Green Leaves

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society Vol. 13, No. 1, May 2007

The Barbara Pym Society in North America Conference 24-25 March 2007

Notes from a rising Pymophile

by Lauren Mechling

Of all the drawbacks to being born in 1977 (too early to understand the allure of Internet "social networks," too late for free love), the harshest one might be never having a chance to experience a time when Barbara Pym's books were easily found.

To be fair, there may have been a short window of time when Barbara's books and I coexisted, but I was too young to appreciate it. I have a very dim memory of my mother devouring pastel-covered Pym paperbacks while I watched *Reading Rainbow*. But it wasn't until three years ago, while spending a weekend on Fire Island, that I really got to properly meet dear Barbara. My then-boyfriend G and I were visiting R, a fifty-something sports official who had recently gone through a divorce. As it happened, G and I were going through a quasi-divorce of our own, and we couldn't speak for five minutes without bickering. Doing my best to keep my distance, I read in another room, finished whatever book I had brought with me by Saturday night. When I woke up the following morning, with what felt like months before our Sunday night departure, I immediately sought refuge in R's bookshelves. Unfortunately, all of his books were horrible-looking thrillers about terror cells and mad scientists. And then, something caught my eye.

At the very bottom of the shelves was a collection of tiny, tattered paperbacks by somebody whose name rang a bell. I plucked *The Sweet Dove Died* from the stack, and three hours later, when I had come to the final page, my mood had drastically improved. It was unlike anything I had ever read before — so strange, so sad, and so hilarious! This writer's style was unlike anybody else's, and I hadn't been this won over by anybody since coming upon Lorrie Moore, another wry hero of mine.

I dispensed with G fairly quickly, but Barbara Pym and I are still going strong. Every time I went to a used bookstore, I'd scope out the fat Thomas Pynchon spines, and sure enough, just to the left there was always a title by Barbara that I hadn't yet read.

Lauren Mechling

Until, that is, there wasn't. Once I finished her oeuvre, I found myself panicking. What to do next? I ordered *A Very Private Eye* on the Internet and once I was done with that, I started gobbling up books by Anita Brookner, P. D. James and Penelope Fitzgerald, but they didn't quite do the trick. Like a fiend, I trolled the Internet, looking for something, anything, that would quench my craving. And that's how I found the Barbara Pym Society. I wasted no time in signing up for the March conference.

As the meeting drew nearer, it dawned on me I had no idea what to expect. A scattering of ladies in their finest tweed, hunching over teacakes? What would they talk about? I imagined it would be a mixture of small talk and witty barbs, with a dollop of ridiculous academic jargon. I determined it would be fairly dry, but still worth it if it meant I'd learn more about my favorite writer.

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

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Imagine how surprised I was when I showed up at Harvard Law School and espied a gaggle of bright-eyed Pymophiles, all of whom were hugging and laughing. There was nothing dour about this group — and when they caught sight of me, several members swarmed around me to introduce themselves. "How nice to have a young person join us!" exclaimed one. "Have you ever heard Pym read aloud?" asked another. "It's so much funnier that way."

Everyone's passion for Barbara, I was soon to learn, expressed itself in fun, sociable ways — so much for the awkward chit-chat I'd imagined. As all readers of this newsletter surely know, the dinners are boisterous, the lectures low-key and informative, and the people are truly special — book lovers who love people, too.

I have to admit, when I first arrived and learned that the majority of attendees were repeat visitors, I found the concept slightly bizarre. There were people who traveled from California and Austria to discuss Pym-land *every year*? Weren't there other, more exciting, places more.worthy of a plane ticket?

Sheila Solomon Klass (left) and her daughter Perri Klass share an affectionate glance during their talk .

Claudia Deane (left) and Barbara Dunlap (center) admire a book bought by Yvonne Cocking at last year's Pym Book Sale at Blackwell's in Oxford.

Possibly. But that's not the point. Over the course of the weekend, I learned that the schedule of events doesn't begin to explain what goes on during the conference. Yes, there are lectures, and yes, there are interesting facts to be gleaned about food and radio and attitudes towards homosexuals in postwar England. But that's just the start of it. Overhearing people refer to parties they'd had together or letters they'd exchanged over the past year, I realized the get-together is about more than one's shared interests: it's about shared lives — a sisterhood of excellent women.

A sisterhood I'm happy to have found.

Lauren Mechling is co-author of the 10th Grade Social Climber Series *for teenage girls. The latest installment,* Foreign Exposure: The Social Climber Abroad, *is set in London and would surely be a fine addition to any Pym-lover's library. To learn more, go to www.socialclimberbooks.com.*

Marjorie Schnader and Tony Kaufman, both from New York City, must be analyzing a Pym text.

Isabel Stanley reveals some of the lesser-known authors admired by Barbara Pym.

The Ninth Annual Conference of the Barbara Pym Society in North America

Saturday, 24 March

"Kinship Tables! You cannot let these go!" Mothers, Daughters, and the Occasional Anthropologist. **Dr. Perri Klass** and **Sheila Solomon Klass**, co-authors of *Every Mother Is a Daughter* (Ballantine Books, 2006)

Group discussion of mothers and daughters in Pym novels. Discussion leader: **Diane C. Thompson** of Boston College.

Afternoon session: Influences on Barbara Pym

"There Is a Talk on the Third Program:" Barbara Pym and the Wireless. **Orna Raz**, Lecturer in English at the College of Management, Rishon LeZion, Israel. Paper read by Tom Sopko.

What Barbara Pym Read: Less-Known and Less-Admired Works. **Isabel Stanley**, Professor of English, East Tennessee State University.

BBC Films: *Tea with Miss Pym* and *Miss Pym's Day Out*

Sunday, 25 March
Morning session: Barbara Pym's Influence on Writers

What Is a 'Pymmish' Mystery Novel? **Kathy Ackley**, Professor Emerita, University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point

Pym's Lessons for the Fiction Writer. **Susan Lumenello,** author, MFA in writing and literature from Bennington College.

Dramatized reading of "Across a Crowded Room" by Barbara Pym.

Eighty attendees enjoyed the conference, held for the ninth year at Harvard Law School, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. We listened and learned, laughed and shared Pym moments, caught up with old friends and found new ones. "The conference," said one Pymian, "makes me want to reread everything. That is not a hardship." Said another, "It was encouraging to be among kindred spirits. And I had never looked at Pym as having themes before—I'd always focused on her wit and humanity."

Gloria Nakamura makes a point during the group discussion of mothers and daughters, as Michael Simonson and Marjorie Schnader listen intently.

The Mighty Pym Players, under the direction of Tom Sopko, presented "Across a Crowded Room," Pym's celebrated short story. Above are Tim Burnett, Beverly Bell and Ted Poland, with Yvonne Cocking as Narrator, nearly hidden at the podium.

All photos are by Sherrie Saint John.
More conference photos appear at
http://barbara-pym.org/z07.

Barbara Pym's Lessons for the Fiction Writer

by Susan Lumenello

When I was preparing this talk and rereading some of Barbara Pym's novels, I was reminded again just how wonderful a writer she was. But of course she was a very particular kind of writer—very English, very funny, very gentle, very post-war, very ironic. One would never confuse her with Hemingway or Faulkner, or even Anita Brookner or Muriel Spark, or a thousand other writers.

But even though Pym was so very Pymmish, she has, I think, important lessons for all those who would strive to write literary fiction, even the most non-Pymmish writers.

And let's say that there is such a writer out there, a would-be novelist about to embark upon his first opus. Let's call him Everard.

Everard is a contemporary fiction writer, an intellectual powerhouse, a man of the 21st century. Perhaps he even lives here in Cambridge. In fact, I think it is very likely that he does.

Everard is a serious man, and he's preparing to write a serious novel. It will cover most of the major spectacles of life, from birth to death. It will be an exceedingly masculine novel. Hard-boiled. It will take the reader to some of the world's political hotspots. It will be filled with graphic sexual encounters and a brutal murder or two, perhaps even some dismemberment. It will not feature a single vicar or distressed gentlewoman.

Everard has not begun his novel yet. He knows only that he wants it to be great, a work of art, filled with real characters and emotion, the stuff of humanity. And he would like it to become a best-seller.

Now, how can the Pym canon, of all things, be of service to a writer such as Everard, filled as it is with domestic settings and no crime at all, apart from the theft of a Fabergé egg? Well, Everard must first determine who is going to populate his novel, and Pym was a master of characterization.

For one thing, she shows her main characters at their most vulnerable. Belinda Bede in *Some Tame Gazelle*, for example, or Mildred Lathbury in *Excellent Women*, and Catherine Oliphant in *Less Than Angels* are seen as lonely, scared, worried, embarrassed, being vain, being selfish, but also exhibiting great self-awareness. Then Pym shows us how these characters behave in their *outer* worlds: Belinda in her North Oxford village, Mildred in her London apartment and vicarage involvement, and Catherine working as a freelance writer, also in London.

Susan Lumenello

Putting her characters in various settings and in various combinations with other characters—so we see Belinda alone, Belinda with her sister, with the archdeacon, with the Archdeacon's wife, with a group of acquaintances, with her servant—makes us see a complete character. We feel after reading the novel that Belinda will go on and on in her life; we believe that she has a life off the page, and we can envision another novel with her in it. That is the art of creating a resonant character.

So when Everard sets out to create his hero, the man who will save the world, the character who will be named Jack or Sam or Steve, he should sketch out some scenes, they needn't be long, in which Jack or Sam or Steve is alone, makes himself a lonely drink, maybe goes shopping for socks, maybe he can't seem to program his DVD recorder, and then goes out to a dinner party with friends and is his brilliant winning self. Everard will have to show an awareness of such moments in a character's life if he wants to write a novel of humanity. Then when Jack or Sam does go off to save the world, we love him all the more for it, knowing him as we do in his private moments.

I'd like to say a word here about Pym's writing methods, which, as far as I can tell from the relevant literature, consisted of keeping notebooks and then doing drafts. More detailed information than that I have yet to encounter, though perhaps someone here knows about it.

Anyway, to the notebooks, which I suppose all writers keep, to some extent. If they don't keep notebooks, then they at least keep notes. Pym's notebooks contained ideas for stories, ideas for characters, observations, anecdotes, bits of overheard conversation that she found interesting. They were grab-bags into which she deposited anything that she thought might be useful, either to a novel currently being written or one yet to be.

Should Everard keep a notebook then? By all means. Perhaps he will keep his notes in an expensive

notebook computer or on the backs of envelopes. It doesn't matter. What does matter is that note-taking will encourage him to be open to suggestion and spontaneous creativity as a spur to his work. He will box himself into an anxiety-filled corner if he expects inspiration to hit him when he sits down to work at an appointed time.

Back to Pym and her characters. If you've ever read any how-to books on writing fiction or taken a writing workshop, you've doubtless found someone insisting that your characters must want something. Their desire drives the story forward; their desire makes the reader care. Your character must encounter obstacles toward reaching his or her goal, and then either be ultimately thwarted or achieve the goal, or find a new goal along the way.

I agree, of course, that characters must want something, and Pym does this, but she is very subtle about it, to say the least. No one declares at the onset of a Pym novel: I must find out who the killer is or I must find out my grandparents' role in the Italian resistance movement. In fact, it might seem that, in the realm of fictional writing, Pym's characters' desires can barely even be classified as desires. They're barely even wishes and are more along the lines of a wistful sort of wondering: can I be happy as I am?

Writers are continually being told that their characters must *do* things, not simply react to things. They must make decisions and then go about fulfilling them. I disagree and I think Pym would too. Reaction seems to be a form of action, at least for non-heroic characters, the most interesting ones of all. Pym's characters are for the most part just existing, as they are, and then someone new enters the village or someone decides he likes person X rather than person Y, and often there is a marriage proposal or heartbreak followed by recovery of some sort. The characters do make decisions; they're just very human-scale ones.

In *Less Than Angels*, we have Catherine, the author of light fiction for ladies' magazines, the rejected lover of Tom the anthropologist. What does she want? What drives her character through the novel? I would say that Catherine wants to understand how to *be* in the world — her world — when love and security are so ephemeral.

That is not what they call in Hollywood pitch meetings a high-concept story. It's closer to the description of a French existentialist novel.

So what is Everard to *do* with this sort of information? His character — Steve or Jack or Sam — wants to save the world. He wants to use sophisticated weaponry, and he wants to bed several nubile things along the way. But remember Everard wants his novel to be a work of art and humanity as well. Some writing teachers or instructional books would say that your protagonist must want something on the outside that reflects what is lacking and desired on the inside — a family of one's own, for example. I think that Pym wouldn't be quite so rigid about it and would tell Everard that Steve or Sam must want to obtain something that is lacking in his soul, in addition to finding the secret formula or the missing scientist. More likely though, Pym would tell him not even to bother about finding the missing scientist and to give Jack or Sam an office job and see what happens to him during his daily commute. Again, more reaction than action, really.

In any case, Everard will have to think about all this. Perhaps he will make his protagonist have no family, like Catherine in *Less Than Angels*, and have him desire deep and meaningful human connection. Now, that may complicate matters when it comes to all the nubile young things, but Everard will sort it all out, I'm sure.

Or perhaps like Pym he will draw on people he has known in his life. Just as Pym modeled Archdeacon Hoccleve on her great love, Henry Harvey, and modeled Belinda Bede and other female protagonists on herself, Everard may find a model for Jack or Sam in an admired older brother, someone he's perhaps never fully understood. And in the course of his novel, he may work out his mystery. It's just a possibility.

Pym was also rather brilliant with her secondary characters. Now, secondary characters have a lot of work to do in a novel. They make comments that the hero can dispute and in so doing display his superior intellect or bravery. Secondary characters get into trouble and have to be rescued; sometimes they exist just to be killed off. And sometimes they are present to help populate and reify the world of the story.

It is for this last reason that Pym mostly puts her secondary characters to use, and she really is an artist about it. Her secondary characters are so strong that one could conceive of novels starring many of them. I could see a story being led by Piers Longridge or even Wilfred Bason from *A Glass of Blessings*. Certainly Alaric Lydgate from *Less Than Angels* would have made an intriguing leading man. But though she drew male characters wonderfully well, Pym clearly felt more comfortable spending most of her time with female protagonists.

One of Pym's great, and greatly used, secondary characters is Esther Clovis. She exists to anchor the anthropological subculture of the several novels in which she appears, to provide comedy, and to make the comments on learned communities that Pym wishes to make.

At the end of *Less Than Angels*, when Alaric Lydgate has finally decided to destroy his long-neglected field notes in a giant bonfire, Miss Clovis is

outraged and tries to stop the destruction. Alaric restrains her and tells Miss Clovis that it was Catherine who convinced him to burn the old notes. Miss Clovis accuses Catherine of being "a wicked woman!" The reader knows what Miss Clovis does not: that anthropology is less important than ridding oneself of unnecessary burdens. So many secondary characters are straw men through which the writer makes her points, as Pym wishes to make this point about release and relief.

So at this point Everard might well ask, "Am I supposed to include an anthropologist in my novel? I really don't want to." Of course he doesn't have to. But as he goes along, sketching out his novel, he will do well to see not just how his secondary characters serve the main character, giving rugged Jack a chance to shine and make the author's points about the grim state of the world, but also how these characters can stand alone as interesting beings. Perhaps Everard will create a scientist, a person of the mind, a character who is not sexual — that is often done to make the protagonist seem even more virile. He will deliver speeches about technology — so our hero doesn't have to and potentially reveal himself as a dreaded nerd. The scientist will be a comic butt as well, because he is not a fully realized human being — though that won't be his fault; it will be Everard's.

But as Everard goes about constructing his novel, how will he make his characters distinctive? The easy answer is: give them quirks or hobbies. You often see quirks disguised as characters in poorly written novels: so and so is a private detective *and* a gourmet cook. Why?

Because the author says so, because the author knows about gourmet cooking. Well that's not good enough for the reader desiring quality fiction, the sort that Everard hopes to produce.

Pym doesn't paint random quirks onto her characters. Alaric Lydgate may sit around the living room wearing a red bean mask from his Africa experiences, but that is essential to his character.

The hard thing to do with these characters, and what Everard and so many of us must learn, over and over, endlessly it seems, is to create characters from the inside out, not the other way around. What I mean is that characters must ring true, psychologically. Pym's characters "ring true psychologically" not just because they're believable but also because the characters are drawn in a way that seems incredibly revealing, even when put against characters in a thousand other novels whom we see having sex or giving birth or other supposedly revealing moments.

How does Pym do it? She doesn't waste a word for one thing, so we are clinging to every word because we know, instinctively at a certain point, that the words will be meaningful, or at least very funny.

She is also, to emphasize an earlier point, willing to show us her characters in their shame, the emotion of self-loathing. It is easier to show anger or happiness on the page than shame, because the author then reveals that he or she knows about shame. And how shameful that is.

There is the vivid scene from *Excellent Women* in which Mildred Lathbury, caught up in a surprising bit of sexual jealousy, goes to a department store and tries to buy some lipstick, a shade called Hawaiian Fire. The clerk says, "I shouldn't have thought it was quite your color." "What would you recommend?" Mildred asks.

> "Well, dear, I don't know really." She looked at me blankly, as if no shade could really do anything for me. "Jungle Red is very popular—or Sea Coral, that's a pretty shade, quite pale, you know."
>
> "Thank you, but I think I *will* have Hawaiian Fire," I said obstinately, savoring the ludicrous words and the full depths of my shame. I hurried away and found myself on an escalator. Hawaiian Fire indeed! Nothing more unsuitable could possibly be imagined."

Of course, for his characters to "ring true," Everard needn't confine his fiction to people he's known, assuming he's not currently working the higher reaches of law enforcement. If he wants to write a high-octane, high-tech novel about the quest for world domination, he can do research; he can have experts review his manuscript for technical veracity. But it would enhance the reader's enjoyment if he also displayed knowledge about the types of people he intends to write about. He still must know about their personal fears and desires, not just their work orders. He must know what they'd eat for lunch or their favorite song. That information need not go into the novel, but Everard must know it.

Pym knew many anthropologists and knew of their passions for remote cultures— or what were then remote cultures to English people—she knew about the nature of their arguments, she knew about their occasional fear that their work was meaningless. So if Everard is going to write about spies, for example, he ought to know something of their everyday lives too.

Now to plot, which is really almost a nasty word in the literary world. There's a prejudice against making too much of it because so many plot-driven novels are not good. They present half-baked characters and superficial or nonexistent moments of reflection and revelation.

Pym's biographer Hazel Holt has written that "very few people read Barbara for her plots" and that it is Pym's characters and settings that tend to charm the reader. Pym herself seems to have shared that

view. In *Young Men in Fancy Dress*, her unpublished first novel, written when she was 16, the main character, Denis, has just finished reading Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*, the novel that inspired Pym to write. Writes Pym: "It seemed to him to be about as perfect as a novel could be. Not actually about anything — of course not — the best novels never are—but full of witty and intelligent conversation."

Character-driven stories are of course the meat of literary fiction. But characters must still drive themselves somewhere. There is a book published many years ago in which the author contended that there are really only 36 possible dramatic situations, and he may be right. As every good reader of fiction knows, it is what the author does with even the most banal plot line that leads to enjoyment or disappointment.

It may occur to the reader who has, for example, just finished *Excellent Women* for the first time, to wonder: What just happened? It can seem as though nothing really happened, nothing more that is than a few characters gained a bit of insight into themselves and their romantic prospects. Can that *really* have been what those 200 or so pages were all about? Then why did I enjoy it so much?

Pym's plots are almost all the same; she's no different from most other writers in this. In the novels I'm focusing on — *Some Tame Gazelle*, *Excellent Women*, and *Less Than Angels* — each story has to do with a rather insecure but highly intelligent woman who begins by believing that her lot in life is not to be overly happy, goes through a period of trying to accept that fate, and ends by realizing there is a path to happiness and that she might just be on it.

What is Everard to do with any of it? Well, that depends. I've heard it said that plots don't matter, and that may be true. A novelist can have the same characters — say, a bipolar airline pilot, his adulterous tennis-pro wife, and their child, a tattooed skateboarder — and put them in different novels by different writers, have them do a variety of things but still come to the same end — because of their character. Another way of putting it is to envision yourself as a fictional character: one day you go to work, and it's dull; another day, you go to the beach; you're stung by a jellyfish, meet a lifeguard, and fall in love. Different plot, same character.

Everard could take the character of Belinda Bede, make her the secretary of his hero Jack or Steve (of course this would have to be set several decades ago), and she would probably fall in love with Jack or Steve, only to watch him go off and marry the daughter of, if not a bishop, then perhaps an ambassador. Belinda would still wonder about the implications of knitting a sweater for her beloved. She would still come home to her somewhat overbearing sister. She would still go to church.

So plot is not the most important feature of a novel, but it matters because characters have to do something, even if it seems like not much—as in a Pym novel — and because it provides the infrastructure. While I don't think that Everard or many other writers can benefit from Pym's plots on a detailed level, I do think he might consider this fact about those plots, feather-light as they are: they do not overwhelm the characters.

That is, the plot isn't so important that the reader has no chance to get to know the characters because they're too busy explaining secret plans or bomb-site locations or satellites or whatever to sit down and make a sandwich and contemplate one's existence.

That doesn't mean a character can't explain secret plans, but for heaven's sake be quick about it and get to the good stuff: who loves whom and why.

In a radio talk for the BBC in 1978, Pym discussed finding a voice as a writer, and I think it is Pym's literary voice that most of us might agree is the most resonant feature of her writing.

With Pym we know instantly from a passage that it is her work. How? Apart from the reusable settings and the demographics of her characters, and that it is extremely funny, we know because of the artistic choices she made. For one thing, she chose to focus on the intimate details of people's lives. Not their sex lives, although I think it would have been great to be able to read a sex scene written by Pym, but rather their interior lives.

She had an ability to get very small on the page and to stay there, quietly, inside the stillness of a character's mind, and yet use those observations to comment on larger human emotions. Pym has been called a miniaturist, and I agree that she was. She emphasizes ordinary details, trivia, minutiae—her characters notice them or ignore them in some cases, or a third-person narrator notes them. She does this not to call attention to herself as a writer, not to raise some sort of postmodernist flag about digression for the sake of digression. She does this to paint a more full portrait of her characters and their yearnings and fears. Somehow she makes the most ordinary, the most easily overlooked person into an avatar for human emotion.

In *Some Tame Gazelle*, Belinda notices that the curate's combinations are showing when he is sitting in her living room with his legs crossed. The point is not so much about the state of anyone's trousers, of course, but rather that this character, Belinda, would notice such a thing at all and that it would make her think about the somewhat elevated social status of the

curate, the ever-so-slight godliness of such a man, and that he too can fall victim to the mundane little insults from living that get us all. This observation of Belinda's joins the accumulating fund of knowledge that this character eventually draws upon when she finally reaches her larger personal realization at the end of the story.

So, does Everard have the patience, the willingness to draw, at least occasionally, in miniature? Will he find it worth his while to find the part that explains the whole? Perhaps he will have Jack or Steve or Sam notice the scar on his villain's finger as that finger is wrapped around the trigger of a gun. And if Everard writes such a moment, it will be extra nice for the reader if the observation adds something as well to the hero's character. Maybe Jack's long-lost father had such a scar.

In Pym novels one also finds observations, not just of characters' qualities but of the human condition generally. Sometimes she lets her narrators make these observations, sometimes a particular character does. Too few novelists seem prepared to commit to a viewpoint; they prefer to let the reader figure things out. Or, more likely, they prefer the safety of always showing but never telling. Well, all readers like to be engaged with the text; most like to unravel a bit of mystery as they go along. But it is worth it for the writer to stick his or her neck out for an opinion once in a while. Bear in mind, Everard shouldn't be pedantic about things; having one's characters go on as though they're spinning political rhetoric — unless they're campaign managers — is tiresome. But an opinion on some aspect of the human condition is welcome. If Everard has conflicting viewpoints, then he can divvy them up between two characters and let them fight it out on the page.

In *Less Than Angels*, Pym gives Alaric Lydgate a definite point of view. In this brief scene, Alaric is sitting in his living room wearing the famous red bean mask. Alaric is a lonely, professionally frustrated, even bitter man, and he likes wearing this mask. Pym writes: "He often thought what a good thing it would be if the wearing of masks or animals' heads could become customary for persons over a certain age. How restful social intercourse would be if the face did not have to assume any expression—the strained look of interest, the simulated delight or surprise, the anxious concern one didn't really feel." She goes on: "Life was very terrible whatever sort of front we might put on it, and only the eyes of the very young or the very old and wise could look out on it with a clear untroubled gaze."

Perhaps the greatest lesson that Everard or any writer, real or imaginary, can take away from Pym comes not from her novels but from her life as a writer. I speak, of course, of Pym's so-called wilderness years, the 14-year period in which her manuscripts were not accepted for publication.

Pym once wrote to a friend, "novel writing is a kind of private pleasure, even if nothing comes of it in worldly terms." And during her years of neglect, Pym continued writing stories and showing them to friends. She was an artist and driven to create.

As I mentioned at the start, Everard dreams of publication, even of fame. Dreams are pleasant, but dreams may distract him from the actual writing that he hopes will be his ticket to notoriety. Let's hope that when he sits down to see what Jack or Steve or Sam is up to next, he thinks not of personal notoriety but of adventures for his protagonist. If he is an artist like Pym, he will find satisfaction in doing the work. It may be all the satisfaction he receives.

Perhaps Everard will hit the best-seller list. But if not, if he is confronted with his own wilderness period, perhaps a permanent wilderness period, will the private pleasure of story-writing be enough for him? If he enjoys doing it, then it may be.

As Pym's experience should teach Everard, writing and publishing are quite different things. One the writer controls, the other, the marketplace controls. The Pym manuscripts that were rejected initially were the same ones that were later published. So, whatever fate befalls the story of Jack or Steve or Sam, I think Everard will at least find a lesson from Pym in that.

This paper was presented at the conference of the Barbara Pym Society in North America, 25 March 2007. Susan Lumenello's fiction has appeared in a number of journals and magazines, including Harvard Magazine *and* The Bloomsbury Review *(forthcoming). She has an MFA in writing and literature from Bennington College and is the editor of* Colloquy, *the alumni quarterly of Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. She will be teaching writing at Boston College beginning in fall 2007.*

It's dues-paying time . . .

Yes, it's that time again. Our membership year runs from 1 April to 31 March, and we are now in the 2007-08 year. Your annual membership in the Barbara Pym Society is renewable now.

If you haven't already renewed your membership in the Barbara Pym Society in the U.K. or in North America, please go to www.barbara-pym.org, and locate the Member Renewal link at the left. Just print out the appropriate form and return it with your check (or cheque!).

Your membership supports the mission of the Society and brings you *Green Leaves* twice yearly.

Renew now!

"There Is a Talk on the Third Programme": Barbara Pym and the Wireless

by Orna Raz

> Quite recently a tenant came up before a rent tribunal complaining that his landlord would not allow him to have a wireless set; and he was appealing for a considerable rent reduction—almost 75 percent as it happened. The magistrate allowed the appeal and declared that a wireless set must be considered as an integral, indeed essential, part of 'family life.'

This anecdote, recounted by the poet and BBC producer, Patric Dickinson, captures the significance of the radio in the life of the community in 1950s Britain. As a presence in practically every household in the land, the BBC was a major force in cultural life of that society.

Barbara Pym's novels provide an accurate representation of everyday life in post-war Britain. It often seems as though her characters are engaged in an ongoing dialogue with views and ideas that were expressed in the popular media (especially radio and newspapers) at that time. I will demonstrate here how Pym uses the radio to aesthetically enrich the text and as part of her social commentary.

I would like to start with some general remarks about BBC radio after the war. "Not many sets of initials became universally recognizable during the twentieth century, and those that did often had ominous overtones, from SS to KGB ... but everyone knows the BBC," observes the author and journalist, Geoffrey Wheatcroft. It is thought of "in the terms usually reserved for the venerable institution in British society – parliament, the Civil Service, the Law Courts and the colleges of Cambridge and Oxford" argues the sociologist Krishan Kumar.

At the end of the war BBC radio services were reorganized into three channels: the Light Programme, the Home Service Programme, and the Third Programme. Following the footsteps of Lord Reith, the first Director-General of the BBC (from 1927 to 1938), the BBC regarded the mission of the radio to inform, educate and entertain the British public. (It is noteworthy that unlike American radio, BBC radio was a monopoly until 1972). Through classical music, plays, poetry, talks, discussions, as well as its comedies, reviews and dance music, the BBC established itself as a distinctive and finally authoritative cultural institution.

The Third Programme, which was launched in September 1946, was the jewel in the crown of BBC

Orna Raz

programming, and was intended, according to its creator, Sir William Haley, the Director-General, for "persons of taste, intelligence, and of education."

The Third Programme was born at an exciting time; the previous year a new Labour government was elected with a huge majority, and there were high hopes for a new egalitarian society. According to the composer Alexander Goehr, whose father the conductor often worked for the Third, its imagined listener was a "hard working, Labour-voting school master in (say) Derby, who was interested in international theatre, new music, philosophy, politics, and painting and who listened selectively to all these things on the Third."

The programs' planners hoped that 50% would listen to the Light Programme, 40% to the Home and 10% to the Third. However, in reality, the BBC Audience Research Department found in 1951 that 70% of the listeners listened to the Light, 29% to the Home and only 1% to the Third. Ironically, even in this new "classless" society, the BBC research department treated the audiences for the Light, Home, and Third as synonyms for working class, middle class and upper-middle and upper class, respectively.

There was another, interesting reason why such a small percentage of the population was able to listen to the Third Programme. A few short weeks before the Third went on the air advertising its intention to use a certain powerful airwave frequency that was available, the Russians snatched that frequency. As a result, the Third had to use another, inferior, airwave, and many houses in Britain did not have reception. This Russian move was perceived by the English as hostile and signalled a beginning of a new cultural war. It was an early shot of what a few months later came to be called the "Cold War."

In Pym's novels, specific references to the radio are rare, but, as we can see from this example from *Less Than Angels*, when they do appear, they deserve

close attention.

> When they had finished in the kitchen [Mabel and Rhoda] took their seats by the wireless in the drawing-room, each with some sewing or knitting.
>
> 'There is a talk on the Third Programme,' said Rhoda, as if to make amends for worrying about such a trivial thing as unwashed dishes, 'something about the betrayal of freedom. It might be . . . .' She stopped and began tuning the wireless set, for she had been going to say 'interesting,' but the word seemed inadequate. "I think it's already started, but I expect we'll soon get the thread.'
>
> They sat back in their chairs and a torrent of words rushed at them. A man seemed to be talking, at phenomenal speed, about tables and why they did not rise up into the air.
>
> 'I suppose this *is* the right program,' said Rhoda doubtfully. 'He must be thirsty, talking so fast and for an hour too. Still, I suppose he would have a glass of water by him.'
>
> 'It is a recording,' said Mabel, consulting the *Radio Times*. 'Perhaps they have put it on too fast.'
>
> They listened for a little longer and then Mabel said tentatively, 'it would be a pity to miss the beginning of the play.'
>
> Without a word her sister altered the tuning of the set. 'I dare say Malcolm and Deirdre might have understood some of it,' she said. 'We cannot hope to now.' (*LTA*, 41)

This scene is a rather unusual account of one of the six talks entitled "Freedom and its Betrayal," given by the young Fellow of All Souls College Oxford, Isaiah Berlin, on the Third Programme between October and December 1952. Berlin's biographer, Michael Ignatieff, acknowledges that the lectures were "fiendishly difficult hour long talks, delivered in a clipped, rapid-fire Oxford accent." These talks led T.S. Eliot to congratulate Berlin on his "torrential eloquence." (Pym may allude to it in her use of "torrent of words.") Berlin himself confessed to being an extremely nervous speaker: "I hate lecturing; I'm a very nervous lecturer. Every lecture I've ever delivered has been an agony to me. And I said to Miss Kallin [the producer of the Third Programme], 'Look, I can't, I don't know how to talk, I'm no good at all. I certainly can't talk live, because I'll be absolutely petrified. I can only talk into a machine.'"

Consequently (as Mabel comments after consulting the *Radio Times*, the BBC program guide), Berlin's talks had been recorded before-hand, in order to alleviate his anxiety.

The Mabel-Rhoda scene is more than an amusing portrayal of the listening preferences of the two sisters (or an inside joke intended for those readers

From the *Radio Times*, 29 September 1946. (BBC Radio)

who could recognize the program and appreciate the humour). Although the sisters readily admit their intellectual inferiority, their inability to follow Berlin's lecture points to the ongoing debate regarding the inaccessibility of many of the Third talks. To attract the cultural minority to the radio, the BBC developed a policy of "no compromise" in providing the highest standards of programming on the Third Programme, whether in music, drama, poetry, or talks presented in the most scholarly (and inaccessible) way.

Mabel and Rhoda, looking for some diversion at the end of the day, turn to a play on the Home Programme:

> [and] were soon absorbed in the play, for it was about people like themselves, being an adaptation of a well-known stage success. After a while both the sisters realized that they had heard it before, but neither could remember exactly how it ended. (*LTA*, 41-2)

In contrast to the content and the delivery of the Berlin talk, the play is much more enjoyable (it also confirms the finding of the BBC audience research about the connection between social class and listening preferences). The sisters acknowledge the educational value of the Third Programme, but in practice even a repeated program is better than listening to the incomprehensible Berlin. It seems that the sisters' aspirations to better themselves through the programs offered by the Third are rather limited. Like most people, they prefer a radio program that is relevant to their lives, as the narrator specifically comments, it is "about people like themselves."

It is interesting to note that Mabel and Rhoda doubt whether even the more educated Deirdre and Malcolm could understand the talk.

Pym uses the radio program anecdote as part of the characterization of the sisters as middle-aged women whose interests are rather parochial. However, a subtle social criticism can be detected: there is no need to alienate good people like the sisters and make them feel inadequate. This episode suggests that the Third Programme could and should have been made more accessible.

Another program mentioned in Pym's novels is *Woman's Hour*. It was launched in 1946, a month after the Third Programme. Incidentally, *Woman's*

Hour became part of the Light Programme (it still runs today as part of Radio 4). Hazel Holt mentioned that Barbara was fond of *Woman's Hour*.

In *The BBC from Within*, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, Chairman of the BBC from 1947 to 1952, explains the nature of *Woman's Hour*:

> *Woman's Hour* is broadcast from 2.0 to 3.0 p.m. every weekday, at a time when, with the midday meal over and the children back at school, housewives can relax or so plan their housework that they can do it while listening. . . .
>
> The programme consists of four or five short talks or discussions each day, with interludes of music, and the reading of a serial story. All the usual subjects which are found in women's papers are covered. It is addressed to women of all ages, of all income groups, of all standards of education.

The veracity of this last claim is challenged at least twice in Pym's novels; in *Excellent Women* when Mildred Lathbury turns on the wireless after lunch for some distraction, what she hears is a "woman's program and they all sound so married and splendid, their lives so full and yet so well organized, that [she had] felt more than usually spinsterish and useless" (*EW*, 28).

Here, too, Pym uses a specific radio program both to shed light on her character and, by contrasting her world with that of the women who are featured on the program, to subtly criticize that program's intake of reality. The woman's program is not intended for the likes of Mildred; it only accentuates her feelings of inadequacy.

A similar example is offered in *Jane and Prudence*; here too the narrator comments on the suitability of *Woman's Hour* to her kind of female character.

> After Jessie had gone out for the afternoon, Miss Doggett felt restless and dissatisfied. She put her feet up as usual for her after luncheon rest and listened to a woman's program on the wireless, but somehow its competent little talks about breast feeding, young children's questions and a housewife's life in Nigeria did not seem to be planned for an elderly spinster. (*JP*, 178)

Mildred and Miss Doggett are very different women, yet both of them are not part of the imagined community that the radio attempts to create. Florida Scott-Maxwell, a psychoanalyst who gave several talks on the Third Programme in the 1950s, observes that:

> The radio and television are used not only to distribute news, information, and entertainment, but also to establish a tribal atmosphere; everyone using Christian names, everyone surprisingly fond of everyone else. It all seems to say, and this must be what we want to hear it say: 'We are all one, and nobody has anything to fear.'

It is not surprising that at the time when 90% of British women were married and family, children and housework were at the centre of their universe, Pym's spinsters feel estranged from that reality as reflected through the programs intended for women.

In addition to radio-specific references, Pym's novels offer many instances where we can find allusions to issues that were discussed on the radio or published in *The Listener* (the weekly BBC magazine which published a selection of the best talks featured in the previous week). Geoffrey Wheatcroft explains the importance of *The Listener* at that time:

> For anyone who grew up in England in the quarter century after the war, the Third Programme and *The Listener* were rivalled only by Penguin paperbacks as profoundly influential conduits of unofficial education. In his recent memoir, *A Short Walk Down Fleet Street*, the veteran political columnist Alan Watkins describes his boyhood in a South Wales mining village, whence he won a university place in 1950. Fifty years on he remains convinced that more than anything else, it was reading the series *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*, which *The Listener* printed from the Third Programme, that got him into Cambridge.

Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians, which Wheatcroft mentions, was a series of 54 talks that were broadcast throughout 1948 on the Third Programme. In 1949 they were also published in a book. The speakers were the most prominent scholars of the time, among them Barbara's own supervisor from the Africa Institute, Daryll Forde, who gave a talk on "Anthropology — the Victorian Synthesis and Modern Relativism." (Hazel Holt believes that Barbara probably felt obliged to listen to his talk, and she might have heard some of the others.) To give you a taste of the programs: John Summerson, the art historian, talked about style; Alec Vidler about "The Tractarian Movement, Church Revival and Reform"; T. M. Parker about "The Tractarians' Successors: The Influence of the Contemporary Mood"; and Monsignor Ronald Knox spoke about "Newman and Roman Catholicism."

Echoes of these lectures can be found in *Excellent Women*; in his talk about Newman, Knox argues: "Curiously his influence belongs to our age, rather than to his own." Indeed both Mildred (who reads a biography of Newman) and Everard Bone (whose sympathies lie with Newman's conflict and its resolution) could testify to Cardinal Newman's influence in the 20th century. There are many instances in Pym's work in which echoes of radio talks on religion, art, gender issues and education find their way into the novels. One such example is the question of the appropriate education for women. When Pym wrote *Jane and Prudence* at the

beginning of the 1950s, the novel expressed the belief that studying the humanities was the right choice for women. But by the time she wrote *No Fond Return of Love* (1957-60) that confidence was no longer there. The novel alludes to a public debate regarding the rift between the humanities and science in Britain and the inadequacy of women's education.

In 1957, Russia's achievement as the first country to launch an earth satellite caused concern in the western world and in England, and discussions about its implications took place on the radio and in all the newspapers. This was such a hot issue that even the prestigious Reith Lectures of 1957, the annual lecture series on the Third Programme in honor of Lord Reith, were given by George F. Kennan on "Russia, The Atom and The West." . . .

We can trace echoes of similar sentiments in *No Fond Return of Love*. Dulcie, who studied English at Oxford, is having doubts about the sufficiency of the humanities. She is not surprised to hear her niece Laurel's reply to a question about her best subjects at school, "I liked English and history best," and Dulcie "sardonically" thinks: "How many a young girl must have given the same answer to that question and really what did it mean?" Finally Dulcie asks herself: "What answer should a girl give now when asked what had been her favorite subjects at school? Russian and nuclear physics were perhaps too far advanced, as yet, but English and History could hardly do."

Although Pym and politician Harold Nicholson, who gave a talk on BBC radio entitled "Science or the Humanities," are aware of the fact that some changes will have to be made in order to compete in the post-satellite reality, and Dulcie admits that "English and History could hardly do," both feel sad about the prospects of a society that has turned away from the humanities.

In her novels Pym treats the radio and *The Listener* as a resource and even a form of inspiration. The information that she heard or read is recorded and later integrated into the opinions and the attitudes of her characters. Since the radio played such a significant role in the life of the British people in the 1950s, it is part of the setting of Pym's novels as well. Whenever it is explicitly mentioned, as in the examples of the sisters from *Less Than Angels* and the spinsters from *Excellent Women* and *Jane and Prudence*, the radio is used to characterize and to critique. Some of Pym's heroines do not find in the radio, which professes to be all-inclusive, any reflection of their own lives. Even worse, it demonstrates their alienation from the rest of society and emphasizes their feeling of inadequacy.

The presence of the radio in Pym's work has another surprising dimension. Many of us in the Barbara Pym Society know that whenever we have the chance to listen to a dramatized reading of her work, thanks to Yvonne Cocking, her characters come to life and the comedy of her work is enhanced. Indeed, Pym's novels are an excellent read, but when dramatized, they become even richer and wittier. In a talk on the Third Programme, "Broadcasting and Literature," the writer Alan Pryce-Jones makes an observation about radio drama: "Once the visual element is taken away, the dramatist can make [a] simple story infinitely more powerful." This comment seems to apply to Pym's work as well; as an avid listener to the radio, her auditory imagination was sharply developed. She had a very sensitive ear and paid close attention to all different aspects of spoken English, whether it was the cultured Oxbridge voice of Piers Longridge (*GB*), the slightly common voice of Father Bode (*GB*), the penetrating voice of Lady Selvedge (*UA*), or the Welsh dialect of Mrs. Morris (*EW*). Pym heard her different characters speak in their own special and distinctive way and was concerned not only with what they had to say, but, as importantly, with how they said it.

And now some radio memories of our own members of the Barbara Pym Society:

From Hazel Bell's childhood:

I do recall that all my favourite comedy programmes used to be on Sunday afternoon (probably repeated from evening versions). I deeply resented having to go to Sunday school on those afternoons and miss them. After school was over I used to run home as fast as I could to listen in — but I had found which houses on the route had their radios on then, and could be listened to, crouching underneath the front window! So I would listen to as much as I could that way, then when the then-obligatory musical interludes started, run on to the next listening post!

Yvonne Cocking's earliest radio memories:

My earliest memory of radio was probably about 1937. My father, who was employed in the catering business, worked most evenings, but was always off on Mondays, so the family ate together in the dining room (as opposed to the kitchen when it was only my mother and sisters), and we all listened to *Toytown* on *Children's Hour* (a man called Derek MacCulloch, known as Uncle Mac, did all the voices — I specially remember the baa-ing sound of Larry the Lamb!)

Christine Shuttleworth's childhood memories:

The radio loomed quite large in my childhood, as we didn't have a TV until long after most people had them . . . .

My parents listened to a lot of classical music and 'highbrow' talks about art, music and literature on the BBC's Third Programme. I didn't acquire this taste until early adulthood. As a teenager (a term not much used then), I used, like my contemporaries, to listen to

pop music secretly at night on Radio Luxembourg, a private station which, unlike the BBC, was financed by advertising and broadcast all over Europe.

Deirdre Bryan-Brown's memories:

I was always a very keen radio listener. I think being an only child whose mother worked meant I had even more time to myself than many children and the habit has stayed with me to this day. The Third was, of course, the more serious of the BBC programmes, but I do remember the wonderful comic series about One-upmanship by Stephen Grenfell, which the Pym girls would also have enjoyed.

There were many wonderful plays, classic or commissioned, and one would hear all the great actors, like John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson, my mother's friend Michael Redgrave, etc. The concerts were legendary — the BBC used to have its own orchestras, several of them, and several contemporary composers were actually on the music staff. There were also the BBC Repertory players, actors actually under contract, some who only did radio work but with wonderful voices. It was only when I grew up that I realised that radio is physically kinder to plain actors or those who became very overweight.

(Courtesy of creativearchive.bbc.co.uk)

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This paper was presented at the conference of the Barbara Pym Society in North America, 25 March 2007. Orna Raz is a Lecturer in English at the College of Management, Rishon LeZion, in Israel. Orna holds graduate degrees from the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Iowa, and received her Ph.D. in English Literature from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her new book, Social Dimensions in the Novels of Barbara Pym, 1949-1963: The Writer as Hidden Observer, *has been published by Mellen Press (http://tinyurl.com/2zudzr).*

From the Archives

Our Pym Society archivist-extraordinaire, Yvonne Cocking, has sent this notice that appeared in The Orthopod, *the newsletter of the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, No. 2, March 1956.*

*Yvonne adds: Alice Grace Pearce (1894-1979), a widow from Herefordshire, married Frederick Crampton Pym in 1946. On 5th of June that year, Barbara wrote to Henry Harvey, "My father has married again and given us a very nice stepmother of suitable age and a dear brother and sister, whom I have not met. He is so happy and it is a great relief to us to think he has somebody to look after him. It was all a great surprise..." (*A Very Private Eye, *252).*

Few, if any of the voluntary workers for the Hospital have a greater record of service on its behalf than Mrs Crampton Pym, of Highfield, Oswestry. The number of offices which she has held or now holds makes an imposing list and testifies to the long and active interest she has taken in organisations connected with the welfare of the sick and disabled.

Mrs Crampton Pym became a member of the Wellington After-Care Committee in 1931 and was appointed its Honorary Secretary in 1935, a position she held until 1946. The 1939-45 War brought further opportunities for service and from 1940 to 1945 she was Commandant under the Red Cross and St. John War Organisation of the Orleton Auxiliary Hospital, Wellington, for which she was made a Serving Sister of the Venerable Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

On leaving Wellington to live in Oswestry in 1946, Mrs Crampton Pym was elected a member of the Board of Management of the Orthopaedic Hospital and in 1948, when the National Health Service came into operation, she was nominated by the Board as a member of the new Committee of Management and still serves in that capacity. She is also a member of the Welfare Committee.

Perhaps Mrs Crampton Pym's greatest work for the Hospital is that for the Children's Comforts League, of which she has been hon. secretary since its formation in 1947. The energy and enthusiasm which she has brought to bear on this particular office has resulted in the building up of a great organization for the provision of cardigans, blankets, children's jerseys, vests and socks. The Dowager Lady Williams Wynn is President of the League, and she and Mrs Crampton Pym have the active support and help of a large body of voluntary workers.

There are many other organisations more or less connected with the Hospital of which Mrs Crampton Pym is an active member. Included among them is the Shropshire St. John Ambulance Brigade, of which she is County Officer; she is also Chairman of the Shropshire St. John and Red Cross Joint Committee which deals with the Hospital Libraries and Ex-Service War Disabled in the county. Her interest in the welfare of the Disabled is also shown by her membership of the National Advisory Council on the employment of the disabled, Ministry of Labour, London, and of the Oswestry Disabled Advisory Committee.

With such a fine record of service and experience it was not surprising that on the formation about a year ago of the Shropshire Voluntary Helping Hand Association for the Home-Bound Disabled, Mrs Pym was immediately elected a member. It is a record which illustrates that although hospital services are now sponsored by the State there are still great opportunities and great need for willing and enthusiastic voluntary helpers.

The Barbara Pym Society
2007-08

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Pym Gleanings

Noted in the press

• In the *Boston Globe* of 14 January 2007, book critic Katherine A. Powers marked the 30th anniversary of "the resurrection of Barbara Pym's literary career, and in my book that's big." She writes:
". . . her great topic is the shabby deal the world hands a certain kind of woman: the unmarried woman over 30 or the taken-for-granted helpmeet of some clergyman or scholar (the sort of man in whom high purpose and ego are a perfect amalgam). Intelligent and keenly observant, Pym's women live in modest circumstances and tend to occupy themselves with secretarial duties, church matters, and eleemosynary affairs. They are both condescended to and exploited as useful resources, but with the surprising result that we feel less pity for their dun-colored selves and more malicious pleasure in how meager those who use them appear in their self-regard and indecent presumption. It is in this light that I like to think of the publishing pooh-bahs who dismissed Pym's novels as passé."

• Libba Wolfe of the *Roanoke Times*, 12 January 2007, wrote: "My tattered collection of Barbara Pym's books has never made it to a bookshelf. I keep the books stacked next to the bed in the guest room. When I wake up in the middle of the night I head upstairs to my good old friends. Pym's characters lead G-rated lives in the small villages and neighborhoods of London in mid-20th-century England. She treats them with humor and kindness while exposing their flaws and prejudices. . . . Pym creates a world where most problems are laid to rest with a 'hot milky drink' before bed. I've reread them many, many times."

• **Scott Herrick** of Wisconsin and **Reverend Sarah Clark** of Massachusetts both sent this item:
New York Review of Books, 12 April 2007, p. 58; (review by Pico Iyer of *Devotion* by Howard Norman): "These antiquarian details and unusual occupations all add to the book's distinctive flavor, and yet sometimes it seems as if, as in certain Barbara Pym novels, everyone here is lonely or thwarted or conspicuously quirky, like specimens on a collector's drawing-board."

• From **Christine Shuttleworth** of London comes this mention in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 16 March 2007, in a review by Lucy McDiarmid of *The Ulster Anthology*, edited by Patricia Craig: "Like any good anthology, this one offers fresh and bracing bits, such as extracts from *Recollections of a Septuagenarian* by the wonderfully named Reverend Narcissus Batt, or the 'dry comment' of Barbara Pym, in a letter to Philip Larkin, that Northern Ireland seemed 'a very original place for a holiday.' That, notes Craig, is 'typical of an attitude of faint disparagement' found in other sources."

• **Barbara Dunlap** of New York City sent a clipping from the *London Review of Books* of 22 February 2007, in which *Quartet in Autumn* was included in a list of books on the theme of ageing for sale in the LRB Bookshop.

Noted in books

• **Veronica Wright** of the U.K. wrote: "I was interested to read the following in *Three Junes* by Julia Glass: 'And Marj is a good sport, he says, not a bad traveler. . . . She is a heroine out of a Barbara Pym novel: bookish, dependable, magnanimously stubborn and no doubt beneath it all profoundly disappointed.'"

• **Moyra Forrest** of Edinburgh found this reference in *The Scotsman* of 14 December 2006, not surprisingly in *44 Scotland Street* by Pym admirer Alexander McCall Smith: ". . . she had now reached the corner of Heriot Row and it did not do to think about sex on Heriot Row . . . She smiled at the thought. It was another Barbara Pym moment."

• Also from Alexander McCall Smith comes an excerpt from *Expresso Tales,* sent by **Reverend Sarah Clark** (Massachusetts): "[Domenica says] "I've made you an apple pie and there's a pound of sausages from the marvelous butcher down at the end of Broughton Street—the one who makes the real sausages. You do remember that wonderful line from Barbara Pym, do you not, where one of the characters says that men need meat? Not men in the sense of people in general, but men in the sense of *males*. Priceless!"

Noted online

• New member **Paula Sutcliffe** of Albany, New York, sent a print-out from *Anglicans Online* (http://anglicansonline.org) which concentrated on the novels of Barbara Pym for Lent and Holy Week: "Her books are like cool glasses of water in their quiet, calm power, and whether she writes about people or Anglicanism or gentrification, Pym illuminates with diagnostic clarity the heart of a matter."

• In the online *Post-Tribune* of Northwest Indiana, dated 5 February 2007, we noted with alarm the following by Piet Levy on the challenges of weeding books from public libraries: "Weeding can also lead to some surprising revelations . . . . For instance, all the novels written by British author Barbara Pym, popular during her prime in the early '60s and late '70s, have been removed from Porter County [Indiana libraries]."

• "Pym and Proper: Fans of British Novelist Barbara Pym Are as Quirky as Her Books" was written by **Lauren Mechling**, who attended her first Pym Conference at Harvard in March [see page 1 of this issue]. Her article appeared online in the CBC (Canadian

Pym Gleanings continued from page 15

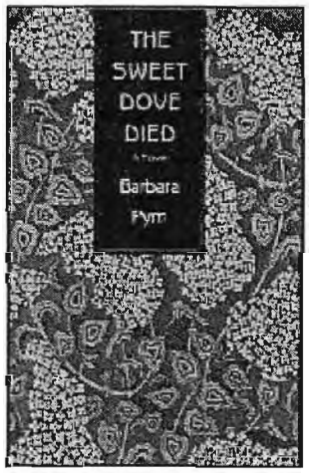
Broadcasting Company) Arts magazine, 24 April 2007, at www.cbc.ca/arts/books/pym.html.

Miscellany

• And in the category of plays comes the following: "*Some Tame Gazelle*, Feb. 18, 2 p.m. Play set in a pre-World War II English village follows activities of two spinster sisters. Based on work by Barbara Pym, at St. Benedict's Episcopal Church in Los Osos, California."

The Barbara Pym Society Annual Meeting and Conference

11-12 August 2007



at St Hilda's College University of Oxford

'The Sweet Dove Died'

Speakers: Judith Baron, Yvonne Cocking, Stephanie Kay, Isabel Stanley, Kay Phelps

Booking form is at www.barbara-pym.org

The Barbara-Julian Romance

Many members will be aware of the romance Barbara enjoyed over the winter/spring of 1937-38 with Julian Amery, a 19-year-old Balliol undergraduate.

The affair is recounted in a book entitled *Speaking for England* by David Faber, now out in paperback (Pocket Books £9.99). Julian was active in student politics and dreamed of a career in government, an ambition he achieved by entering the House of Commons and serving as a Minister in the Governments of Harold Macmillan and Ted Heath. David Faber's book is a comprehensive account of the lives of three members of one of Britain's foremost political families. Leo Amery, Julian's father, was a contemporary of Churchill and held one of the most prestigious ministerial posts, Secretary of State for India. His elder son John (known as Jack) was the black sheep. After numerous brushes with the law and social convention, he broadcast anti-government propaganda from Berlin during World War II and shortly after the war was hanged for treason.

This love affair has been described by Professor Nancy Talburt as Barbara's "perfect romance." Faber acknowledges its role in Barbara's life and how, afterwards, she modeled a number of her characters on Julian and his mother, notably Simon Beddoes and Lady Beddoes in *Crampton Hodnet*. Unfortunately, he provides no answer to one intriguing mystery: why, in later life, was Julian so reluctant to admit to the affair?

Editor's note: Many thanks to Michael Wilson of the U.K. for this contribution.

"Pymmish" Mystery Writers

(list compiled by Kathy Ackley for her talk at the Pym Conference at Harvard)

M. C. Beaton (Agatha Raisin series)
Joan Coggin (Lady Lupin novels)
D. M. Greenwood (Deaconness Theodora Braithwaite novels)
Catherine Aird (Inspector C.D. Sloane novels)
Hazel Holt (Mrs. Malory novels)
P. D. James (Adam Dalgliesh novels)
Kate Charles (Book of Psalms series & others)

"Catherine Aird, D. M. Greenwood, Hazel Holt, and Kate Charles are, in my opinion, the best examples of mystery writers whose works have strong Pymmish overtones," said Kathy. "Charles and Holt have been directly influenced by Barbara Pym, and they are the two writers to turn to if you want to hear strong echoes of Pym's voice in British mysteries. But the other writers also have their wonderful Pymmish touches, especially Catherine Aird and D. M. Greenwood, nor can you go wrong reading M.C. Beaton and Joan Coggin."