef casserole, the close connexion between two of Pym's most intense sources of pleasure, poetry and food. (Perhaps she had read Rebecca West's assertion:

> There is a fundamental unity between all art and experience. When one makes a cake for a guest one likes one is striking a low note on a scale that is struck higher up by Beethoven and Mozart.)

Chapter 13 of *A Glass of Blessings* opens with two allusions to poems by T.S.Eliot which illustrate the subtlety and wit with which literary allusion is deployed in this novel:

> We had a hard winter that year. February and March were cruel months – not in the poet's way, perhaps, but bad enough for most of us. Only Rodney seemed to enjoy himself, lagging pipes, unfreezing the tank and dealing with a neighbour's burst pipe in the middle of the night.

Barbara Pym glances here both at Eliot's Ariel Poem 'Journey of the Magi' (1927), which begins

> A cold coming we had of it,
> Just the worst time of the year
> For a journey, and such a long journey:
> The ways deep and the weather sharp

and at the famous opening line of his *Waste Land*, 'April is the cruellest month'. But then, with the kind of abrupt shift of tonal register of which Eliot himself was a master, she descends from this resonant religious imagery to mundane details about the unpoetic Rodney and burst water-pipes.

Further on still in *A Glass of Blessings* Wilmet – who has now come to terms with the truth about Piers Longridge and his 'unsatisfactory' life style – visits Mary Beamish at her Anglican retreat house, and tries to help:

> The only task Mary could find for me was to pick and shell some peas for lunch, and to put the pods on the compost heap under the apple trees at the bottom of the garden. Here, in a kind of greenish twilight, stood a pile of grass cuttings and garden rubbish, and as I added my pods to it I imagined all this richness decaying in the earth and new life springing out of it. Marvell's lines went jingling through my head
> My vegetable love should grow
> Vaster than Empires and more slow...
> There seemed to be a pagan air about this part of the garden, as if Pan — I imagined him with Keith's face — might at any moment come peering through the leaves.

As in the passage quoted earlier about Wilf Bason's quasi-poetic ideas for recipes, Pym moves easily and fluently from the domestic to the poetic – and once again she is quoting from memory, for the Marvell lines are in the wrong order. In her all-too-brief late blossoming in the late 1970s she compared writing novels to making chutney — mixing all sorts of disparate ingredients together and simmering them until the magic moment when a new flavour emerges. I think we can see this anticipated in the passage about the retreat-house compost heap. All sorts of ingredients are thrown on to it in apparent chaos — grass, flower clippings, pea-pods. But from this fermenting chaos will eventually emerge fresh life, fresh love, fresh stories; and for Wilmet, as for Pym herself, fresh hope and courage.

Barbara Pym's devotion to English Literature, fostered at Oxford, but developing in an essentially natural and spontaneous way, provided the rich green heap of fertile fragments from which her wonderful novels flowered.

Talk given to the Barbara Pym Society's North American Conference, Cambridge, Mass., 27 March 2004

Letters to the Editor

Barbara Pym has many avid readers in Australia but, according to the 2005 directory of members, only three of us are members of the Barbara Pym Society. As I live so far away, my visits to England are years apart. In May-June this year the two Sundays I spent in London were largely shaped by Barbara. On my first Sunday, staying in Pimlico, I started the day exploring the area around Warwick Square, saw the house in Cambridge Street where Barbara had lived in the late 1940s, and looked inside St Gabriel's Church (open only for services), which is St Mary's, Pimlico, in *Excellent Women*. The following Sunday I attended the famous Anglo-Catholic church, St Alban's, Holborn, for High Mass followed by the Barbara Pym Society's Spring meeting. I wondered how Barbara might have written about St Alban's with its splendid music (Mass in F by Rheinberger) and unforgettable acoustics, the well drilled High Mass (this having been the principal Sunday service for 140 years), and the congregation with its high proportion of men of all ages, in ones and twos. Then afterwards, at the St Alban's Centre, there was the pleasure of meeting members of the Society whose names, through *Green Leaves*, have become familiar. To my lunch companion I spoke warmly about the collection of essays *No Soft Incense* and found she was Hazel Bell, its editor. So we had much to talk about. She introduced me to Dr Eleonore Biber, visiting from Austria, whose University of Vienna doctoral thesis had examined Anglo-Catholicism in the novels of Barbara Pym and A. N. Wilson. It was a memorable day. I should like to thank the Society for its welcome to a distant member.

David Hilliard
Adelaide, South Australia

A happy customer at the Blackwell's sale of the Pym sisters' books

Such an exciting night last night! Family commitments having prevented my attending the Pym Society conference this weekend, I now sit at home on 3rd September 2005 surrounded by books from the collection of Barbara Pym, which are being sold off at Blackwell's, and I am so moved. Blackwell's opened their doors specially for the Pym Society last night. My daughter, Sasha, and I climbed up to the third floor (I was too impatient to wait for the lift) and found tables set out among the usual stock of Second-hand books, marked 'Barbara Pym's own books', 'Hilary Walton's books', 'Books by Larkin', 'Miscellaneous', etc.

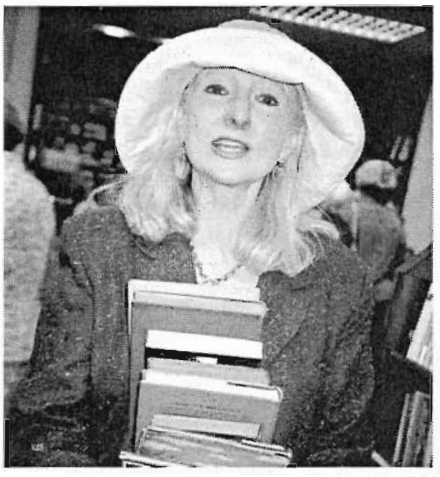
There were about fifty of us and I think we all tried not to make it like a scramble as in Pym's own accounts of genteel ladies behaving badly at jumble sales, but it certainly was a bit like that, with pressing elbows in the confined space and occasional large crashes as books hit the floor! I sat poor Sasha down on a chair (with wine of course) and piled her from lap to chin with my choices. It was so wonderful to see Pym's books and yet after a while sorrowful too, to think that she's gone and here we are all poring over her precious books. But Sasha said that Barbara would have been pleased that we all treasure them so much and think so much of her.

I was delighted to come across *The Oxford Book of English Verse* and *Seventeenth Century English Minor Poets* from which Pym quotes so much – it was like finding the raw material for her novels, which I suppose it was; I think I had imagined she just remembered all the poetry from her St Hilda's days. What actually brought tears to my eyes though was a little book, *Teach Yourself Portuguese* (£1) – Sasha said, Oh mum, you don't want that! But of course I did, remembering Wilmet and Piers in *A Glass of Blessings* – that's how deeply she went into it all, to be able to describe their lessons in Portuguese. Of course, it all stands to reason when you think about it!

It was lovely to see that Pym read all the books I like, Hardy, Austen, Elizabeth von Arnim ...

I bought six books about Hardy, a couple about Austen and two novels by Elizabeth which I've read but which were nice little blue editions signed by Pym (One was *The Pastor's Wife,* my favourite Arnim.)

It was a great joy to have other Pym enthusiasts around me, some of whom had come from Scotland, Germany and



Rita Phillips with her books from from the Blackwell's sale

even America! It was a shame but I didn't want to talk much as that would mean time away from looking at the books and then they would all disappear! It would have been nice for us all to look around at them ALL before being allowed to buy, I think. Anyway, people were not really as bad as the jumble sale devotees and were happy to show their books and discuss them.

One chap picked up *Enquire Within* and we found the entry for stain removal that BP mentions in *Jane and Prudence* when Jessie Morrow deliberately spills tea on Prudence's dress at Fabian Driver's garden party. It says one should use egg yolk and glycerine, fancy that! Another book I picked up was by Robert Liddell and has an inscription inside to Barbara. I could see this was something special and Yvonne Cocking was kind enough to tell me that he had been a close friend of Pym's for many years and had worked in the Bodleian Library.

A charming American lady in a large becoming hat told me that it was Aldous Huxley's novel *Crome Yellow* that decided Pym on becoming a novelist, and handed me another novel by him, *Two or Three Graces.* I had recently re-read *Brave New World* so I thought I'd try it, with the added joy of knowing that Pym thought something of it. I have always thought Huxley suddenly seemed to turn against his hero, Bernard, (in *BNW*) in mid-stream and so I picked up another novel, *No Coward Soul,* by Noel Adeney, because it appears to have strange qualities about its hero also. Pym was in the habit of putting little cuttings from newspapers in the front of her books and this one says:

"... Merton, a delicate plant of Beardsleyish proclivities, so obviously engages his author's sympathies at the exact moment when he is provoking the reader's derision." She dated all her books, too (this one is 1956) but you're left wondering what was the inspiration — was she given it, or was it this very cutting that made her want to read it, perhaps?

I found *The Oxford Book of English Verse* with, in Pym's writing, 'from Harlovin', followed by 'Christmas 1931'. I wondered if this could be some kind of joke or pet name for Henry Harvey? Arnim's *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rugen* has Pym's signature and Pwllheli written underneath, and I remember picking up another book from the table there with Harvey's signature and "Remembering Pwllheli" inside. How I wish I'd taken more note of what the book was and who exactly wrote that, surely it was him ... but I was in feverish haste to see all the books as I have only joined the Society recently and was unfortunately not present at the visit to the cottage at Finstock.

Many books have the name of the place she bought them in, or possibly it is the place she was living in at the time she acquired them, so *Jude the Obscure* has Dorchester inside it and 28th March 1953; I wonder if the date is significant as well as the place? I bought that one for Sasha who picked it up just having read it this summer (her first Hardy novel). *The Pastor's Wife* was bought on the 2nd June (1937) — Pym does not always put the date, or rather she often just puts the month, so as she is a Hardy lover of course she knew this was Hardy's birthday (as well as her own).

I also picked up two other books, *Manservant and Maidservant* by Ivy Compton-Burnett and *Fabled Shore* by Rose Macaulay; both authors were recommended by a tutor of mine at college in the '70s. I still haven't got round to reading either of them so perhaps this will inspire me to make a start. *Fabled Shore* says it was bought in Barnes 24.8.63 — I feel sure the dates will mean something to somebody. The Compton-Burnett says "Pimlico 14th February 1947" and has two asterisks, one either side — I wonder if this was a secret sign to herself and if it was a Valentine's Day present?

There were other very interesting books that I wish I'd had time to read; I did pick up one, on her faith and interest in the church and how she seemed more concerned with details of dress and form

than with the actual faith (it reminded me of the bit in my favourite Pym novel, *No Fond Return of Love*, where the vicar wants to show Dulcie and Viola the wonderful new heating system rather than the Norman Font) — however, the book was £25 so I put it down again! I bought quite a lot but they were all only a few pounds each. There were some first editions of her books, one was £500! And there were some Larkin books but when signed by him they were pricey, and mostly all gone by the time I got to that particular table. I saw a book of his letters on Hilary's table but I think it's the Pym/Larkin letters that interest me most. I have the excellent CD but I wonder if their letters are all collected in a separate volume? [Yes – a selection edited by Anthony Thwaite, published 1993. – Ed.]

On turning to the back of the paperback, *Seventeenth Century English Minor Poets,* I was awarded a special treat – BP has written the names of several suggestions for titles for *A Few Green Leaves* on the back! She's written:

Two Green Apricots
The Nectarine and the Cuckoo
Green Desert
A Few Green Leaves
Green Paradise
Dog's Mercury

What a privilege it has been to glimpse something of my favourite author's life like this and to be present at such an occasion!

Rose Little
Swindon, Wilts

Reviews

Excellent Women: Barbara Pym. London, Folio Society, 2005. xiv, 206 pp. 28 cm. Illus. £19.95. hbk.

Excellent Women is the favourite novel of many Pym devotees, myself included, and we all have very definite pictures of the characters in our minds. We know them like friends. It was, therefore, with some apprehension that I opened the Folio Society illustrated edition. What would have become of Mildred, Helena, Rockingham, or even Father Malory? Debra McFarlane's illustrations, however, are charming and, if not identical to my perceptions, they are very close. From the frontispiece showing Mildred and Helena in front of the sitting-room window with its view of the church spire peeping 'through the trees in the square', we are aware of someone with a remarkable eye for detail who has thoroughly researched the period and captured the feeling of the novel. Each of the six illustrations has been carefully selected to reveal significant moments in the text: the jumble sale; Mildred holding her mimosa and saying to Rocky, 'I couldn't resist it'; tea in the Lyons Corner House. Each one has a wealth of detail: ladies with permed hair, hats and handbags; gentlemen, hair Brylcreamed, short and sharply parted; a cyclist in the background in a V-necked pullover. Even the final illustration conveys the poignancy of the unromantic ending with Mildred in black, gazing at the proofs of Everard's book. '"It should be interesting work', I said rather formally'."

It is this theme – the unconventional ending for a comedy – that is discussed in A. N. Wilson's introduction to the edition. There is no question but that Wilson is a fan of Pym's and sees her as an important writer of her period. He argues that she is definitely a comic writer but one who deftly 'turns the comic tradition on its head'. It is 'wintry comedy'. Mildred does not end in the arms of her lover but is contemplating a life indexing and proof reading for Everard, protecting Father Malory from the advances of women and generally doing her duty. She does, however, regard herself as having a full life.

Wilson sees many similarities between Pym's vision and that of Philip Larkin and says that it is not surprising that the two writers became friends because 'they had a shared vision'. This vision encompasses a view of life that Wilson describes as ' a nihilistic sense ... that life cannot hold out very exciting possibilities'. Pym, while seizing upon the comic and being aware of the potential for a certain fulfillment is, like Larkin, aware that life 'Whether or not we use it, it goes' leaving us with old age.

And the 'Excellent Women' of the title? These, Wilson argues, are the women 'whom men take for granted' but beyond that, they are representative of the majority of human beings who do not find their lives totally rewarding and who reach a point, sometimes sooner rather than later, where they realize that not much can be done about this. Pym treats such ordinary, limited people with dignity as well as humour. It is for this that Wilson concludes that her novels 'have stood the test of time better than many novels by her contemporaries who took themselves, and life, more seriously'.

This edition, with its introduction and illustrations, places Pym firmly within the context of both the literature of the period and the specific post-war society. The early '50s was a period of great social changes but life was very restricted, economically and emotionally: it was a time when writers such as Iris Murdoch, Kingsley Amis, and John Braine were beginning to explore these changes. Pym is there with them but Wilson's essay recognizes that her writing transcends the specifics of the time and tackles universal themes.

It is a serious and appreciative essay within a beautifully produced book and is a valuable addition to anyone's Pym collection.

Maureen Woolley

Character and Concept in the Barsetshire Novels of Angela Thirkell edited by Penelope Joan Fritzer. The Angela Thirkell Society, North America, P.O. Box 7798 San Diego, CA 92167, USA. 2005. x, 200 pp. 21 cm. Index. ISBN 0-9768345-0-2 pbk.

This production of the Angela Thirkell Society is parallel in theme and format to the Barbara Pym Society's *No Soft Incense*, both being collections of essays on the work of their eponymous novelists. While *No Soft Incense* focuses on the church in the work of Pym, the 'book of refereed criticism' on Thirkell deals

chiefly with her World War II novels, as well as the attributes of particular characters, and use and control of language.

Two contributors on women in wartime, Elisabeth Lenckos and Helen Taylor, have previously written on Pym, and both refer to Pym in their essays here, Lenckos calling Pym's *So Very Secret* 'a parody of wartime spy novels', and Taylor referring briefly to Pym's 'unpublished wartime novels'.

The volume is published in place of the June 2005 issue of the Thirkell Society's Bulletin, and is supplied free to Society members.

Hazel K. Bell

Reviews of *No Soft Incense*

Several reviews have appeared of the BPS's published collection of essays, *No Soft Incense: Barbara Pym and the Church,* since the *TLS* noted it in its 'Commentary' section in April 2005 (see last page of our previous issue).

A. N. Wilson reviewed the volume in *The Tablet* (21 May 2005) under the heading, 'Humour and holiness', including:

> ... the entertaining and often learned contributors to this symposium on the fascinating theme of Barbara Pym and the Church ... this collection of papers actually leads us to the heart of why the novels are such extraordinary works of art. ... This book is essential reading for Pym fans.'

Alexandra Mullen devoted three columns of *The New Criterion* (May 2005) to her review, headed 'Miss Pym disposes', referring to its:

> ... contributors who make up an almost stereotypical cast of Pym characters, largely divided into Excellent Women and Clergy. The institutional affiliations of the two lay men are impeccable: one served in the Coldstream Guards before joining the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum; the other taught History at the University of Lagos (Pym, you may recall, worked at the International African Institute and created the wonderful Bishops of Mbawawa and Nybongaland). ... a happy dipping book for fans.

Anthony Symondson, reviewing the volume in *The Catholic Herald* (17 June) under the heading, 'A glass of Pym', delightfully observed: 'Not since Anthony Trollope's Barchester novels has the Church of England received such minute and detailed treatment in fiction ... Pym's work has a quiet, subtle, ironic quality that had Anglicanism as its background. Incense runs like a leitmotif through her books, as much as boiled chicken in her characters' menus.'

On the Tregolwyn Book Review website,

www.tregolwyn.tripod.com/index.html

Deborah Fisher calls *No Soft Incense* 'an excellent example of self-publishing' and writes that 'it is difficult to read any of these articles without laughing out loud at least once'.

The *Rockford Register Star* (of Illinois), 27 August 2005, gave the heading to its 'Ten-second review' of *No Soft Incense*, 'Check out a literary jewel'.

No Soft Incense is available at £7.50 per copy, P&P add 56p (UK), £2.50 (US/Canada airmail) from: The Barbara Pym Society, St Hilda's College, Oxford OX4 1DY, England. In North America the book is available at $18.00 per copy plus $3.00 P&P from Norma Munson, 5225 Ponderosa Drive, Rockford IL 61107. Please make cheques payable to The Barbara Pym Society.

"All This Reading": The Literary World of Barbara Pym edited by Frauke Elisabeth Lenckos and Ellen J. Miller, published by Associated University Presses in 2003, is now in its second printing.

Dear Miss Pym, Dear Mr Larkin. C.D. The Philip Larkin Society, 2005. £7.50, add 75p P&P (UK), £1.50 (Europe) from The Barbara Pym Society, St Hilda's College, Oxford OX4 1DY, England.

This recording was made at the joint Philip Larkin/ Barbara Pym meeting in Oxford at St. Hilda's College on Saturday 9 April, 2005. It is a reading by Professor Anthony Thwaite and Dr Ann Thwaite and is an entertaining introduction to the correspondence between Philip Larkin and Barbara Pym. We follow the development of a friendship that was begun formally by Larkin in 1961 with a query about future publications of Pym's work, and ended poignantly with Larkin's comments to Anthony Thwaite after Pym's death, " I regret her death very much ..."

What the readings capture is the increasing affection and understanding that evolves as the years go by and the two of them begin to discuss personal as well as literary issues. There is always a sense of distance between them, but also a feeling that they care about each other. At one point Pym asks, "May I call you Philip?" and Larkin responds, "Dear Barbara". The letters are full of insights into their approach to writing, and a shared desire for recognition is constantly present. They both have an eye for the comic and appreciate each other's sense of humour, and yet two very different people emerge. Pym, despite the sorrow and disappointment that she experiences at the rejection of her work during these years, remains optimistic and able to laugh. Having had her novel, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, turned down, she writes, " I could offer my services to Stephen Ward ... after all he is a canon's son." Larkin's vision is much bleaker, and the humour is often that of the self-deprecating outsider, the grumpy old man, as in his comments on "the horn-blowing people" who have moved into the flat below him and who seem to be "new to houses with doors", and his description of the party he attends with "hot punch, Beatles records, twisting ..."

The letters also reveal, though, a man who admires Pym's work and who offers endless support, both in sympathetic responses to her rejections and in offers of advice wherever he can. He constantly looks for ways to help her get published and he expresses genuine delight when success finally comes to her. When he has news of her novels being republished he writes of his pleasure and tells her, "I admire you enormously".

The letters chosen do, therefore, give us an insight into the increasing affection and respect that these writers had for each other. They are beautifully read, conveying the shifts of mood and changing fortunes of the poet and the novelist and giving us glimpses into the routines of their lives and their ways of coping. The CD represents 48 minutes of really pleasant and rewarding listening.

Maureen Woolley

Pym Gleanings

In books

** In Donald Westlake's mystery, *Watch Your Back* (Warner Books 2005), a retired bar owner and a thief on a plane are seated alongside little old lady who is reading a Barbara Pym novel 'with such intensity you'd think there was going to be a test on it when the plane reached Newark'. The men discuss how to forestall a Mafia takeover of the bar. When the beverage cart comes around the Pym reader orders a bloody Mary and tells them "it's called a bust-out joint, and I hope you pin those [censored for readers of *Green Leaves*!] good".

** From *Cold Blood* by Susan Kelly (Allison & Busby, 2003):

> Beatrice Pitcher had spent a happy hour browsing the antique shops of Hungerford Arcade. She had little spare cash but an eye for a bargain. She decided she would treat herself to some coffee and maybe a cake while she decided whether she could afford that Barbara Pym first edition and, if not, whether she could bear to be without it.

** *The Time of Your Life: Getting on with getting on* by John Burningham (Bloomsbury, 2002) is an anthology of extracts about ageing from a variety of authors. Four quotations are taken from *A Very Private Eye*. In the section, 'Pastimes' are given Pym's lines about taking her driving test, 7 November 1971; in 'The Modern Age', about a power cut, 4 Nov. 1977; in 'Money Matters', on becoming an Old Age Pensioner, 10 May 1972; and in 'Last Scene of All', on the death of her cat, Tom, 8 March 1976 (in a letter to Philip Larkin).

** In his first memoir of Iris Murdoch, *Iris* (Duckworth, 1998), John Bayley makes several references to Barbara Pym: to her modesty, to the comic passages from her novels that he read aloud to Iris, and to Pym's meeting the couple (chapter 6); and, in Part II:

> Even my dear Barbara Pym, whose novels I am so fond of, must have been awful when she was young, and all her set too, because they were always trying to dazzle with clever remarks, or by neatly capping quotations. Innocent enough, and rather charming in her early novels, but it must have been fatiguing in life.

In his sequel, *Iris and the Friends* (1999), Bayley refers again to reading Pym for comfort, to the rejection of her novels 'when the firm who published her came under dynamic new management', his own '*tendresse* for one or two of [her] female characters', and how real 'the Pym heroines' are.

In the press

** *In the London Review of Books* (20 October 2005) James Woods reviews *The Power of Delight: A Lifetime in Literature: Essays 1962-2002* by John Bayley, writing:

> ...It is not really an exaggeration to say that for Bayley most modern literature, busy in its little hive of egotism and artificiality, can be written off: this is what explains the canny simple-mindedness of his stance, whereby Wodehouse and Barbara Pym and Mollie Panter-Downes are used to tease overweening complexity ...

** *The Spectator* (8 October 2005) includes a review by D. R. Thorpe of David Faber's *Speaking for England: Leo, Julian and John Amery: the Tragedy of a Political Family* (Free Press, 2005), beginning:

> No commemorative blue plaque adorns the wall of 112 Eaton Square, "that curious house", in Barbara Pym's words [in her diary, July 1939], "with its oil paintings and smell of incense".

** The American *Real Simple* magazine for August 2005 devotes its regular 'Thoughts' column to 'Small Things', quoting from *Less Than Angels*:

> The small things of life were often so much bigger than the great things . . . the trivial pleasures like cooking, one's home, little poems especially sad ones, solitary walks, funny things seen and overheard.

The Pym quote is reprinted on the perforated, heavy-card back page, and can be removed to make a bookmark.

** *Slightly Foxed* has an article in its Autumn 2005 issue on Angela Thirkell, 'A Bad Chooser of Husbands' by Hilary Temple, whose last paragraph starts: "Angela Thirkell could be due for a revival similar to that of Barbara Pym (albeit posthumously...)".

Hilary Temple had previously written in the Holiday 2004 edition of *The Angela Thirkell Society Bulletin*, recommending *Slightly Foxed*:

> I can see a revival of Angela Thirkell being due, a bit like the one accorded to Barbara Pym in the late '70s.

** In an interview by Rachel Harden in the *Church Times* of 22 July 2005 with 'Kate Charles — crime-fiction writer', Kate (former BPS Chairman) is quoted as saying:

> I've always been a huge reader — which is a good thing for a writer. I grew up reading mysteries and fantasies. I've just finished reading the fabulous 'Merrily Watkins' series by Phil Rickman — brilliant books. Now I'm re-reading Barbara Pym's *Civil to Strangers*, and looking forward to the new Harry Potter.

** In *The Oldie* Issue 196, July 2005, Jennie Erdal writes about Alexander McCall Smith, author of *No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* etc. She asked: "Does he feel very separate from those writers who deal with the grand themes, those whose novels reflect the burning questions of the age?". Smith replied, "I suspect that we arrive at the same place but by alternative routes. One can portray the sadness and pain of life by writing *War and Peace* or one can write *Less Than Angels*, as Barbara Pym has done. Both are powerful and legitimate ways of dealing with the human struggle. But I do think that through small things you can get across a major message."

** The *TLS* on 2 June 2005 carried the full paper given by Barbara Everett to the joint meeting of the BPS and the Larkin Society (reported in *Green Leaves* May 2005), under the heading 'Larkin and the Doomsters — Walking "down life's sunless hill" with Hardy and Barbara Pym'. On the cover is a caricature of Larkin and the headline 'Hardy, Pym and him'. 'This Week's Contributors' includes the acknowledgement, 'Barbara Everett, now retired from Somerville College, Oxford, delivered a version of "Larkin and the Doomsters" at the joint meeting of the Philip Larkin Society and the Barbara Pym Society held in Oxford during April 2005'.

** BPS member Scott Herrick of Madison, Wisconsin, sent a letter to the *London Review of Books*, Vol. 27 No. 11, 2 June 2005, reading:

> Tom Maschler, about whom John Sutherland writes (*LRB*, 5 May), is infamous among Barbara Pym fans. She was published by Cape until Maschler went there. After his arrival, she spent fourteen years in the wilderness. His treatment of Pym merits at least a footnote to point up the failures among his accomplishments: not only did Pym eventually find a publisher, renewed critical acclaim and some commercial success, she was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, which Maschler devised. As a suitable revenge, Barbara and her sister Hilary invented a 'Maschler pudding', a kind of lime-flavoured milk jelly.

** In *Waitrose Food Illustrated*, June 2005, after reference to peanut butter and chocolate brownies in books, Jill Foulston writes:

> These are comfort foods, but meals can transport us too. Barbara Pym, a contemporary of Elizabeth David and herself a fine cook, used food to express her character's moods and aspirations in her novel *Less Than Angels*. When the lovelorn student Deirdre gets home after a party, she rejects her aunt's suggestion for a simple supper: 'I don't feel like an egg — I'd like something different — Some rice, all oily and saffron yellow, with aubergines and red peppers and lots of garlic'. In 1950s London, this exotic, almost voluptuous menu is a magic carpet to take Deirdre far from drab suburbia.

** Michael Dirda, reviewing Sybille Bedford's memoir, *Quicksands*, in the *Washington Post*, 29 May 2005, comments:

> Born in 1911, Sybille Bedford is nearly the last great representative of those amusing and intelligently cosmopolitan women writers who came to prominence in 1950s Britain: Nancy Mitford, Barbara Pym, Iris Murdoch, Muriel Spark.

** James Wood, reviewing *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson (Farrar) in the *New York Times*, 28 November 2004, writes:

> The great danger of the clergyman in fiction is that his doctrinal belief will leak into the root system of the novel and turn argument into piety, drama into sermon. This is one of the reasons that, in the English tradition, from Henry Fielding to Barbara Pym, the local vicar is usually safely contained as hypocritical, absurd or possibly a bit dimwitted.

** The *New Scientists*'s 'Who's Reading What' column on 16 April 2005 records the reading preferences of archaeologist Maisie Taylor. It ends:

> Last year she found *Crampton Hodnet* by Barbara Pym in a second-hand bookshop. 'That was Saturday morning: I finished it shortly after Sunday lunch.'

** Graydon Carter, US editor, is quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* (28 September 2004) as describing his parents as'rather Barbara Pym-ish, the sort of people who wore tartan jackets for cocktails'.

** A long, unsigned article in *The Guardian* of 31 May 2004, 'I like to read', includes suggestion of a grouping: 'Authors who came in from the cold', featuring Barbara Pym, H. P. Lovecraft, Philip K. Dick and Edith Wharton.

** *The New Criterion* had included the following four references to Barbara Pym before its review of *No Soft Incense: Barbara Pym and the Church.*

Its 'Notes & Comments' column, 23 May 2005, reviewing the new *Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature,* points out many startling omissions: Betjeman, Wodehouse, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, John Masefield, J. M. Barrie, and many more ... David Herman is quoted as writing in the TLS, "It is not hard to see what these writers have in common. All are male, all are white". The *New Criterion* writer added, '(Though we note that Barbara Pym is missing as well)'.

In 'Betjeman: a whim of iron' by Brooke Allen, 23 March 2005:

> Thus began Betjeman's life-long love ... for Oxford: not so much the university with its dreaming spires as the dowdy, Gothic Revival North Oxford with its "ill-paid dons, suburban gardens, petty gossip, tinned peas, toothbrushes airing on the window-sill". (This is also the territory, some might remark, of Barbara Pym, who claimed to have been influenced more by Betjeman than by her fellow-novelists.)

In 'The dominion of Robertson Davies' by Brooke Allen, 14 April 1996

> Davies was not altogether pleased with the reception of his novel [*Tempest-Tost*]; he believed that he had written something more substantial, universal. Some people, he felt, had mistaken his book "for a funny book to be read by old ladies at Torquay on winter afternoons. It is a comic book, and one of the comic things about life is the way in which the lovable and venerable may, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, become hideous, grotesque and even hateful". But Davies was wrong: *Tempest-Tost* was very much a funny book rather than a comic one — Angela Thirkell, let us say, rather than Barbara Pym.

And in 'Nothing shabby' by Alexandra Mullen, 22 February 1994:

> [Penelope] Fitzgerald's quality of mind doesn't much show itself in argument or even in exposition ... But we can get a sense of it in other ways. Personally reticent, she often wrote on authors of similar temperament, if not style, to her own: Jane Austen, Margaret Oliphant, E. M. Delafield, Barbara Pym. It is tempting to read her comments on them as providing oblique clues to her own view of the world. What she says of reading Barbara Pym is obviously true of her as well: "We have to keep alert, because she will never say exactly what we expect."

BPS Web site

The Barbara Pym Society Web site (www.barbara-pym.org) has been updated and several new pages added. Now available are papers from the 2005 North American Pym Conference, cover pages of recent issues of *Green Leaves*, new order forms for *No Soft Incense*, and "Save the Dates" for upcoming Pym Society meetings.

Notice Board

The Eighth North American meeting of the Barbara Pym Society
will be held at Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Mass., 1-2 April 2006

The Barbara Pym Society Annual Conference
will be held at St Hilda's College, Oxford, Saturday–Sunday 2-3 September 2006
with the theme of Pym in London.