Green Leaves

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The Barbara Pym Society Annual Meeting St. Hilda's College, 2-3 September 2006

by Christine Shuttleworth

My extended weekend at St Hilda's got off to an inauspicious start. Because of an extended diversion caused by roadworks outside Oxford, I arrived at the college about half an hour after the coach to Finstock to attend the unveiling of the blue plaque to Barbara Pym had been due to leave. The Finstock pilgrims had kindly delayed their departure for my sake, but of course they couldn't wait indefinitely. There was nothing to be done. However, there are many worse places to spend an afternoon than Oxford, so for the next few hours I had a pleasant walk around the city in warm sunshine, eventually making my way back to St Hilda's, where I enjoyed dinner with the excited crowd of returned fellow-Pymians who were eager to relate the events of the afternoon (see an account of the visit to Finstock on p. 2).

There were about 60 participants at the conference, an increase on last year's numbers, and of these, eight were from the U.S.: Beverly Bell, Joan Drexler, Barbara Dunlap, Charles Gilbert, Judy Horn, Ellen Miller, Tom Sopko and Isabel Stanley. In addition Janice Rossen came from Delft, Eleonore Biber from Austria, Orna Raz from Israel and Michael Macke, Jutta Schmidt and Margot Schnorr from Germany.

After the Annual General Meeting (held, like all the sessions, in the Vernon Harcourt Room), and lunch, we heard from two excellent speakers whose names will be well known to many Pym fans. Barbara Dunlap, one of the contributors to the collection of essays, *All This Reading: The Literary World of Barbara Pym*, spoke on 'Barbara Pym and Post-War London: Romance and Anti-Romance.' She vividly evoked the post-war period in England, with its food rationing and clothes coupons, and the ethos of "going without," while the use of make-up was encouraged with the slogan 'beauty is duty.' In Pym's work she praised the ability to 'see beyond' and find richness in the world about her.

Barbara Dunlap of the U.S. and Orna Raz of Israel

Janice Rossen, also a contributor to *All This Reading*, as well as sole author of *The World of Barbara Pym*, spoke next, on 'Town and Country in Pym's Novels of the 1950s' (see p. 6), contrasting the romantic possibilities of the two milieus in which Pym's novels are set. In London it is possible to remain anonymous, while village life subjects each individual to the curiosity of neighbours, to whom, as to Pym, no detail is too small to be observed.

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"A few green leaves can make such a difference."
Miss Grundy, *A Few Green Leaves*

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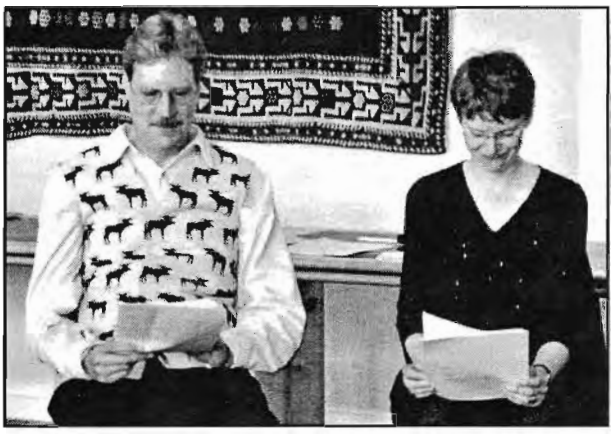
After a tea-break Eileen Roberts introduced Jean Harker, an alumna of St Hilda's and a former editor of *Green Leaves*, substituting for Katherine Duncan-Jones, who was unfortunately unable to speak as arranged. Jean spoke on "The London of the Later Novels and Barbara Pym," taking us on a breathtaking tour of contemporary cultural references, from the first publication of Phyllis Pearsall's *A-Z Directory of London Streets* and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* to the Ealing comedies and the early cookery books of Katherine Whitehorn and Delia Smith.

Were the postwar years in London really drab and marked by gloom and deprivation? The general discussion on 'Barbara Pym in London,' led by Michael Wilson, tended to suggest that this was a misconception.

There followed a drinks reception and the Annual Dinner, after which Tim Burnett gave an entertaining talk on his London adventures.

Sunday's proceedings started at 11.30am, allowing time for churchgoers to attend the service at St Cross Church, while others went about their own devices. Deirdre Bryan-Brown and Eda Forbes, secretary to the Oxford Blue Plaques Board, spoke about the history of blue plaques commemorating celebrated individuals, as well as the criteria for the choice of subjects and the regulations applying to their installation. A subject must have been dead for at least twenty years or have passed his or her centenary, and must be an eminent or outstanding personality known to "the well-informed passer-by."



Michael Macke and Bridget Villatoro are the two romantic leads in 'A Sister's Love.'

After lunch we enjoyed one of the dramatised readings of a work by Barbara Pym that have become traditional at the annual meetings at St Hilda's. Yvonne Cocking had adapted an unpublished story, unearthed by her in the Bodleian Library, called "A Sister's Love." It was hilariously performed by Bridget Villatoro, Deirdre Bryan-Brown, Michael Macke and others. All the performers threw themselves into their parts with gusto and extracted every ounce of fun from the farcical story.

For me, as for others, it was as always a total pleasure to attend this conference in the familiar, peaceful, riverside surroundings of St Hilda's.

Many thanks to all those responsible for making the weekend so rewarding and enjoyable.

May there be many more such!

Barbara is honoured with a Blue Plaque

Deirdre Bryan-Brown unveils the Blue Plaque.

Barn Cottage, Finstock, where Barbara Pym lived from 1972 to 1980 with her sister Hilary Walton, was the scene of a Blue Plaque unveiling on Friday, 1 September, the day before the Barbara Pym Society meeting at St. Hilda's.

by Tom Sopko

Friday, 1 September, was a beautiful late-summer afternoon in Oxford. About 30 Pym Society members boarded a coach at St Hilda's and set off for Finstock. It is a tiny village with roughly 800 inhabitants, three streets, two pubs, and neither traffic signals nor street lights, easy to miss if you're zipping by on the nearby highway from Charlbury to Witney. Hilary called it "grotty" and the *New Oxfordshire Village Book*

Joan Drexler of Washington, D.C. admires the selection of home-baked cakes at the Village Hall.

From left to right, Ruth Nissim, Eda Forbes, Lord Lieut. Hugo Brunner and Deirdre Bryan-Brown before the unveiling at Barn Cottage.

calls it "the sort of place you've been to without noticing." But it's also free from the gaping tourists, souvenir shops, and twee tearooms that plague the quainter Cotswolds villages.

We went first to the Village Hall, a simple wood-frame building originally built in the 1920s as a glove factory, where a wonderful tea had been prepared by the women of the village. Pymians and Finstockians met and mingled over homemade cakes, tea and coffee. After stuffing ourselves and reading the WI notice board, we moved down Well Hill to the High Street where Barn Cottage sits opposite the old Methodist Chapel. Local dignitaries and representatives of the Barbara Pym Society and St Hilda's joined Hugo Brunner, Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire (representing Her Majesty, who was otherwise engaged) for the ceremony.

Barn Cottage sits directly on the main road and its front gate area is so small that the speakers stood on that side of the road and the rest of us faced them from the opposite side. Finstock is usually a sleepy village, but late on a Friday afternoon many people use it as a short cut on their way home. So the speeches were frequently interrupted by passing cars, motorcycles, and the local mini-bus service. The interruptions became rather comical, and I'm certain that the Pym sisters, undoubtedly peeking out from behind their heavenly curtains, were greatly amused.

Delivering brief remarks were Lord Lieutenant Hugo Brunner; Deirdre Bryan-Brown, chair of the Barbara Pym Society; Lady English, principal of St Hilda's College; Eileen Roberts, membership chair of the BP Society; Ellen Miller, representing the U.S. membership; Ruth Nissim, current co-owner of Barn Cottage; Vicar Jane Knowles of Holy Trinity Church; and Eda Forbes, secretary of the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board.

Deirdre unveiled the plaque to much applause, and we made our way up the hill to Holy Trinity churchyard, where we paid our respects at the sisters' gravesite. I had taken a red rose from the gardens at St Hilda's and left it on the simple headstone. Vicar Jane Knowles then welcomed us into the church to see the Pym memorial tablet and lectern before we returned by coach to St Hilda's for dinner and the rest of our Pym-packed weekend.

Cottage for rent – guess whose?

Here is an opportunity that should fire the imaginations of most Pym enthusiasts. When Hilary Walton, Barbara Pym's sister, died, she left Barn Cottage to her good friends in Finstock, Ruth Nissim and Peter Bramley. They have renovated and expanded the cottage, which is available for rental. Ruth has written:

"It would indeed be delightful if a Pymophile rented Barn Cottage. We are quite happy for you to let *Green Leaves* readers know about this opportunity. Our agent is called Jamie Lamb; his e-mail addresses are www.springfield.uk.com and info@springfield.uk.com."

Report of the Thirteenth AGM of the Barbara Pym Society held at St Hilda's College, Oxford, Saturday 2nd September 2006 at 11.30 am.

Committee members present were Deirdre Bryan-Brown (Chair); Eileen Roberts (Membership Secretary); Ellen Miller (Editor, *Green Leaves*), Yvonne Cocking (Archivist), Beverly Bell (North American Organiser), Phil Bacon, Maureen Woolley, Bridget Villatoro, Maggie Parsons.

1. Chair's opening remarks

Deirdre Bryan-Brown welcomed everyone to the conference and drew attention to the bookmarks and copies of *No Soft Incense* (N.S.I.). The book is being sold at £5 a copy at the conference.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Michael Wilson, Chris Rutherford, Kathy Ackley, P.D. James, Bishop Richard Harries, Margaret Miles and Canon John Edge. Jilly Cooper had also written regretting her absence at the unveiling of the Blue Plaque at Barn Cottage, and sending her best wishes to the Society's members.

3. Minutes of Previous A.G.M.

Eileen made a correction to the financial report; income during the year 2005 was £3500.40 and the balance was £3163.82. With this alteration the minutes were approved.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Deirdre said that Barbara Pym's table, which was purchased using donations from members, has been cleaned and is now in the Senior Common Room in St Hilda's College. A plaque will be added to the table.

5. Financial Report

The Pym Society account as of 10th July 2006 stood at £3163.82. Income during the year was £2923.28 and expenditure £1753.79, leaving a balance of £4342.31 on the 7th July. Major expenses included: CDs (Larkin/Pym letters), £322.95; St Alban's for the Spring Meeting, £374; Newsletter £600; and the Blue Plaque for Barn Cottage, £220. (The Newsletter is now being printed in the U.S. and all the CDs have been sold.)

Membership numbers: 254 for U.K. and Europe, 237 for North America.

N.S.I has now broken even. However, Eileen still has half of the original production and Hazel Bell sent a message to the meeting asking if members could go into their local Library and ask for a copy. Shirley Dex said that N.S.I. made a very good Ordination present.

Ellen Miller (Barbara Pym Society in North America) reported that $3,300 is in the Pym account. Many new members have joined this year and the Society is doing well for funds.

Norma Munson in the States has taken on the distribution of N.S.I. and between September 2005 and July 2006 she has sold 17 copies making a profit of $93.52. She may reduce the cost to promote sales and will advertise this on the web site. In response to a question Eileen said that the unit cost for production of N.S.I. was £2.44.

6. Editor's Report

Ellen said that the 2006 edition of *Green Leaves* is now printed on cream rather than green paper as this reduces the costs of printing, which is in any case cheaper in the U.S. than the U.K. She added that she would be happy to hear people's views/criticisms of the new format privately. Deirdre said that she felt that the quality of the photographs was better. Ellen said she hopes that this can be improved further in the future. She said that she is happy to accept contributions from members especially for "Gleanings." Copies of *Green Leaves* are sent to Eileen in Oxford and then posted by her to U.K. members. Eileen said that the new postal format in the U.K. may lead to changes if it needs to be folded to fit the A5 format.

Ellen said that she had brought two copies of the revised *Following Barbara's Footsteps* (this should shortly be available on the Web). Eileen will take orders for prints; the cost will be £5. Ellen also recorded her thanks to Beverly Bell who joins the committee as the U.S. representative, to Judy Horn, the web mistress and to Norma Munson for distributing N.S.I.

7. Archivist's Report

Yvonne said that she is continuing to list the written material that she has, *i.e.*, any writing by Barbara and any reviews. When completed, this list will be available to members. Bridget has listened to all of Hilary's audiotapes and listed the contents. Maureen has also gone through Hilary's diaries. Yvonne does not feel that this is Pym archive material but will keep it. Phil Bacon and Michael Wilson from the Committee have also worked on a miscellaneous section. All the archive material is kept in Yvonne's house whilst it is being catalogued; she has audio tapes of all the novels excepting *Quartet in Autumn*. She also has videos. Some are in the St Hilda's archives.

Eileen asked if anyone could volunteer to transfer the videos to CD format to better preserve them. Yvonne had also brought in a selection of books not sold at the Blackwell's sale last September. She also announced that a copy of *A Very Private Eye* would be auctioned on Sunday morning together with other books. Muriel Watson told Yvonne of an article about Pym, "A Secret Richness," in *A House of Air*, a book by Penelope Fitzgerald published by Flamingo.

8. Elections

Since there had been no further nominations, in accordance with the Society's constitution, the slate of candidates for membership put forward by the Committee is duly elected: Chris Rutherford to a second three-year term as Secretary, Muriel Watson to a three-year term, Katherine Duncan-Jones to serve for one year and Beverly Bell to replace Ellen Miller as U.S. Representative.

9. Any Other Business

a) Yvonne read an e-mail from Hazel Holt that Virago will reprint *Excellent Women, Jane and Prudence*, and *No Fond Return of Love* with an introduction by Jilly Cooper. *Jane and Prudence* is due to be published in November 2006. An American actress, Lisa Eichhorn, has taken out an option to make a movie of *No Fond Return of Love*.

b) Yvonne also noted two letters from Muriel Maby, which had recently appeared in the *Oldie* magazine. Muriel has been a member of the Pym Society since it began and first met Barbara at work in Bristol. Muriel will celebrate her 100th birthday in April 2007. Deirdre said that the Society would send flowers to mark the occasion.

c) Rosamond Cleal said that Oneword Digital radio will take requests for an audio book to be played. She has requested *Excellent Women* and suggested that anyone wishing to request a Pym novel could do so online at www.oneword.com.

d) Tom Sopko said that Wikipedia has a good base entry on Barbara Pym but only a third of the novels have summaries. He suggested that anyone who wished to rectify this should get on the web site.

e) Kate Charles invited everyone to join her in attending St Cross Church for Sunday morning worship. She also said that her new book, *Secret Sins,* will be published in the U.K and Germany in January 2007.

f) Eileen says there is a group meeting in Devon, and she will be happy to help other members get together in their regions if they contact her.

g) Kate said she would be willing to host a tea party when she has moved into her new house in Ludlow.

h) Ellen announced that the North American meeting would be held at Harvard Law School on 24-25 March 2007

i) Eleonore Biber said that her talk on "Barbara Pym and Homosexuality" was available on DVD. She would also be delivering lectures on Pym for the English Speaking Union over the coming year.

j) Ken Ellis suggested that a future AGM expand the Society's structure to have a subcommittee on future publications /recordings, promotions and developments.

k) *The Sweet Dove Died* will be the theme of the next conference to be held in St Hilda's College, 11-12 August 2007.

Maggie Parsons

Call for Papers

We are searching for innovative papers to be presented to the ninth annual conference of the Barbara Pym Society in North America, to be held at Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Mass., on 24-25 March 2007.

Please send an abstract or proposal of 300 words or less to Ellen Miller at ellen@ellenmiller.net. If you cannot send it electronically, please mail it to the Barbara Pym Society, 145 Indian Hill Road, Carlisle, MA 01741, U.S.A.

The deadline for abstracts or proposals is 31 December 2006.

The Barbara Pym Society
2006-07

Chairman: Deirdre Bryan-Brown
Membership Secretary: Eileen Roberts
Secretary: Chris Rutherford
Committee: Phil Bacon, Katherine Duncan-Jones, Maggie Parsons, Muriel Watson, Michael Wilson, Maureen Woolley
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Town and Country in Pym's Novels of the 1950s

by Janice Rossen

London is often seen, in Pym's novels, in relation to the country—particularly to country village life. Mildred Lathbury, the spinsterly vicar's daughter in *Excellent Women*, reflects that her connection with her parish church in London echoes—in fact, reproduces—that of her past life: 'I sometimes thought how strange it was that I should have managed to make a life for myself in London so very much like the life I had lived in a country rectory when my parents were alive. But then so many parts of London have a peculiarly parochial atmosphere that perhaps it is only a question of choosing one's parish and fitting into it.' (p. 11) Pym makes fine comedy throughout her novels of the scrupulous gradations of social distinctions in terms of one's address; Mildred describes her own flat as occupying a relatively 'shabby part of London, so very much the "wrong" side of Victoria Station, so definitely *not* Belgravia . . . ' (p. 7) But the point of London—perhaps especially for a clergyman's daughter with a small income—is that Mildred is able to live in a place which is not a village. It offers unprecedented independence. When her friend Dora Caldicote leaves the flat which they have shared together, Mildred confesses that she had 'looked forward to being alone once more, to living a civilized life with a bedroom and a sitting-room and a spare room for friends.' (p. 11)

Finding community

Being alone, in this context, means graciousness and leisure (or, 'being fussy and spinsterish,' in Mildred's self-mocking words) and enjoying solitude, especially in the sense of not having to cope with another person's foibles. But there still exists a compelling need for some sort of community—all the more so if one is living alone. This is the first point I want to explore in this contrast between town and country: the community which Pym's characters seek out and create for themselves in London. In Pym's novels, this is often found in a nearby parish church—although professional relationships and romances are often sources of meeting the same need. Second, London provides endless opportunities for those of Pym's heroines who indulge in abundant curiosity about those around them. Dulcie Mainwaring, in *No Fond Return of Love*, is a perfect example of someone who follows her intuition regarding others, doing what she calls 'research into the lives of ordinary people . . . people who have no claim to fame whatsoever.' (p. 13)

Finally, London offers that which country village life usually does not: the opportunity to meet others who are very much out of one's usual sphere. Endless possibilities for romance delight Prudence, in *Jane and Prudence*, a heroine whom one could not imagine living in the confined circle of a country village, as it would severely limit her choices. Pym herself loves to create all kinds of odd juxtapositions and pairings, as when Wilmet Forsyth in *A Glass of Blessings* becomes friends with Keith, Piers's lover, or when Mildred meets the Napiers and also Everard Bone. At the same time, Pym shrewdly uses the fluidity of London social life to suggest that there lurk predators, as well as potential friends. Keith qualifies as both, for Wilmet; and Mildred must fight off the encroaching machinations of Allegra Grey, who wants to install Winifred Malory in Mildred's flat (and, not surprisingly, live alone with her new husband).

Mildred's corner of London

All three of these themes—community, curiosity and possibilities for meeting other people—are subtly blended in *Excellent Women*, where Mildred's corner of London begins as a kind of recreation of her past life, but soon changes radi-

cally. When the novel opens, she is close friends with the vicar and his sister. Yet, as she begins the novel by saying, she also is possessed by curiosity about the new neighbours who are moving into the flat below hers. She jokes about this interest, as she notices the furniture being unloaded from a van and carried upstairs, observing wryly: 'I suppose an unmarried woman just over thirty, who lives alone and has no apparent ties, must expect to find herself involved or interested in other people's business, and if she is also a clergyman's daughter then one might really say that there is no hope for her.' (p. 5) The moving-in of the Napiers—a navy officer and his anthropologist wife—is a peculiarly London, city-dweller experience. Unlike the stereotype of village dwellers, they have no connections with this part of London, and they meet Mildred for the first time purely by accident, since they share not only the same building, but (famously) the same bathroom. Late in the novel, they move away from London (to live in a country cottage!) just as casually as they moved into the flat which they occupy for most of the novel.

The moving-in of the Napiers—a navy officer and his anthropologist wife—is a peculiarly London, city-dweller experience.

What strikes Mildred forcibly is that they are substantially different from anyone whom she would normally meet. For one thing, they are not part of the church community, nor do they share her Christian beliefs. For another, Helena represents a kind of aggressive professionalism (she revels in calling herself a 'slut' as a housekeeper), and she also has a seemingly casual attitude towards her marriage. Mildred's constant refrain, in relation to them, is that 'people like the Napiers had not so far come within my range of experience. I was much more at home with Winifred and Julian Malory, Dora Caldicote, and the worthy but uninteresting people whom I met at my work or in connection with the church.' (p. 27) The new neighbours pose a challenge to her—she feels that her social skills, even as a clergyman's daughter, are unequal to the task of conversing with them. At the same time, they are fascinating—not least because she falls in love with Rocky, who utterly charms her. She is both uncomfortable with them—they are witty and dashing—and yet entranced.

London plays a role

The role that London itself plays in this novel is crucial to the plot, as it catapults her into a new sphere of life (with constant references to the old one that she has left behind). Given this, it is interesting to speculate on why Mildred initially set up house for herself in the city? It does seem slightly surprising that she would have moved to London from the country—although clearly she cannot stay in the rectory, now that her father has died. I want to propose the more general suggestion that Pym's heroines move to London in order not to be caught up in the closeness of village life, where everyone knows everyone else's business. (We will all recall that Pym's first published novel, preceding *Excellent Women*, was *Some Tame Gazelle*, which dramatized precisely this dynamic.) Mildred herself is ironic about this tendency to become over-involved in others' lives, and about her own skill in dealing with what she refers to as 'parochial' matters: 'I know myself to be capable of dealing with most of the stock situations or even the great moments of life—birth, marriage, death, the successful jumble sale, the garden fete spoilt by bad weather.' (p. 6) London does not pose these problems, or not in the same way. One can remain anonymous and isolated, unbothered by the potential exasperations of a flat-mate.

At the same time, curiosity is inevitable. Mildred cannot help noticing the furniture which is carried up the stairs into the new neighbours' flat; nor can she resist eventually becoming involved in their lives. In the keenest irony of all, the very people who are so dashing as to draw Mildred into an exciting sphere of life (everything from anthropology lectures to drinking in the afternoons to the alluring charm of Rocky's flirtations) are the most in need of her parochial experience. During the course of Rocky and Helena's pitched marital battles, Mildred is the one who is constantly pouring out cups of tea in a crisis. They are friends, yet not friends; they provide a sort of community, but a distinctly uncomfortable one. They offer grounds for lively fascination, but prove hurtful in the end, and ultimately it is a bittersweet alliance for Mildred. Inevitably, they move out of the flat,

leaving her to sort out what the furniture removers should take away, and they assume that she will provide help in whatever way they need it. Her own emotional investment in their friendship is not even considered, though Rocky's departure is devastating to her: 'After he had gone I stood looking out of the window until his taxi was out of sight. The effects of shock and grief are too well known to need description and I stood at the window for a long time.' (p. 167)

Meeting new people in London

The parallel to this casual treatment of Mildred by her neighbours is provided by Allegra Grey, who seeks to use her in another way. Allegra seizes with zest the possibilities which London offers for meeting new people. She has deliberately chosen to pursue Julian Malory, and succeeds in becoming engaged to him, through moving into a rental flat in the vicarage with Julian and his sister, Winifred. She then attempts to force Mildred to offer Winifred a permanent place in her own flat. This is an interesting plot twist because it confirms Mildred's conscious desire to live alone. Although Mrs Morris, her cleaning woman, tells Mildred that 'It's not natural for a woman to live alone, without a husband,' Mildred replies sensibly, 'No, perhaps not, but many women do and some have no choice in the matter.' (p. 170) The choice that Mildred firmly and continually makes, however, is to live alone, if she is not to be married.

The same choice, from another direction altogether, is made by Prudence Bates in *Jane and Prudence*. Although she does not have a church community, as does Mildred Lathbury, she has what her friend Jane thinks of as 'her love affairs . . . for they were surely as much an occupation as anything else.' What Prudence tells the assembled former students at her Oxford college is that she *wants* to live alone: 'I often think being married would be rather a nuisance. I've got a nice flat and am so used to living on my own I should hardly know what to do with a husband.' (p. 9) Prudence creates an exquisite life for herself, self-dramatizing her emotional states, and playing at all times for an audience of wider London. Dining during one work day at lunch, she is 'conscious of herself sitting alone at a table that could have held two. She was still young enough—and when does one become too old?—to wonder if people were looking at her and asking themselves, "Who is that interesting-looking young woman, sitting alone and reading Coventry Patmore?"' (p. 45). . . .

For the most part, of course, suburban dwellers are condemned to such uninteresting fare as watching the antics of the neighbours' children, or marking the dinner hour of the elderly couple across the street, or if especially lucky, overhearing a tea party in the garden next door, or watching the cleaning lady beat a few rugs. Much can be made of certain snatches of others' lives, however. Senhor Macbride-Pereira, the Brazilian who rents a flat in Dulcie Mainwaring's suburban neighbourhood in *No Fond Return*, muses quite happily on the scenes revealed by his front window vantage point: 'The things I see! he said to himself,' reflecting on his glimpse the day before of Viola Dace being handed out of a taxi by 'a gentleman who had kissed her hand in the Continental fashion.'. . .

Random encounters

Encounters in London, where one does not have the same cast of neighbours to engage one's attention, are almost entirely random. In one hilarious example in *Jane and Prudence*, Prudence is condemned to overhearing a conversation between two diners in a restaurant which exactly captures this resonance of the mystery of others' lives (when seen at a distance). The man who interrupts her own meal, to ask for a seat at the table, is soon discovered to be accompanied by a woman. The two discuss a forthcoming visit to his wife in hospital. 'Prudence sat for the rest of the meal, listening to her neighbours' conversation, her eyes full of tears. Disliking humanity in general, she was one of those excessively tender-hearted people who are greatly moved by the troubles of complete strangers, in which she sometimes imagined herself playing a noble part. The man sitting at her table, who had at first appeared to be a bore or even a menace, was now proved to be an object of interest. There was both nobility and pathos about him.' (p. 46). In later novels, such as *Quartet in Autumn*, Pym shows the bitter and desolate side of this disconnectedness from others, for those who are aging and who live alone, with no one to care for them, and no community. . . .

By now, I have strayed a bit from my original

point of the contrast which Pym makes between town (London) and country (usually, country village), and I'd like to return to that distinction by concluding with a few thoughts on *Jane and Prudence*, which makes the most obvious shift between the two worlds. (In passing, I'd like to say that in the opening of *Jane and Prudence*, Pym adds yet another geographical/emotional location to her depictions of London, suburbs, and country village, by invoking Oxford, whose transcendent presence remains an idyllic landscape, outside of place and time).

In *Jane and Prudence* Pym turns many of her themes about London on their heads by placing Jane Cleveland and her husband Nicholas in a country village, where he is newly installed as vicar. Community—that which is often lacking in London, unless characters search it out for themselves—is almost thrust upon them. They cannot escape their neighbours, nor being observed by them. Curiosity takes on another tone in the village, as all of the cast of characters are intimately known and observed and gossiped about. One of the funniest scenes in the novel is the sorting through of the deceased Constance Driver's belongings, a year after her death. Her widowed husband requests his two neighbours to take her things away, a task which they are eager to perform. Jane, who has not been invited to the ritual, mulls over her own plans to take part, relying on the fundamental neighbourliness of a country town. '"Yes, of course,"' she says, when she hears first of the occasion, 'her mind on plans for being there herself. A casual call? A request to borrow a lawn-mower in the depths of winter? How was she to manage it? No doubt something would occur to her when the time came.' (p. 120)

In village life, no detail is too small to remain unobserved, as when Jane goes off to lunch with Nicholas, and is seen by Fabian Driver (from his perch in the local pub) wearing 'the kind of coat a woman could wear only in her husband's presence, he thought.' (p. 59) And in stereotypical village fashion, everyone knows everyone else's history. Jane is eager, upon her arrival, to delve into their characters. She tells Mrs Glaze (who is to 'do' for the vicar's family): 'You see, we are like people coming into the cinema in the middle of a film . . . We do not know what, if anything, has gone before, or at the best we have a bald and garbled synopsis whispered to us by somebody on his way out . . . . ' (p. 19) Jane's village combines the satisfaction of community and indulgence in curiosity, and also—for her, as a newcomer—the chance to meet new people. Its smallness of scale makes this still easier, especially as she can use her position as vicar's wife to attend P.C.C. meetings or to impose herself on the small party who are sorting through Constance Driver's things. The problem with village life, of course, is precisely this diminutiveness: the same thing that makes it easy to get to know other people also makes it tedious, as there are so few possibilities for meeting one's own kind of people, as she laments to Nicholas part-way through the novel. While attending a P.C.C. meeting, she has offended those villagers present and complains to her husband later:

The problem with village life, of course, is precisely this diminutiveness.

'If only you could have been a chaplain at an Oxford college,' she lamented. 'You're wasted here.'

'But, darling, you always said you wanted to be in a country parish. You were so pleased.'

'I know, but I didn't think it would be like this. I thought people in the country were somehow noble, through contact with the earth and Nature, I suppose,' she smiled, 'and all the time they're just worrying about petty details like water-tanks and magazine covers!—like people in the suburbs do.' (p. 157)

Her initial hope, voiced at the opening of the novel in Oxford, that they will encounter people in the village who are 'less narrow-minded' seems doubtful from the beginning and is not fulfilled.

London provides a definite contrast to the close-knit village community because of its relative anonymity. Indeed, Fabian Driver has made a habit of taking frequent trips there, in order to carry on the series of affairs which has occupied him during his married life. It provides stimulation as well as escape from routine. Jane herself goes up to town in order to meet Prudence for lunch and on the same train encounters Miss Doggett, who is bound on an errand to her dressmaker. After the excessive closeness of village

life, metropolitan anonymity can seem a kind of relief. When Miss Doggett points out that a bit of Jane's underskirt is showing (on the left side), Jane shrugs off this information as negligible: 'I suppose I ought to do something, especially as I am going to London. People might notice, she added unconvincingly, for who among the many millions—six was it, or eight?—would notice that a country vicar's wife had half an inch of underskirt showing on the left side?' (p. 75)

The provinciality of the village

The village is a distinctly different place, and to some extent its provinciality forms the perfect foil for Prudence and Fabian to meet each other, as they are essentially sophisticated Londoners. When they both appear at the village whist drive (held in support of the Party's local member), they are drawn to each other instantly, and he invites her for a drink. 'The pub was just the other side of the pond. They seemed almost to run towards it and were soon sitting by a blazing fire.' The romantic tableau continues as he walks her towards the vicarage, and 'She began to wonder if he would kiss her outside the vicarage gate.' This, of course, proves impossible, with everyone else's knowledge of who they are and where they are going. '"Good night, Mr Driver," a loud countrywoman's voice broke in on her thoughts, and she realized that they were passing the village hall, from which a crowd was now emerging.' Fabian states the obvious at once: 'We must meet in London,' as he let go of her arm. (pp. 105-6) That is the only possible place for carrying on the romance they have begun.

It is precisely the smallness of community which finally defeats Fabian in his character as a Don Juan. Everyone in the village knows what he has been doing, during the years of his marriage, running up to London in order to carry on romantic affairs—moreover, bringing his 'loves' to visit his wife in the country. . . . This common knowledge of everyone's movements is confining, and can only be escaped by forays to London, particularly in his on-going search for romantic conquests. Living next door to Fabian as Miss Doggett's companion, Jessie Morrow seizes upon her proximity to him, however, to seduce him, and ultimately to use the pressure of local opinion to cause him to propose marriage to her. The funniest scene in the book occurs when Miss Doggett bursts in upon Jane and Nicholas at the vicarage, to announce her suspicions that Jessie and Fabian are carrying on together. This is comic first of all because it is her own excessive curiosity which has sparked this realization—she has been going through Jessie's handkerchief drawer on her companion's afternoon out and she finds one of Fabian's handkerchiefs there. It is imperative to share her excitement: 'She longed to confide her discovery to somebody, to discuss and brood over it, and began to consider the suitability of people she knew in the village. . . .Mrs Cleveland seemed to be the only person who might be at all suitable, and, who indeed, could be more so than the vicar's wife? One should always be able to take one's troubles, hopes and fears to the vicarage.' . . .

Country values triumph

In this affair between Jessie and Fabian, country values, as it were, triumph over London's anonymity and vastness, where social pressure is not so keenly felt as it is in a small village. While Fabian is never directly confronted by Nicholas (who in any case would not do so) nor even by Miss Doggett, he realizes that he has drawn judgment upon himself by his actions. He bows to the inevitable, appearing at the end of the scene and announcing his intention to marry Jessie. On her part, this represents the triumph of cunning and perseverance over that of London sophistication. While Jessie knows that she is completely unable to 'compete' with Prudence, on one of her visits to the country she spills tea over her linen dress (merely one part of a well thought-out campaign to win Fabian and oust her rival) and—her main point of attack—simply appears in Fabian's drawing-room one evening when he is alone.

The effect of Fabian's engagement on Prudence results, in its turn, in a triumph of London values. She is able to console herself in her elegant Regency flat—Jane writes her a warm and sympathetic letter, and counsels her earnestly: 'give yourself a *good breakfast,* if you possibly can . . . ' (p. 220) In effect, it is in some ways easier to cope with the effects of grief because Prudence is not surrounded by an insistent community wanting to comfort her. When she must venture into public again, after her retreat from the world, she is able again to dramatize herself

in her own mind, in front of admiring metropolitan crowds. Dining alone during the work-day, again, she imagines herself an object of interest to fellow diners: 'might somebody ask, "who is that interesting-looking young woman, with the traces of tears on her cheeks, eating smoked salmon?"' (p. 225)

London truly comes into its own as a venue of endless romantic possibilities, when Fabian can be immediately replaced by Geoffrey Manifold.

And, of course, London truly comes into its own as a venue of endless romantic possibilities, when Fabian can be immediately replaced by Geoffrey Manifold, the young man who works in Prudence's office. His advent as a suitor is even accompanied by a renewal of interest shown by Arthur Grampian (the scholar for whom they both work), and for whom Prudence has been pining when the novel opens. Possibilities, at the end of the novel, seem endless, as she reflects happily: 'We have many more evenings before us if we want them.' (p. 252)

Jane and Prudence creates a dialectic between London and the country which is all the funnier for being bittersweet. Nothing definitively works for anyone, though hope springs eternal. Early in the novel, when the two heroines meet at an Oxford gaudy, Jane tries to imagine a fuller life for Prudence that involves the country in a romanticized way, being 'determined to do what she could for her. When they got settled in the new parish she would ask her to stay, not just for a weekend, but for a nice long time . . .However, even Jane realizes that Prudence is ineradicably a City Mouse rather than a Town Mouse.

Part of Pym's genius as a writer is her complex view of life: neither town nor country offers satisfying locations simply because of what they are. In both places, characters must search for fulfilling lives, likeable communities, and ways in which to have a domestic life which is not too lonely (if a character lives alone) nor too irritating (if one shares a dwelling). Curiosity —a trait which many of Pym's characters possess in abundance — can be pursued and satisfied in either place, and possibilities for new relationships can appear in both (though London definitely holds the greater attraction in this regard). The contrast between venues makes each more interesting. But in the end, I think I would go further than that, and say that Pym's knowledge of country village life gives her depiction of London more depth and substance. She understands both the relief of anonymity which the city seems to offer, as well as the loneliness which (as the flip side of that) can also afflict her characters—and she explains it in terms of the contrast with village life. The countryside always exists as an important background to whatever is going on for her characters in London. Some heroines, like Mildred Lathbury, try to recreate a kind of village atmosphere for themselves within their chosen parish, and each character searches for what will best suit him or her, in terms of community, surroundings, and opportunities. But neither village nor town is unequivocally superior. As Jane Cleveland gives voice to, the most compelling ideal, and what remains eternally best, is to remain in Oxford.

Janice Rossen presented this paper at the September 2006 meeting at St Hilda's College. She has written The World of Barbara Pym *and has edited* Independent Women, *a collection of essays about Pym. Her latest book is* Women Writing Modern Fiction: A Passion for Ideas *(Palgrave, 2003). She is currently at work on a book on epiphanies in literature. She was Senior Research Fellow at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, but has recently moved to Delft in the Netherlands.*

Notice Board

The ninth annual meeting of the Barbara Pym Society in North America will be held at Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 24-25 March 2007.

The Spring Meeting of the Barbara Pym Society in London will be held on 20 May 2007 at St Alban's, Holborn.

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Barbara Pym Society will be held at St Hilda's College, Oxford, on 11-12 August 2007. The theme of the conference will be *The Sweet Dove Died.*

For further information on these meetings, please visit www.barbara-pym.org.

The Novelist's Use of Everyday Life

by Barbara Pym

Editor's note: Following are excerpts from a talk given by Barbara in Barnes, London S.W. 13, in February 1956. It can be found in the Miscellaneous Papers of Barbara Pym, 1922-79, in the Bodleian Library. Many thanks to Orna Raz who discovered it while doing research in the Bodleian and has shared it with Green Leaves.

We might use Christopher Isherwood's phrase 'I am a camera' to describe the process by which the novelist records his impression of life. But the novelist's camera is a selective one, picking and choosing, recording some things clearly, rejecting others altogether. And it is obvious that the camera of one novelist may record quite different things from that of another. The writer, like the singer, has a range and if he is wise he will keep within that range. . . .You would not trouble to write down in your note book something that didn't interest you. The selective process is at work again, showing that all of everyday life is not for every novelist, but that each one must make use of some of it. There . . . are four main ways in which he does this: in setting or background, plot, character and dialogue.

First of all, then, the setting or background . . . But all authors don't live in exciting or inspiring places—the ones that do must be the exceptions. Many especially nowadays, live in ordinary flats and houses in apparently uninteresting surroundings, as Jane Austen did, of course. But their use of their surroundings as a setting for novels is no less interesting.

I think many people enjoy the kind of novel that they might be living in themselves, and that constantly reminds them of their own lives. More amusing, more interesting perhaps, but familiar. And sometimes much worse, but still probable – the kind of thing that could happen, but fortunately doesn't very often. I always think that reading these novels is like looking in through a window. You're interested in what is going on in the house but glad not to be inside it. To take an example from the theatre, I feel that the plays of Tchehkov have this quality. . . .

Then there are the many modern novels set in a contemporary framework, which are so contemporary and contain so much detail that they will probably very soon become dated because of that. In a few years time the Espresso coffee bar will have given place to some new undreamed-of fashionable place of refreshment – though presumably the pub, having stood the test of a good many years, will not. It is very difficult for the novelist to know what to put in and what to leave out. I suppose the answer is that details should come in naturally and not appear dragged in to give a sense of period, as they sometimes are in bad historical novels. But . . . on the other hand, when we are reading, we do want details. Denton Welch writes in his journal, 'I wish that people would mention the tiny things of their lives that give them pleasure or fear or wonder. I would like to hear the details of their houses, their meals, and their possessions.' And I think we do enjoy hearing about such things not necessarily for social history but because they are pleasing in themselves. One wishes sometimes Jane Austen had given us more detail about her heroines' clothes—what, for example, did Emma wear, when she went to dinner at the Coles'? . . . Modern novelists do, I think, give us more of these interesting details.

[The plot]: The novelist dealing with everyday life is much more fortunate [than the historian] for it is really his business to see that things 'happen as they ought.' I suppose we find this carried to ridiculous extremes in those magazine stories which always have a happy ending. But even when a story cannot logically, or at the moment when the novels ends, be given a happy ending, the novelist should perhaps at least hold out some hope for his characters and show that their lives will go on somehow. This is not always easy to achieve and the reader sometimes has to be asked to help the novelist out. [*Mansfield Park* is Pym's example.] The novelist has to do a good deal of improving upon life at all stages of the plot. Life is very untidy and messy. . . .

I must now mention another use which the novelist may make of everyday life, and perhaps the most obvious one to the non-writer. That is the deliberate seeking out of experience to use in

fiction. I am not sure whether this happens very often, at least cold-bloodedly and consciously. And yet how often things do happen to the novelist, or to his friends, which he could use in a book and wonders if he dare do it. Perhaps he stores them away in his mind or in his 'little book' (most novelists do have little books, I think) in the hope that one day, when there is no likelihood of the people concerned being hurt or offended, he may be able to write about them. Or, if the experience has happened to himself and is a painful one, until he can bear to go over it again. Sometimes it can be a comfort to make one's own experience into a book, though this isn't realized at the time.

[Characters]: I think authors very seldom take a character straight from life, they are nearly always composite figures and the greatest source of material for character drawing is probably the author's own self. Even when a novel isn't obviously autobiographical one can learn a good deal about a novelist from his works, for he can hardly avoid putting something of himself into his creations. I don't suppose anybody nowadays would be likely to think of Jane Austen as a quiet spinster who had never known love but only imagined it. In *Persuasion*, the most beautiful and satisfying of all her novels (I think), she writes of Anne Elliot in such a way that one feels she must herself have experienced Anne's desolate tranquility—a peculiarly vivid phrase to describe a certain state of mind, better known, I imagine, to women than to men. And again, towards the end, when Anne finds that the letter she had thought Captain Wentworth was writing to somebody else is really for her. 'Such a letter was not to be soon recovered from. Half an hour's solitude and reflection might have tranquilized her; but the ten minutes only, which now passed before she was interrupted, with all the restraints of her situation, could do nothing towards tranquility. Every moment rather brought forth fresh agitation. It was an overpowering happiness.' [The underline is Pym's.] I cannot but think that the author must have experienced that feeling

This is not to say that all heroes or heroines have much of their author in them, but they usually have something. Most of an author's characters will be composite portraits—something real and a good deal more imagined. You will have noticed, I expect, how well some men succeed in drawing female characters, and women in drawing male characters. And you will also have noticed how they sometimes fail. When they are successful, is it because of loving and meticulous observation of people in real life or because they have unusually vivid imaginations? I think probably the former.

[Dialogue]: And now a word about the words characters in novels are made to say—dialogue—surely one of the most difficult aspects of writing. How is the novelist to make people appear to speak as they would in everyday life? I say 'appear to speak' because most 'real' dialogue is quite unusable by the novelist. It is far too rambling and incoherent and it very seldom, as dialogue in a book must drive [the plot], does anything toward furthering the plot. You often hear that the art of conversation has died out, but I sometimes wonder how far it ever really existed as an art. . . . Admittedly intelligent people will talk more brilliantly than ordinary people, but in a novel even ordinary people must be made less ordinary than they would be in everyday life. Dialogue must be made to do far more than our everyday conversation does. It must show characters, and it must help the story along though sometimes even the novelist must be allowed a few banal sentences. Somebody must offer the heroine another cup of tea. And she must be allowed to accept or refuse it.

Can dialogue ever be taken straight from everyday life? Sometimes we hear a vivid phrase or even a whole conversation that interests us. I should say *overhear*, because usually we're in a bus or a café and the conversation isn't meant for us. But generally dialogue needs very careful editing and stylizing. [Examples are given of Jane Austen's dialogue, Charlotte Bronte, and Ivy Compton-Burnett. Pym quotes from Compton-Burnett's book, *Mother and Son*].

The point seems to be, as I see it, that everyday life by itself needs something done to it before it can make a satisfactory novel. I consider that this is probably the greatest of the novelist's gifts—the power to describe ordinary things so that the reader finds his own sensibility increased and looks at his own everyday life in a new way.

Pym Gleanings

Barbara's blue plaque in the press

The Blue Plaque installation drew the attention of the U.K. press. *The Oxford Mail* of 5 September 2006, headlined a story by Samantha Simpson, "Honours panel picks novelist." In addition, the October 2006 *Oxfordshire Limited Edition* featured a multi-page review of Barbara's life, in which writer Nicola Lisle calls her "probably one of the most neglected writers of the 20th century."

Hazel Bell has sent the following item from *The Times*, 16 September 2006. It appeared in the Books section at the end of "Hot Type" by Nicholas Clee: "The Oxfordshire home of Barbara Pym, a novelist who has suffered the vagaries of fashion more than most, has acquired a blue plaque. Twenty-six years after her death many of her works are out of print, but the thriving Barbara Pym Society unveiled the plaque at its conference." [*Editor's note: Her works are* not *out of print (see p.15). However, we are pleased at the confirmation that the Barbara Pym Society is "thriving."*]

Noted in books

Kathy Ackley writes: "I was so excited to read the following blurb on the back of the dust jacket for the latest M. C. Beaton Agatha Raisin novel:

'Welcome back to Carsely, the charming Cotswolds village that's home to the 16th Agatha Raisin mystery. (If you've missed the first 15, just imagine a Barbara Pym novel with murder, mayhem and the sexual longings of a 50-something divorced lady sleuth.)—*Publisher's Weekly* on *The Perfect Paragon*.'"

In reading *Leave Me Alone, I'm Reading* by Maureen Corrigan (Random House 2005), **Norma Munson** found several Pym references, and adds, "In her 'Recommended Reading' section, Corrigan lists *Quartet in Autumn* under the heading 'Female Extreme-Adventure Tales: Traditional and Feminist' and lists *Some Tame Gazelle* under the heading 'Books I Never Get Tired of Rereading.'"

Noted in publications

Christine Shuttleworth spotted a reference in an obituary of the publisher Alan Maclean in the *Guardian* of 2 October 2006:

"He was Rebecca West's editor and later literary executor, and it was at his suggestion that Muriel Spark (obituary, April 17, 2006) wrote her first novel, although his relations with both were often tempestuous. He also rescued Barbara Pym from publishing oblivion, and was the British publisher of many North American authors including Lillian Hellman, E.L. Doctorow, Mordecai Richler and Barbara Tuchman."

Scott Herrick found the following in the *New York Review of Books,* 5 October 2006, "Men without Qualities" review by Joyce Carol Oates of *The Emperor's Children* by Claire Messud:
"... As if the 'good women' [sic] so attentively observed by Barbara Pym and Anita Brookner were taken out of their routine, domestic lives, given a shake, and made to experience a metaphysical chill, before being brought back safely home again."

Teen Haskell found the following reference in the 7 July 2006 *Christian Science Monitor*, in a review of *My Latest Grievance*, by Elinor Lipman: "Somebody hand Elinor Lipman an award already. The Massachusetts writer consistently turns out witty, intelligent novels that seem to suffer from Barbara Pym syndrome: They're just so smoothly done, readers tend to undervalue them."

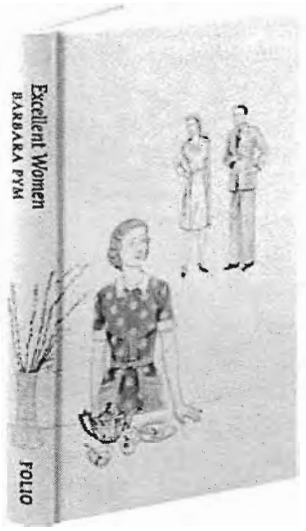
Kathleen Boyer sent a reprint of an article titled, "Barbara Pym's Affectionate Irony" by Betty Smartt Carter in the November 2006 issue of *First Things*, a monthly publication of the Institute on Religion and Public Life.

Susan Bramson reports that the 12 November 2006 issue of the *New York Times Book Review,* p. 7, includes a review of *The Stories of Mary Gordon,* with this quotation: "You'll find work that resembles an Alice Adams story, a Grace Paley story, a Barbara Pym story, a Louis Auchincloss story."

From the *Montreal Gazette* of 13 November comes this gem: "[Elizabeth Taylor's] novels are in the tradition of Barbara Pym and Elizabeth Bowen, with interesting characters, beautiful writing and sly wit."

Pym books in print

Moyer Bell (www.moyerbellbooks.com)
An Unsuitable Attachment
A Few Green Leaves
Jane and Prudence
The Sweet Dove Died
Some Tame Gazelle
Crampton Hodnet
A Glass of Blessings



The Folio Society (www.foliosoc.co.uk)
Excellent Women

Pan Macmillan (www.panmacmillan.com)
Quartet in Autumn
Crampton Hodnet
The Sweet Dove Died

Virago Press (www.virago.co.uk)
Jane and Prudence (November 2006)
Excellent Women (forthcoming)
No Fond Return of Love (forthcoming)

Following is an abstract of a forthcoming book by Pym Society member Orna Raz. It will be published in 2007 by Edwin Mellen.

The Fourth Wall: Social Dimensions in the Novels of Barbara Pym, 1949-63, by Orna Raz

The six novels that the English novelist Barbara Pym (1913-1980) wrote in the 1950s demonstrate the response of a specific class of people, represented by her heroines, to the dramatic social, cultural and demographic changes that took place in Britain at the time.

This book offers the first comprehensive discussion of Pym's work in the context of its time. It treats her 1950s novels as works of art doubling as social-historical sources, and decodes references that were clear to her original reader, but with the passage of time have become obscure. Whenever possible, it relies on sociological and cultural sources from the 1950s and early 1960s.

The focal point of Pym's novels is the interaction between the individual and the community: the church, the parish or the work place. Although her characters are distinct individuals, her female protagonists conform to a certain type: an educated gentlewoman, often still unmarried in her thirties. The eight chapters of the book reconstruct the heroine's social world moving from the public to the private domain.

Orna has also reported on a talk she presented in mid-October to the International Conference on Religion, Literature and Culture in Stirling, Scotland. She explored the significance of Victorian church buildings and Anglo-Catholic rituals in producing the feeling of holiness in Pym's novels. The talk was entitled, "Victorian Churches and Anglo-Catholic Rituals: Spiritual Uplift in Barbara Pym's novels of the 1950s."

Book Prize for Perri Klass, Barbara Pym Society Member

The *New York Times* of 16 November 2006, announced that "Perri Klass, a pediatrician and the author of several books on parenting and medicine, is the recipient of the 2006 Women's National Book Association Award. The award is presented annually to an American woman whose work in the book world goes 'beyond the duties or responsibilities of her profession or occupation,' the organization said. Eleanor Roosevelt, Rachel Carson and Barbara Tuchman are among previous winners. Dr. Klass, who is also the president of the literacy program Reach Out and Read, will be officially honored at a ceremony on December 3 in New York." Congratulations, Perri, from all your Pym friends!

A Pym dilemma

by Ellen Miller

Last month Eileen Roberts at St. Hilda's College received the following e-mail. Since it was from an American, she sent it to me:

"As I read BP, I am rapidly approaching the last of her treasured works. Can you please tell me if there are any other authors, at all, who can be compared to her? This is almost a state of mourning that I am feeling. Thank you."

Since this melancholy condition is familiar to experienced Pym readers, I appealed to members of the online Pym discussion group (www.yahoogroups.com, click on Pym-B) for answers. As expected, the Pym circle did not disappoint. Following are excerpts from the many replies received via the Web from Pym lovers on both sides of the Atlantic.

—How about trying one of B. Pym's own favourite authors—Charlotte M. Yonge? Both *The Daisy Chain* and *The Trial* have been recommended to me . . . I have both on my book shelves, but sadly, so far unread! So many books, so little time.

—I'd like to suggest the early works of Gail Godwin. She lived in England for a while in the sixties so she has somewhat of a British sensibility, although she's very much considered a Southern author. I especially liked *A Mother and Two Daughters* and *Mr. Bedford and the Muses.*

—I find Laurie Colwin's work to be similar in some ways to Pym, although she, of course, was writing in the '80s. Like Pym, most of her stories and novels take place in only a very few locations and are full of marvelous descriptions of meals and interesting characters, without much really happening. She excelled in writing about the small moments of life, one of the things I enjoy so much about Pym.

—When I first joined the group, the books of E.M. Delafield, such as *Diary of a Provincial Lady* were recommended and I found them similar to Pym (as much as that is possible, which really, it isn't. She has such an original voice, I think).

—I think that most Pym lovers would also like the six *Mapp and Lucia* novels by E.F. Benson. They are very upper-middle-class British and are full of memorable characters and scenes drawn in wonderful detail. And they are very, very funny indeed. But they lack Pym's wonderful irony and understatement, and while Pym certainly shows us plenty of human frailty, silliness, and vanity, she never judges, merely observes. Benson's characters are self-serving, scheming, pretentious, and pompous, and one laughs at them, not with them. Not an "Excellent Woman" in the bunch (except just maybe Olga Bracely, the opera singer).

—Though she is perhaps a bit lighter, many Pym lovers also seem to love D. E. Stevenson.

—I can't resist recommending the novelist Elizabeth Taylor. *Angel, Palladian, The Sleeping Beauty* and *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont* are particular favourites, but all of them really. There's a Pym connection, too, in that the two writers knew one another and admired each other's work.

—And for a little Canadian content, I'd like to recommend Bill Richardson's *The Bachelor Brothers Bed and Breakfast,* a delightful, somewhat absurd story about two brothers who operate a B and B in British Columbia for bibliophiles (Barbara is listed as one of their favourite authors and cat lovers. Sadly, it's fiction and no such place exists, to my knowledge.

Other authors frequently mentioned include Anne Tyler (*The Accidental Tourist, Breathing Lessons*), Anita Brookner ("but much darker than Pym"), and Ann Beattie.

The final suggestion comes from a wise reader and online group member: "We on this group have found one way of dealing with the end of Pym dilemma – we go right back and read them all again and talk about them with sympathetic souls on this list."

Electronic Green Leaves?

We are considering offering *Green Leaves* as an e-mail attachment to save on ever-rising postal costs. If you are interested in receiving the newsletter electronically, please e-mail ellen@ellenmiller.net.