Green Leaves

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The Barbara Pym Society Annual Meeting and Conference

An American's first conference at St. Hilda's

Susan Bramson of Philadelphia attended her first St. Hilda's conference in August and reported on it for the online Pym discussion group. She has generously shared her memories with Green Leaves, *and we include excerpts below. Susan's report begins on Saturday afternoon, after the AGM – she took the morning off to sightsee in Oxford and just made it back in time for lunch.*

After a lovely lunch, the conference, whose theme was *The Sweet Dove Died (SDD)*, began in the Vernon Harcourt Room of South Hall. Yvonne Cocking, the archivist of the Barbara Pym Society, welcomed us and spoke on "*The Sweet Dove Died*: Publication History and Public Reaction." She told us that there are several drafts of SDD in the Bodleian. The first version that Pym sent to Jonathan Cape was considered to be lacking the "neatness and irony" of the earlier books. Philip Larkin suggested that she make Leonora the "real centre of the book." [Yvonne's presentation is excerpted on page 8.]

Next, Stéphanie Kay, who is working on her D.Phil. at Trinity College, spoke on the topic "Is Leonora Happy?" She pointed out that one of the qualities Pym enjoyed about Leonora was the freedom that it gave her (Pym) to indulge in Leonora's aestheticism and that Pym challenges us to see things through Leonora's view. [Stéphanie Kay's talk appears on page 4.]

Margaret Kean, the Helen Gardner Fellow in English at St Hilda's College and a Milton scholar, then spoke on "How Beautifully Packed, Thank You So Much: On Reading *The Sweet Dove Died*." She sees Leonora as "an alternative, dark side of Pym."

Margaret characterized this novel as "Pym with the gloves off," containing the "well-known Pym furniture, but somewhat rearranged" and "packed full of love triangles." It is also a novel in which we learn that there is a price to be paid. Leonora pays her dues,

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

Left to right, Louise Smith, Jeannette Molzer and Susan Bramson enjoy the sunset reception on St. Hilda's South Lawn.

but there comes a point at which she won't pay any more. Will she give up on perfection? At the end of the novel, Margaret believes that Leonora wins – she does not give in and will not drink second-rate wine.

Speaking on "Chinese Vases and Fruitwood Mirrors: The Role of Antiques in *The Sweet Dove Died*" was Professor Isabel Stanley of East Tennessee State University.

Isabel noted that antiques, antiques shops and dealers all play an important role in the novel. Leonora's house is tastefully furnished with Victoriana and, of course, it is through antiques that Leonora, Humphrey and James meet. Isabel cited a journal entry for 1962 in *A Very Private Eye* about a "little Italian bowl." This may have been when the character of Leonora began to emerge in Pym's mind.

Isabel pointed out that Leonora "always cared as much for inanimate objects as for people...," that both James and Humphrey frequently brought her little gifts for her collection, and that Leonora chose to display the

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Christine Rutherford (left), secretary, and Deirdre Bryan-Brown, outgoing chair, of the Barbara Pym Society, confer before the Annual General Meeting.

Dan and Ann DiPietro weigh in during the group discussion of *The Sweet Dove Died.*

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photo of her grandparents, rather than her parents, because her grandparents were more distinguished-looking. Leonora likes everything in her life to be perfect.

In conclusion Isabel observes that although Leonora loses James, she keeps her collection of Victoriana, her charming house and Humphrey as her faithful admirer: "The reader believes her to be content."

After the talks, at 5:30 p.m. on a beautiful evening, I sit down on a bench, overlooking the Cherwell River. I see lots of punters and people in paddleboats on the river. I hear students shrieking and laughing because their boat has gotten too close to the edge and overhanging branches are hitting them. (Shades of Francis Cleveland and Barbara Bird in *Crampton Hodnet.*) Just before sunset, we enjoyed a champagne reception on the lawn on the bank of the Cherwell.

Then came the annual dinner. We were served a delicious meal of pheasant breast, Dauphinoise potatoes, green beans, and chocolate and Devon blue cheese tart, followed by coffee and petits-fours. The after-dinner speakers were Kay Phelps and Judith Baron, two former neighbors of Barbara and Hilary in Finstock. They told wonderful stories about how warm and neighborly Barbara had been. Judith and Kay both had families, with dogs and small children, and Barbara had been very gracious, especially at the point when there was no proper separating wall between her house and Judith's. Barbara had been a huge influence on the formative years of Judith's children, and both women spoke of how much they and their families missed Barbara after they moved away. After their informal talk, Kay graciously presented the Barbara Pym Society with a beautiful and elegant leather box that had belonged to Barbara. It was a touching moment.

The evening was magical. Maybe the champagne and wine helped, but I was overcome with emotion. Perfect evenings don't come along so often in this life.

On Sunday, the conference proceedings began at 11:30 a.m. with a lively group discussion of *The Sweet Dove Died*, led by Christine Rutherford and Michael Wilson. Everyone seemed to have something to say about Leonora. For example, one participant said, "After Leonora left the note for Miss Foxe, two turns around the park convinced her of the rightness of her actions. This was very Jane Austen."

After lunch, another delicious meal, we enjoyed the much-anticipated dramatized reading of *The Sweet Dove Died,* adapted by Yvonne Cocking. The outstanding cast included some Pym members who were joined by students from the Guildford School of Acting, where Pym Committee member Bridget Villatoro works. Gary Horner, a young man from Scotland who played Ned, did an amazing American accent with a "gnatlike"voice and sounded just as you would expect Ned to sound. Marigold Gordon-Gray was an excellent Leonora. The performance was so well done that with a little imagination, it felt as if I had spent an afternoon at the theater.

Before the conference ended, we had one more cup of restorative tea or coffee, with biscuits, and the chance to socialize before heading home. For me, it was an amazing time – socializing, just being in Oxford and seeing all the wonderful sights, especially the guided tour with Eleonore Biber of the Pym places which I'd been imagining for years: Magdalen Bridge, a house like Miss Doggett's, the Botanical Garden, the monkey puzzle tree. Just walking up the High Street was a thrill. All of this, along with the lectures and dramatized reading, made up, for me, the experience of a lifetime. ☙

Minutes of the Barbara Pym Society Annual General Meeting
Saturday, 11 August 2007, at 11:30 am.

Chair Deirdre Bryan-Brown welcomed all, especially new members and reminded us that, sadly, this was her last AGM as Chairman of the Society.

Apologies. U.S. – Beverly Bell, Charles Gilbert, Tom Sopko, Judy Horn. U.K. – Canon John Edge, Maureen Lenk, Barbara Newman, Muriel Watson, Stephen Shell, Muriel Maby, Louise Ross. Minutes of the last meeting were agreed. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

Financial Report. As of 10 July 2006 the account stood at £4342.31. Income during the year was £3915.76 and expenditure £3789.40 leaving a balance of £4468.67 on 20 July 2007. Major expenses included St. Alban's for the Spring Meeting: £432, two newsletters: £560, Tappins (Blue Plaque coach): £165 and mugs £52. We just broke even on the Spring Meeting. Ellen Miller reported that the Barbara Pym Society in North America has $1,000 in its account.

Membership is divided fairly equally between U.S. and U.K. members with approximately 250 each. The U.K appears to have more as old members stay on the list for some time. The Chairman said that membership fees may rise next year owing to increased costs.

Archivist's Report. Yvonne Cocking has books of criticism, audio books, original material, odd unpublished items, obituaries, memorials and reports of the Society. It was agreed that we should publish lists of this material on the web so people can use it. It should be exploited. The Chairman remarked on the huge amount of work Yvonne does and everyone thanked her for it, with applause.

Committee. As no other nominations have been received, the following slate has been approved:

Michael Wilson for a second three-year term.
Deborah Fisher for a three-year term.
Jean Harker to complete two years of a three-year term.
Clemence Schultze to become Chair.

Maggie Parsons has completed her terms of office. Again sadly, we are losing her with many grateful thanks for her work and support. We hope she will continue to be actively involved.

Editor's Report. The general opinion is that *Green Leaves* has improved. For a small press it is a very good publication. Ellen Miller is still looking for articles and would like to balance the U.S. and the U.K. contributions. The mailing cost of *Green Leaves* continues to escalate. The idea of distributing it online has been investigated and rejected on the grounds of very few takers.

Any Other Business. Yvonne Cocking reported that Hazel Holt sent her regrets and love and the news that *Jane and Prudence* should be out in December '07 with *Excellent Women* and *No Fond Return of Love* due out next year. There is the possibility of a radio adaptation of *Jane and Prudence* coming up.

Orna Raz published *Social Dimensions in the novels of Barbara Pym* this year, which is very good. Deborah Fisher has a review copy she will auction later in the meeting for BP funds. There will be a review of it in *Green Leaves* by Barbara Dunlap. There will be a coupon on the web to download to get the book at half price.

Tim Burnett seeks the highest bidder for Orna Raz's new book. Seated from left to right are Rita Phillips, Diana Gulland, Isabel Stanley and Stéphanie Kay.

Ellen Miller reported that Moyer Bell is devoted to keeping up the BP publishing schedule in the U.S. *An Unsuitable Attachment* is due in November and *A Glass of Blessings* in January. *A Very Private Eye* should be out in the spring and one other, as yet unidentified, in the summer of 2008. MB has rights to all books except *Excellent Women* and *Quartet in Autumn*. All MB books are available on Amazon.com. The MB website (moyerbellbooks.com) is now working.

Past Newsletters are available at £1.00 per copy, with *No Soft Incense* at £5.00.

Kate Charles's latest book, *Secret Sins*, was published in the U.S. in March and is out in the U.K. in September.

Eileen Roberts reported that owing to refurbishments in the dining hall and the Senior Common Room, the plaque was not yet fixed to Barbara's table, which has been cared for carefully and is back in the SCR.

Future Meetings. The North American Conference will be on April 12 and 13, 2008, at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Mass. The Chairman thoroughly recommended the meeting to all.

The spring meeting in London will be on April 27. Next year's Annual Conference will be on August 9 and 10; the theme will be *Under the Influence* – looking at writers who influenced Barbara and those whom she has influenced. *An Academic Question* will be the book for 2009.

Michael Wilson suggested asking David Faber to speak at the spring meeting and would like suggestions for other speakers. Rosamund Cleal asked if there could be a display of books from Barbara's library. Kate Charles suggested a coach tour to include Oswestry and London at the start of the next annual conference. Anyone interested in participating or helping should contact her. A walking tour of Oxford, preferably on the Friday afternoon before the conference, was also suggested.

Members were asked to let the Committee know if they were involved in another literary society.

Respectfully submitted,

Is Leonora Happy?

by Stéphanie Kay

Critics have tended to interpret Leonora Eyre's story in *The Sweet Dove Died* as one of defeat, or even of comeuppance. Leonora is said to be "strong-willed but finally miserable and helpless in her self-absorption." Or she's compared to poor, mad Marcia Ivory from *Quartet in Autumn*: "she ends up alone and lonely, the victim of her own craving for purity and perfection, and veering, like Marcia, painfully close to obsession and madness."

Such comments, though interesting, do not offer much insight into Barbara Pym's art. More helpful, I think, would be to ask the question: is Leonora happy? We can break down the question into its two main components: what did Pym think of this character and, secondly, how is her story told?

Initially, Pym didn't think very much of Leonora. Referring to an early draft of the novel, she wrote to Philip Larkin: "I started out not at all in sympathy with Leonora, who began by being a minor character, but as the book progressed I got more interested in her and really enjoyed writing about her best in the end."

Sharpening the novel into the version we know now only made the problem worse: "what reader would want to identify herself with Leonora?" she asked. And yet, it was also her opinion that this novel was "one of the best I have ever done."

One of Pym's sources of enjoyment in writing about this problematic heroine was perhaps the freedom to indulge in Leonora's aestheticism. Pym was always fascinated by aestheticism in others, and she often aspired to it herself – so much so that in 1978 she named the achingly aesthetic Henry James novel, *The Golden Bowl,* as her choice of book on *Desert Island Discs*.

In the 1960s Pym was bruised by her relationship with the gay and highly aesthetic Richard Roberts, the young man who inspired *The Sweet Dove Died* and to whom the novel is dedicated. Her complicated and precious friendship with him seems to have resulted in a great deal of frustration on her part with her own "ordinariness." She simply could not compete with his cool self-possession, his talent for perfection, or even his signature scent – Guerlain's L'Heure Bleue, usually worn as a woman's fragrance. In the Roberts material in *A Very Private Eye*, Pym is almost always lagging behind him in some way, not measuring up to his exacting standards. "What was it about him that brought about this curious inadequacy in her?" she asked, in a fictionalised letter to him in 1964.

Pym's inspired move in *The Sweet Dove Died* was to transfer Richard Roberts's aesthetic qualities to the character of Leonora Eyre. With Leonora appropriating Roberts's refined taste and perfectionism – as well as his L'Heure Bleue as her winter scent – Pym was able to give full rein to the sort of characterisation she had attempted in Prudence Bates and Wilmet Forsyth, and to some extent in the semi-bohemian Catherine Oliphant.

Leonora's aesthetic perfectionism is disliked by many of the other characters in the novel, even by very minor ones like the antiques shop saleswoman in Chapter XV. But Pym usually allows Leonora to brush off any criticism. "Does one seem so cold, proud and formidable," Leonora asks herself after her encounter with the saleswoman, "when one is none of these things?" Her friend Meg, speaking from the point of view of someone who feels perhaps too much, questions Leonora's ability to feel anything, and more particularly to feel love. Leonora thinks, in silent retaliation: "Of course one wasn't like that at all, cold and fossilized. It was only that all one's relationships had to be perfect of their kind."

Leonora's feelings for the "sweet dove," the beautiful but weak James, are described as "love" but only in the possessive sense of "one's love" and then only in the context of fighting for one's love when Ned, the enemy, makes him his lover and tries to take him away from her. In fact, in that passage James is clearly only a pawn in the power play between Ned and Leonora. When the word "love" *is* mentioned between James and Leonora, it comes from him, in a bumbling attempt to explain his inconsiderate behaviour to her. The word startles her. She quickly resorts to her coolest manner and flings the word right back at him, draining it of meaning by repetition: "You loved Phoebe and now you love Ned. When Ned goes back to America, as he no doubt will in time, you'll love somebody else." In trying to understand Pym's attitude to Leonora, we latter-day Pym fans are at a bit of a disadvantage. We know her story so well, with its pathos of rejection and rediscovery, that it's difficult not to assign to her all the

more benign characteristics of her heroines. Surely, Barbara Pym herself was an excellent woman? Or surely, she, the champion of "Something to love, oh, something to love," really did believe in the power of enduring love? That sort of Pym could not genuinely like Leonora, could she?

But if we go back to Pym's early years as a mature writer we find another dynamic at work. The first draft of *Some Tame Gazelle,* for example, from 1934, shows her initial conception of the characters of "Barbara" and her sister "Hilary" ("Belinda" and "Harriet" as they became) – like Leonora, leisured women in their late forties. The end of the manuscript shows the curate playing the piano after dinner, gloated over by Hilary. The set-up gives Barbara ample opportunity to ponder the immaturity of young curates:

> Now a nice Archdeacon was much more suitable if one had to love, and *perhaps it wasn't really necessary to love anyone at all.* Barbara had always found it most convenient to go on loving the things and people she had loved at the age of twenty, it had become a habit with her, just like smoking a cigarette straight after breakfast. [Emphasis added.]

Here we see that the strategy of maintaining a devotion to "things or people" is not so much one of ensuring emotional fulfilment as one of *getting rid of* the need to love. By keeping up an old object of devotion one can safely put it away, neutralise it, prevent it from disturbing one's settled middle-aged life. It is not far from Leonora's initial picture of herself as displaying Milton's "calm of mind, all passion spent" and Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquillity."

In the commonplace book that she also started in 1934, Pym transcribed this line from Samuel Johnson's "Preface to Shakespeare" onto a prominent position on the flyleaf: "Love is only one of many passions and it has no great influence on the sum of life." It is placed there almost as a talisman against the troublesome vagaries of love as depicted in the other quotations in the book – from the *carpe diem* motif of poems by John Cleveland to stark reminders of the humiliation and loss of control inherent in a disposition to love. This one, for example, from *Venus in Furs* by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch:

> In love we are not guided by our own judgement – [...] It is a sweet melancholy, mysterious force, which drives us, and we cease to think, to feel, to will. We allow ourselves to be driven, and ask not whither.

Here, I think, we have another reason why Pym enjoyed writing about Leonora: because it allowed her to fully flesh out, so to speak, a heroine who doesn't like sex. The combination of aestheticism and sexual drive leads to the form of decadence embodied by Ned in *The Sweet Dove Died*, the darkest character by far in the whole of Pym's oeuvre. Aestheticism and sexlessness, however, achieve a sort of super-perfection.

She first attempted this sort of characterisation in a much smaller part, that of Barbara Bird in *Crampton Hodnet* where, comically, the undergraduate Miss Bird attempts an affair with an Oxford don called Francis Cleveland. John Cleveland, the 17th-century poet, is never far from their thoughts, especially his poem "The Anti-Platonic," with its lines condemning sexlessness – "You are salamanders of a cold desire/ That live untouched amidst the hottest fire." These lines are echoed in Barbara's fear of being thought "a cold fish" and lead her to go much further in the attempted affair than she really wants to. In fact, she cannot recollect any poem in *favour* of the platonic love she would, aesthetically, prefer. It takes the stark reality of checking into a Dover hotel room with Francis on their way to Paris for her to finally reject the situation, in a panic, and flee to the safety of a convenient female friend who lives nearby.

The name "Barbara Bird" occurs again in Pym's work, when it's given to the wheezing middle-aged novelist who makes a brief appearance in Chapter XII of *Jane and Prudence*. This "Barbara" seems more of an inside joke on Pym's own publishing history up to that time, and perhaps Pym was also recycling an amusing name from *Crampton Hodnet*, which was then an unpublished novel. I think it is safe to say, however, that there is no significant link between the two Miss Birds and that the spiritual heir of the first Barbara Bird is, in fact, Leonora Eyre. The key to their kinship is their use of the emphatic *that*.

"There won't be any more love, or at least not *that* kind of love," thinks Barbara Bird with relief. In *The Sweet Dove Died* the emphatic *that* is used to refer to several other things (death, a photograph, handwriting, babies) but it achieves its greatest resonance when it refers to sex. Leonora recalls, "One or two tearful scenes in bed – for she had never enjoyed *that* kind of thing." When still in a state of shock from learning that James has been "keeping a mistress," as Humphrey puts it, Oliver Goldsmith's poem about a seduced and betrayed woman suggests itself to her: "When lovely woman stoops to folly, she said to the fruitwood mirror with the cupids, though of course it wasn't exactly *that*."

When toying with the idea of marrying James, Leonora remembers the unhappy time when Humphrey

tried to seduce her: "but of course dear James wouldn't expect anything like *that*..."

Increasingly, since the Romantic Movement, it has been seen as almost sinful for a character to shrink away from sex or sexual passion. After all, are we not redeemed in the secular view of things by all-conquering love? It's a story line that occurs again and again, yet Pym begged to differ, as we know from Roger Till, who relates a conversation he had with Pym in which she commented: "My novels are not about love" – and here's the emphasis again, "not *that* kind of love." [i]

So how did Pym write about Leonora as a sympathetic, though frigid, character? By challenging us to see things from Leonora's point of view. This is often achieved through her use of free indirect speech, a device (much favoured by Jane Austen) which allows us greater access to Leonora's thoughts than she has herself. A good example of this is the first paragraph of Chapter XIV, wherein Leonora sets her mind at ease over her eviction of her elderly tenant Miss Foxe ("Two turns around the park convinced her of the rightness of her action") and returns to the house, serenely "determined to be firm but not unkind, or at least no more unkind than was necessary." It is risky to use such a withering device for a main protagonist rather than for a comic secondary character, but though Leonora's thoughts may be objectionable, the privilege of intimacy engages us whether we like it or not.

Pym also challenges the reader's dislike of Leonora by writing a few key scenes in such a way that we can hardly withhold our sympathy. The scene of Humphrey's attempted seduction is especially well done in this respect. To Leonora it is an attempted rape, and all the language that Pym uses points in that direction. "But *I* want" says Humphrey, in his outbreak of sexual assertiveness; and here I'll just list the highly suggestive words that follow: bulk, looming, panic, pray heaven, protest, scream, no sound came, larger, stronger.

The first encounter between Leonora and James's lover Ned also asks us to sympathise with Leonora. Ned shows up at Leonora's house, uninvited and unannounced, on a Sunday afternoon, an "unfair" time thinks Leonora, when "few women past their youth feel at their best," whereupon he proceeds to examine her, "calculating the cost of her clothes and everything about her, including her hairstyle, make-up, jewellery, and even her shoes." Ned's impudence is echoed a few times in the bronze sculpture that Humphrey is trying to sell – a figure of Actaeon turned into a stag and set upon by his own hounds for having taken a forbidden look at the chaste huntress Diana. Or so, one feels, Leonora would wish.

Other pleas for sympathy for Leonora occur in the description of her misery in Chapter XXII, when she feels herself "debased, diminished, crushed and trodden into the ground" and, in Chapter XXIV, when she breaks down in front of the despised Meg, helpless to prevent her flowing tears and the great sobs from racking her body "in the most embarrassing way."

Pym also tells Leonora's story in terms of various trials and antagonists she must face. Leonora's antagonists are a mixed bunch, from droopy Phoebe Sharpe to the friend of Phoebe's who takes the last marron gâteau in the coffee shop; from the vulnerable Miss Foxe to the experienced and formidable Ned.

Leonora's retrieval (with Humphrey's help) of James's furniture from Phoebe's cottage is described as "her moment of triumph," and her epic battle with Ned is said to end in "a kind of victory." Humphrey, however, wants Leonora to acknowledge Ned's power over James. He thinks: "How much more sensible it would be for her to admit defeat and give up." Leonora *is* defeated in the sense that her attempts to hold on to James have failed. There is no rejoicing when she reflects on her "victory" over Ned: "she supposed she had acquitted herself quite well, perhaps she had even won a kind of victory, but it hardly seemed to matter now."

The reason it hardly seems to matter is that the object of contention between Ned and Leonora was not so much James himself, as Ned supposes, as the perfection of the relationship, "their rare and beautiful friendship." Leonora, in full-blown aesthetic mode, considers that the cracked and broken relationship is no longer worth having. The defeat is nullified. The fought-for James is now of no more use to her than a shattered mirror.

Is Leonora finally happy as she seems to me – or unhappy, as critics have almost wanted her to be? Initially, Leonora is very happy indeed. She lives in the grandest house of any Pym heroine by far. She will soon be able to own it outright and in the meantime it provides everything she could want in terms of a perfect and comforting environment. She is content with her life of "tranquil solitude" punctuated by dinners and outings with undemanding, easy-to-control admirers. There are many things that threaten Leonora's happiness, not least the times throughout the novel where she notices signs of ageing in herself, and the *process* of losing the relationship with James causes her much misery at various times, but she always manages to recover from these more or less intact.

All Pym's heroines are faced with the question of what to do, of how to live their lives. What, in *The Sweet Dove Died*, does a woman in her late forties with no apparent ties do? A woman called Ba asks Leonora, incredulously: "You mean you do *nothing*?" and is quick to suggest several kinds of voluntary work Leonora might do, all of them equally unappealing. Humphrey suggests she find a new interest by finding a new tenant for her flat. Good old Meg, as we have seen, urges Leonora to find someone to love. But Leonora

slips away from these attempts to mould her into a kinder, more acceptable type of woman. She is not changed, not transformed, not reformed by the end of the novel – or is she?

Amazingly, Pym gives her what we might call an "out." She gives Leonora moments of sympathetic clarity amid her times of misery. When she visits Keats's house with James and Ned, for example, she cannot look at the other visitor there – a badly dressed middle-aged woman with a "frozen dinner for one" in her shopping bag -- with her usual contempt, "perhaps because growing unhappiness had made her more sensitive." Later, when the sight of Edwardian jewellery for auction brings about "the full realization of her unhappiness," she cries not only for herself "but also for the owners of the jewellery, ageing now or old, some probably dead." We are told that James has taken away from Leonora "the pleasure of being alone." Yet the result of this is that she begins to value human company and "almost welcomed Liz's interruptions or Meg's cosy chats about Colin." Both Rose Culver and cousin Daphne rescue her with kindness and comfort at times of stress and, in the aftermath of her encounter with the antiques saleswoman, her conscience is nagged by a religious quote even though, characteristically, she does her best to misinterpret it.

This new sensitivity is not emphasised, but in a Pym novel I believe it is, literally, crucial. For what are Pym's novels about? What kind of love if not *that* kind of love? I would suggest the kind of love Pym is most concerned with is the one known in the New Testament as "charity," the love for our fellow-men, the kind of love that makes community possible. "One must love them all," says Mildred in *Excellent Women*, reflecting on her "neighbours" in the cafeteria, whereupon Mrs. Bonner, "rather shocked," looks up from her chocolate trifle and replies, sensibly (with a different sort of "that"): "I don't think the Commandment is meant to be taken as literally as that."

In Leonora we have a character who is so anti-community that she cannot bear to be reminded of the bigger picture of life by the meek figure of the Christian Miss Foxe. On the one hand, Leonora is free to reject Miss Foxe and all that she implies, and on the other, by the end of the novel, Pym has provided Leonora with the means and the nascent ability to change her mind about the value of friends, and of people in general.

So it is armed with this new capacity for humanity that Pym restores Leonora to her leisurely life, to her appreciation of perfection ... and to her happiness. The trying times that can be said to have started with the peace-shattering totem pole at Virginia Water in Chapter V, the "hideous phallic symbol," as Leonora thinks of it, are resolved. Now, with Ned's power annulled by Leonora's belated understanding of him as a comic character, and with "funny old Humphrey's" lustful episode safely in the past, Leonora's trials come to an end in the peonies that Humphrey brings her in the final paragraph – round, flat flowers with nothing of the phallic about them. Flowers, moreover, whose very name derives from "paean": a song of praise, joy, thanksgiving or triumph. One can only admire Pym's boldness in restoring Leonora to herself so emphatically as to make "oneself" the very last word of the novel:

> Yet, when one came to think of it, the only flowers that were really perfect were those, like the peonies that went so well with one's charming room, that possessed the added grace of having been presented to oneself.

Stéphanie Kay is a Canadian who now lives in the U.K. She earned her B.A. in English Literature from the University of Montreal. She is working on her D.Phil. at Trinity College, Oxford. The working title of her thesis is "Sex and Excellence in the Novels of Barbara Pym."

i. Roger Till, "Coincidence in a Bookshop," in *Independent Women: The Function of Gender in the Novels of Barbara Pym*, ed. Janice Rossen, The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1988, p. 166.

No Soft Incense: Barbara Pym and the Church. *Edited by Hazel K. Bell*

Catholic Herald, 17 June 2005: "Not since Anthony Trollope's Barchester novels has the Church of England received such minute and detailed treatment in fiction."

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The Publication History of *The Sweet Dove Died*

by Yvonne Cocking

After the shock and disappointment of the rejection by Cape in 1963 of *An Unsuitable Attachment*, and further rejection by many other publishers, Barbara Pym put this novel aside and started on a new one. The first mention of this is in her notebook for 1963. On 16 October she wrote, "I have started to write another novel, as I knew I would eventually, but I don't get on very fast." It was not until December 1964 that she wrote rather sadly to Philip Larkin, "I have written seven or eight chapters of a new novel. Of course in the end it will turn out not to be any good, perhaps, but I may as well write something even if only for private circulation among a few friends..."

In *A Lot to Ask*, Hazel Holt says that the inspiration for the new novel was, in part, Richard Roberts, who had been introduced to Barbara and Hilary by Bob Smith in the summer of 1962, and with whom she embarked on a romantic, hopeless relationship. At its inevitable end, she made use of the experience when she started writing again.

Richard, called "Skipper" by his close friends, has, of course, no exact counterpart in *The Sweet Dove Died*. He has no obvious personality traits in common with Humphrey, though his interest in antiques and ownership of an antique shop translate to the novel. He is too old (in his 30s) to be James, though his behaviour sometimes belies his age, and the idea of "anything coming" from such a relationship applies equally to James and Leonora in the novel and to Richard and Barbara in real life. There is an element of Ned in him too, as when Barbara describes "his very spoilt little Bahamian mood, full of euphoria, money and sex talk."

Even before Barbara met Richard, she had jotted down a few items In her 1962 notebook which later appear in some form in the book. She writes, "a little Italian bowl really pleases me, though it is chipped, and I begin to wonder if I'm getting to the stage when objects could please more than people or (specifically) men." And after meeting Richard, the following idea occurs to her: "A man, dealer in antiques, goes to a parish jumble sale in search of Victoriana and there gets involved in things he would rather not have experienced." In 1963 she notes, "The middle-aged woman with an Italian lover" who enjoys Guinness, "A wet day in Hampstead – Keats's House – the engagement ring he gave Fanny B.", and "...walking in Bond Street I see a young man sitting alone in a grand antique shop, presumably waiting for customers. A woman admirer might be a great nuisance always coming to see him."

On 26 September 1965, when her relationship with Skipper was waning, she writes, "After the dentist, the Wimpole Street Buttery. A delicious creamy cake tasting of walnuts. Now Skipperless, one begins to understand 'compensatory eating.'"

The furniture repository episode in *The Sweet Dove Died* was occasioned by a similar event in Barbara's life, when Bob Smith, who was returning to Nigeria, offered to lend furniture to Barbara, and also to another friend – though in this case there was probably no dispute, but possibly a misunderstanding. All these ideas and little incidents found their way into *The Sweet Dove Died*.

There are in the Bodleian Library several drafts of *The Sweet Dove Died*, the earlier ones, all undated, telling a very different story from the version eventually published. One, the earliest I think, appears to be the beginning of a novel called *Spring*, an unusually brief title for Barbara. Chapter One begins startlingly with Violet Couchman saying, "No, Lionel, a fox's droppings are *grey* and pointed at both ends." Lionel is her first husband, with whom, together with her second husband Hilary Couchman, she is visiting Phoebe, a newcomer to their village. Lionel lives in a hut at the bottom of the Couchmans' garden, where he is more or less independent, though hot dinners are sent down from the house. Hilary, the second husband, wouldn't mind him living in, but Lionel says, "It might cause a scandal in the village – few of these good people are familiar with what one might call polyandry." And in any case, he is a sociological researcher and "likes to keep all his data with him."

Before they arrived, Phoebe had been sitting in the little front room of her cottage where Anthea Wedge, whose literary remains Phoebe was working on, had written her poems and journal. "Phoebe remembered that James had promised to visit her, but that had been after dinner when they had both had a lot to drink. He said he would like to see her again, but he hadn't even kissed her goodnight." When her visitors left, "Phoebe flopped down in an armchair. Her first experience of village social life had been exhausting ... she wondered when James would get in touch with her." Later she has a meal with her friend Rose Culver, who, according to Violet, "does good works" in the village, but had once had a love affair with a married man who worked in Africa but came home each summer.

Two further undated manuscripts are cited as "Typescript draft and incomplete carbon copy of *The Sweet Dove Died.*" In fact, both copies are incomplete, each lacking whole chapters and individual pages. However, the carbon copy includes Chapter Two and a few other pages which the original lacks – so the two need to be read together. They seem to be an expanded version of *Spring*. The characters mentioned above are retained and are joined by an alcoholic "resting" actor, a vicar previously involved in a sex scandal, a cleaning

lady and her electrician son who is over-familiar with his customers, an ex-Anglican priest turned married RC layman and novelist, and several others all living in an unnamed village. This draft opens like the published version, with Leonora having been picked up by Humphrey and James at the Sale Room, but apart from some dallying in the country between James and Phoebe, and some socialising with the villagers, little more is heard of them. Ned makes a benign appearance towards the end, with Rose and Leonora encouraging him to take over Phoebe's cottage when she leaves. It ends with Leonora hoping that a relationship might develop between Rose and Ned, while she continues her liaison with James. All rather bland, I thought, a rambling plot with far too many characters and sub-plots, and no real focus. All the acerbity and deep feeling of the final work is completely absent.

Nevertheless, this must have been the version, tidied up and no doubt improved (though I found no evidence for this), that she sent to Wren Howard at Jonathan Cape on 5 June 1968. Howard's son replied, after noting his father's ill health:

> It, therefore, falls to me to write sadly to convey to you the consensus of opinion about your new novel, which is, I am afraid, that we do not feel it likely to sit happily in the kind of list which we have now, or to make a mark strong enough to justify its presence there in your eyes or in ours. You mentioned that you thought we would find it sharper and faster-moving than *An Unsuitable Attachment*; but that doesn't really seem to be the case: the neatness and irony which were so much a characteristic of your earlier books has rather softened, and while such good nature is most lovable in an author, readers unfortunately seem to relish greater asperity in their books!

The fact that he speaks of irony softening, and "such good nature" proves, I think, that Barbara sent him a version primarily about the village community, because "soft" and "good nature" are words hardly applicable to *The Sweet Dove Died* as we know it. Next she sent it to Longmans Green, who rejected it on similar grounds, and then to Chatto & Windus, who kept it for six weeks or more, but finally rejected it.

In September 1968 Barbara sent the novel to Philip Larkin for his opinion and, as she said to Robert Smith, "he told me what was really wrong with it – too many characters, and the action really should concentrate more on Leonora, the real centre of the book. I have to fill out her character and write more bits of horrible Ned. So I haven't sent it anywhere else, but have been thinking how I might rework it."

Barbara must have spent most of 1969 rewriting the

Yvonne Cocking (left) and Eileen Roberts at the AGM.

novel along the lines suggested by Larkin. Phoebe and Rose Culver were retained, with less important roles, but all the other characters were eliminated. Some of them, I am fairly sure, were adapted for use later in *A Few Green Leaves*. Certainly the fox's droppings found their way there!

It now occurs to me that the missing pages from the drafts may have been those in which Leonora, James and Humphrey did appear, and that Barbara may have removed them when she was rewriting the story.

The revised version went to Macmillan in January 1970 and to Peter Davies, Ltd. in October 1970; both refused it. She then submitted it to Macdonald & Co., to Collins (signing herself Tom Crampton); to Secker & Warburg under the heading "Leonora, by Tom Crampton," and to about 12 more publishers, who all rejected it. The book had by then been making the rounds for over three years.

At last she gave up. In the next few years there were great changes in her life. Her first illness, her move to Balcombe Street after Hilary went to Finstock, the IAI's move to High Holborn, and her eventual retirement in Finstock. But even before the last rejections of *The Sweet Dove Died*, Barbara was making notes about characters that she would later use in *Quartet in Autumn.*

After her rehabilitation, the publication of *Quartet in Autumn* in 1977 and its appearance on the Booker Prize shortlist, it was a *very* different story. Macmillan, who had published *Quartet,* were very eager for more of her work. Macmillan's James Wright, who had said in 1970 that he hoped someone would have the courage to publish *The Sweet Dove Died*, finally did so himself. ☙

Yvonne Cocking is the archivist of the Barbara Pym Society. For more information on the archives, please see page 13.

Yvonne's entire paper, including reviews of SDD, will be posted at www.barbara-pym.org.

The Search for Friedbert Glueck

by Jutta Schmidt

When Yvonne Cocking asked me whom to contact in Germany to find out more about Friedbert Glueck, the German Barbara met in Cologne in 1934 on a trip of the National Union of Students, I was quite happy to offer myself. I never liked the idea that Barbara was in love with a Nazi and quite impressed by him:

> Then I had my first sight of real Nazis and of Friedbert Glueck. He was wearing a black uniform, although the others were in yellowish brown shirts with the Nazi swastika business on their left arms. They saluted each other in the Heil Hitler manner. Then we went into lunch and various speeches were made. Friedbert spoke in German – I remember being much impressed by him, and thinking him a marvellous unapproachable Nazi. What did he look like? Tall, with a lovely figure set off to advantage by the black uniform ... I can't remember much else of that day, but I suppose I ended up by being still in love with Gabriel, however much the Nazis had impressed me." (Quoted by Yvonne Cocking in her paper, "Barbara Pym in Germany," *Green Leaves*, Nov. 2006.)

The fascination with the Nazis went on for a while, but as Yvonne Cocking put it in the above-mentioned article: "As the appalling events in Germany were gradually revealed, the feeling of shame at having known and loved a Nazi must have intensified, and Barbara would not have wanted anyone to know about this episode in her life. Friedbert obviously survived, for on 31st July 1946, over a year after the end of the war in Europe, and again on 24th September, her diaries record letters from him, but their contents are destined to remain unknown."

As real Barbara Pym fans, we do want to know more about this time in her life, so I contacted the German *Wehrmachtserfassungsstelle* in Berlin (WASt). The WASt is a national information office that deals with questions concerning the soldiers of the German army, the *Wehrmacht*. I soon received an answer from the WASt informing me that a man called Friedbert Glueck was on their records but that he had died in 1988.

According to the records, Friedbert was a member of the German *Wehrmacht* but there was no proof that he was a member of the SS, the *Schutzstaffel* of the Nazi Party (NSDAP). Founded in 1925 as a special unit to protect Hitler, the SS became a paramilitary organisation that was heavily involved in the Holocaust. Some Pym readers think Friedbert must have been in the SS as Barbara describes him wearing a black uniform, which SS members also wore. But as yet we do not know that for sure.

The WASt was not allowed to give me any more biographical details about Friedbert Glueck, but as they had the name of his wife on their records, they contacted her, telling her about my inquiry and asking her to get in touch with me if she wanted to. She has never done so, and I am not sure if she is still alive or if she just does not want to become involved.

I followed another path in Berlin – the central Berlin Documentary Center, the largest repository of personnel and membership records of the Nazi Party and its affiliated organisations. They sent me a copy of Friedbert's entry form for the NSDAP. Nothing much is written on it except the entry date, 1st May 1937, and his profession which was stated as "Ref.," the abbreviation of "Referent." That could mean that he was some kind of assistant to someone important or that he was a referee/speaker. His address was also included on that form. It took me a while to decipher the old-fashioned writing, but by that time someone else became interested in researching Friedbert Glueck – Michael Simonson, a member of the Barbara Pym Society in North America. Michael believes the name of Friedbert's town must be Annaberg, which is near Dresden, which makes sense regarding Barbara's stay there.

Michael and I will continue our research into the lives of Barbara Pym and Friedbert Glueck. We hope to come up with more information the next time. ☙

Jutta Schmidt is a long-time member of the Barbara Pym Society and attends Pym Conferences in the U.K. and the U.S. She lives in Berlin.

Save these dates on your 2008 calendar

The North American Conference will be on April 12-13 in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The spring meeting in London will be on April 27.

Annual Conference at St Hilda's College will be on August 9 and 10.

Book Review

Social Dimensions in the Novels of Barbara Pym, *1949-1963: The Writer as Hidden Observer* by Orna Raz. (Edwin Mellen Press, 2007). $109.95; £69.95. 213pp., Bibliography, Notes, Index.

by Barbara J. Dunlap

Orna Raz, an Israeli academic and Pym Society member who has spoken at Pym Conferences in the U.K. and the U.S., has written a very good book indeed. In addition to her thorough use of the Pym papers in the Bodleian, she brings to bear previous scholarship in telling ways and offers her own interpretation of important elements in the five novels Barbara Pym published between 1952 and 1961 and in *An Unsuitable Attachment*.

In aiming to "dispel the illusion about the transparency of Pym's work," Raz looks at the Church of England and women's role in it, higher education and careers (or the lack of them) for women, domestic life, women's friendships, and women's roles generally. She includes a highly nuanced discussion of what she views as Pym's "ambiguous treatment of male sexuality," and this is perhaps her most tendentious chapter. In each chapter she explores the "semiotics" of Pym – how the cultural milieu of her novels is presented in a series of often coded signs – signs that readers who come to her half a century later may not be able to decipher, making it difficult to appreciate fully the richness of her tapestries.

Raz does not regard the novels as merely "historical or sociological documents." Her literary analysis uses these sources to enrich her readings and to prompt her conclusion that the "focal point" in Pym's work is not the private lives of her characters, but rather their interactions with their milieu – a concern that links her with the tradition of Dickens, Thackeray, Gaskell and George Eliot. Her mostly upper-middle-class protagonists regard themselves as bearers of traditional culture and find comfort in it, while at the same time they are anxious about the direction of their post-war society. Raz fills in this framework with deep readings of passages that illustrate Pym's major subjects. Pym emerges as a "connected critic," a writer who observes and comments from within her own idiosyncratic world.

In her discussion of Anglo-Catholicism in the novels, Raz suggests that Anglo-Catholics represent a subgroup where membership provides a feeling of community. For instance, protagonists such as Mildred and Wilmet grew up with austere "Low Church" services and an emphasis on catholicity of the Church of England as Protestant; their adult commitment to Anglo-Catholicism with its elaborate services and emphasis on the catholicity of the English Church represents a mild form of transgression.

The Church of England could not function without the support of its women, yet it takes for granted the services of the clergy wives, sisters and daughters. Jane Cleveland's refusal to do the things expected of the rector's wife – church decorating and Mother's Union activities – and to attempt a role in more substantive parish matters indicates her discontent with traditional women's roles. Other women in the novels care for clergymen, washing their surplices or making sure they have good meals, but do not look to them for guidance.

Raz points out that the presentation of homosexuals in Pym's novels of the fifties must be read against the severe police prosecution and the media's unrelentingly negative portrayal of them. In *A Glass of Blessings*, Piers's excessive drinking and suggested depression express the state of denial he is in until near the end of the novel when he introduces Keith to Wilmet who eventually accepts him, as do Harry and Rowena Talbot. Raz thinks that the sensitive portrayal of homosexuality in these novels reflects an upper-class tolerance of diverse behaviors rather than a "progressive" world view.

While Pym's world centers on the unmarried, she does present four marriages in some depth from *A Glass of Blessings, Excellent Women* and *Jane and Prudence*. The Talbots' marriage, in particular, is subjected to a searching analysis by Raz in her chapter on domestic life, "Dreary Cosiness," and the ideal nuclear family in its pseudo-Elizabethan house is shown to be less than perfect. Harry longs for some sort of surreptitious relationship with Wilmet and Rowena regrets that she is past the time for romance. Yet Raz's careful reading marks how both partners subtly develop over the course of the novel.

I missed in this book any substantive discussion of the governmental Austerity policy that so deeply affected daily life from 1945 to 1954. Pym's original readers would have understood her characters' obsession with food in the early novels and Catherine's and Wilmet's appreciation of abundance in the later ones. I question her view that Pym "is not a reflective author," and denies "complex inner lives" even to characters such as Wilmet and Jane. Yet on balance, I can say as Jane Cleveland does in another context: "such richness here."

Like all specialized titles from the Mellen Press, this one is austere in design and costs serious money, well worth it in my view. [A discount coupon is available to Pym Society members who e-mail Orna Raz at razorna@hotmail.com.] The extensive bibliography invites us to an ever-deeper acquaintance with Pym's world.

Barbara Dunlap retired from the City College of CUNY where she was Chief of the Archives and Special Collections Division. She is co-author of From the Free Academy to CUNY *(2000) and has published on Barbara Pym and Victorian novelist Charlotte Mary Yonge.*

Muriel Eira Watson (*née* Smith)
11 January 1931 – 9 September 2007

by Eileen Roberts

Muriel Watson with two of her grandchildren.

Yvonne Cocking and I travelled to Kent for Muriel's funeral which was a wonderful goodbye to her – from her family and friends and most of the congregation of St. Clements, Sandwich to which she and her husband had moved on their retirement. I wish Barbara could have met her for I am sure she would have been impressed with Muriel's version of a clergy wife. A Founder member of the Barbara Pym Society, she loved the meetings, having a great love of both St. Hilda's and St. Alban's. She was always so ready to help and in 2006 she finally agreed to serve on the Committee, always before saying there were better people in the Society than she for it – not so!

Muriel was born in Maidenhead, but moved when still very young to Warwick where she attended the King's High School. Childhood memories there included seeing the night sky red with the flames of Coventry burning. Her father, a tank driver, was wounded and captured in the Western Desert in 1942 and died in Italian captivity in October of the same year. An only child, she was heavily relied upon by her widowed mother, who wanted her to remain close at hand in Warwick, but Muriel was determined to attend Oxford University and went to St. Hilda's to read French and German.

Her first teaching post was at Milham Ford School, Oxford, before moving on to the Alice Ottley School in Worcester. After her marriage in 1955 to Douglas Watson (whom she had met at Oxford), she took a post at Dover Grammar School for Girls. A year spent abroad included a sojourn in Switzerland as *au pair* to a large family with an irascible father – an episode later imagined by her own children as being akin to something out of *The Sound of Music*.

Muriel became a clergy wife when Douglas became a curate at Charlton in 1960, and this she remained until he retired in 1994 in the same year as Muriel finally retired from teaching. (Her children have noted that she did not at all match the image of a vicar's wife; consternation was recorded in some quarters in 1972 at the phenomenon of a vicar's wife seen *wearing trousers*!) She had in fact an unforgettable presence and highly individual dress sense and expansive hand gestures, being mistaken, on different occasions, for: an artist, an actress, or a French lady long resident in the U.K.

The family moved to Headcorn in 1972 and, soon after, its financial situation dictated that, despite already holding down a full-time job as clergy wife and mother of a young family, Muriel would have to return to teaching. She never regretted this, enjoying the renewed intellectual stimulation of exploring and discussing the prescribed A Level French texts with interested sixth formers, but she often found the work and the demands of family life both physically and emotionally draining.

Muriel had a great love of art and literature – for example, in the '60s, she and her husband published translations of two theological texts, and during her retirement she was a Friend of the Royal Academy. An ardent Francophile, she missed no opportunity to cross the Channel – Calais or Boulogne would do just as well as Paris. She was enthusiastically involved in ecumenical contacts between the Canterbury diocese and the Roman Catholic diocese of Arras; she fostered links between her own church and monasteries and convents at Bec and Bayeux.

After Muriel and Douglas retired, they remained in Kent and moved to Sandwich where they were very quickly and happily absorbed into the communal life of St. Clement's parish. It was impossible to imagine a happier choice of retirement location.

Muriel will be missed by so many. I know I will miss her friendship and the many cards with almost unreadable writing which I have received over the years. At the funeral we heard that this practice was multiplied many, many times, as she loved choosing, writing and sending cards.

Muriel leaves two sons, a daughter and five grandchildren. ☙

Eileen Roberts is the Membership Secretary of the Barbara Pym Society.

Call for Papers

We are searching for innovative papers to be presenting to the tenth annual conference of the Barbara Pym Society in North America, to be held at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on 12-13 April 2008.

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 is 31 December 2007.

From the Archives

by Yvonne Cocking

The Pym memorabilia which I have received from various sources include items that are difficult to classify and to store.

For this issue I offer you one such. It is a certificate, approximately 17 x 13.5 inches, in black on parchment-coloured paper, issued by the Central Executive Committee of the National Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to F. Crampton Pym, recording "their great appreciation of your invaluable services to the Oswestry, Whitchurch North and East Montgomeryshire Branch since 1922."

Under the citation is a large red paper seal of the Society, to the left of which is written "Given under the Seal of the Corporation this 26th Day of July MCMLV." On the other side are the signatures of the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Director.

Around the sides are various ornate coats of arms, depictions of Justice and Charity and other symbols, a New Testament quotation, and, perhaps rather inappropriately by today's standards, six medallions of naked children (stylized, putti-like) linked by garlands of leaves and fruit!

This is not only a tribute to the philanthropy of Barbara's father, but an interesting example of the pseudo-classical style of art still used for such certificates in 1945.

Barbara Pym Society Archives Listing on the Web

The archives left by Barbara Pym at her death in 1980 are housed at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. The collection, entitled "Papers of Barbara Mary Crampton Pym, 1913-1980," includes the manuscripts of published and unpublished novels and short stories, literary papers, notebooks, diaries and correspondence. (See www.bodley.ox.ac.uk.)

In addition to this wealth of information available to researchers, Yvonne Cocking, the Pym Society's archivist, has been collecting a great many papers, books and recordings that have appeared since Barbara's death. This collection is called "The Pym Archives."

The works included herein are categorized as follows:

- Books, translations and audio recordings of books by Pym
- Books and articles about Pym
- Original material not published in *Green Leaves*
- Reviews of books by Pym
- Reviews of books about Pym
- Material relating to the BP Society –meetings, speakers and members
- Dramatisations
- Obituaries and memorials of BP and others
- Correspondence

The entire listing is too extensive to be reproduced in *Green Leaves*. Instead, The Pym Archives will appear on the Barbara Pym Society web site, www.barbara-pym.org.

Many thanks to Yvonne for her diligence in maintaining this archive for the benefit of Pym readers and scholars around the world. Yvonne can be reached at yvcocking@aol.com.

The Barbara Pym Society
2007-08

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Looking at the World with Oswestry Eyes

Just before the August meeting of the Barbara Pym Society, Eileen Roberts received a letter from Canon J.F. Edge, who resides in Burnley, Lancashire. In his letter Canon Edge regrets not being able to attend the meeting, and then writes:

"I do hope you have an enjoyable time. At least I have read *The Sweet Dove Died* again.

"I would have been very interested to discover whether we have any members from Oswestry and how far back their memories go. I was vicar of the "servants' church, Holy Trinity," from '64 to '79 and curate from '58 to '62, and then while I was Tutor of Lichfield Theological College from '62 to '64, I covered the summer holidays of the vicar and the curate.

"Oswestry is not now what it was in my time. No doubt in my time it was not what it had been some twenty years before, but there were still in my congregation people from those days. From its position as a Border town, Oswestry was unlike any other town in Shropshire. They tended to be socially very divided so that at Ellesmere you sat in your pews in St. Mary's according to your position in local society, and I have it on very good authority that if anyone moved forward two pews, it was assumed that someone in the family had married above themselves. This would be discussed outside church.

"Oswestry was much more a melting pot. I had in my own congregation (and mine was the servants' church) the two granddaughters of a Victorian First Lord, and, as I discovered one day from new photographs which I chanced to notice, the aunt of Prince Philip's Commanding Officer and the aunts of the Tutor to the Royal Children. Well over half our congregation came from the Council Estates. This may well explain the rather humorous attitude which people had towards society and the rapid discomfiture of incomers with social pretensions. Maybe Barbara looked at the world with Oswestry eyes.

"My typing too, I fear, indicates my years in Oswestry. It was definitely a town where the quill pen still reigned – and in my case sadly still does."

Yours sincerely,
s/John Edge

Editor's note: Barbara Pym was born in Oswestry in 1923. Oswestry played a key role in her life, as reflected in A Very Private Eye *and* A Lot to Ask (ALTA).

A sentence from ALTA, *p. 105, suggests the significance of Oswestry to Barbara:*

> In Oswestry, in her late twenties, in the uncertain days of war, she acquired a grasp of the fundamentals of an ethos – practical, moral, almost stoical, yet with a kind of cheerful irony – that would sustain her (and most of her heroines) through many vicissitudes.

A Message from Clemence Schultze

"Incredulous astonishment": the opening words of E.M. Delafield's *The Provincial Lady in America* (1934) entirely express my feelings when an email arrived from Eileen Roberts asking whether I would consider becoming Chair of the Barbara Pym Society. I've been a Pym admirer for many years, ever since reading the classic *TLS* articles by Lord David Cecil and Philip Larkin, and knowing at once that this sounded like my kind of author and book.

Well do I remember borrowing those Cedric Chivers hardback reprints (produced for libraries) which were the only form in which Pym was available until Penguin and Granada reissued the earlier novels. And I have been a member of the BPS for a good few years too, though not quite a founder member. I recall hearing the wonderful radio programme about the original meeting, and I joined the Society soon after that. But there are others whose Pym affiliations are far longer and closer than mine, and so I was very surprised – and greatly flattered – by Eileen's suggestion. When she assured me how efficient and supportive the Committee members are, and how Deirdre Bryan-Brown (a hard act to follow!) would remain around for a year to hold my hand, I happily agreed.

The BPS is a wonderful institution: by the efforts of volunteers on both sides of the Atlantic, members are edified and entertained at meetings, conferences, and by means of publications; Barbara's works are kept in the public eye; and Pym scholarship is forwarded. I am very glad to be able to contribute to all of this; and I certainly expect to have a great deal of fun as I do so.

Last August's U.K. conference memorably reassessed *The Sweet Dove Died*, and, as always, gave the opportunity to encounter old and new friends and enjoy the discussion of character and motive, social custom and moral behaviour, triviality and profundity, so often evoked by Pym's novels. Soon I hope to meet many more of the North American members in April 2008 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Again, like that very Pym-mish heroine, the Provincial Lady, with her quiet life in the country and her wry outlook on a small slice of society, I shall be crossing the Atlantic for the very first time. I am looking forward to it all! ☙

Pym Gleanings

Noted in Books

• From **Joyce Williams** comes a quote from *The Assassin's Cloak: An Anthology of the World's Greatest Diarists,* edited by Irene and Alan Taylor, Canongate Books. An entry by Barbara Pym for 27th November 1964 was mentioned by the reviewer (Sue Laidlay) in *Writing Magazine,* July 2007. Having read the review I straightaway bought the book. Here is the quote in full:

> Lunched at the Golden Egg. Oh, the horror – the cold stuffiness, claustrophobic place of tables, garish lights and mass produced food in steel dishes. And the egg-shaped menu!
>
> But perhaps one could get something out of it [for a novel]. The setting for a breaking-off, or some terrible news or an unwanted declaration of love.

• **Rita Brewer** sent this quotation from *Home from Home* by Carol Smith. Advice on getting published is being offered by Anna to Genevieve, "who had to be the world's most bashful writer":

> You need to be taken seriously up-market and given the real distinction that you deserve. Your wicked humour and sharp observation should be aimed at a far more intelligent readership. Take Nancy Mitford and **Barbara Pym**. I honestly believe that, properly packaged, your rightful place should be alongside them.

• **Hazel Bell** offers this quotation from *What Hetty Did* by J. L. Carr, Quince Tree Press, 1988.

[In the Birmingham race riots a bookshop window has been blown out.]

> An elderly lady, obviously a gentlewoman who had come down in the world stepped back to poor Mr Williams's gaping window and removed **Barbara Pym's** novel, "A Glass of Blessings." "Ever since dear Lord David Cecil recommended this, I have been trying to obtain it from the Public Library but it was always out. But, as my dear father so often told us, 'There always is one grain of Good hiding in each stack of Evil'. And (stroking the novel) how right he was! Of course, I shall return it when Mr Williams opens again on Monday. He will understand."

Noted on the Radio

• **Christine Shuttleworth** writes that she had just been listening to "Bookclub" on BBC Radio 4, in which "Armistead Maupin discussed his *Tales of the City* books with some of his readers. Rather surprisingly he nominated the Mapp and Lucia books and **Barbara Pym** among his influences, saying that he thought his books had something in common with English village novels, only transferred to San Francisco. James Naughtie, the presenter, commented that the comparison with Pym was an interesting one: 'nothing is happening, but everything is happening.'"

• **Yvonne Cocking** reports on a recent Sunday service from Eton College Chapel that celebrated the centenary of W.H. Auden. Richard Coles said:

> Auden's Hymn to St. Cecilia, patron saint of musicians, was composed by Benjamin Britten in 1942 on his hazardous voyage back to England from the United States. . . .
>
> But today, to me, it sounds like a lament, a lament for a time when the Church, more particularly the Church of England, was a place of consequence for artists of consequence, nurtured, or at least accommodated, in its breadth and depth. Britten and Auden, Eliot and Sutherland, Vaughan Williams and Howells and Stanley Spencer and John Piper and **Barbara Pym**: not exactly a Church of England First Eleven, but with a little support in the slips from, say, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and David Jones, the Church in England half a century ago could field quite a side.

Noted in Book Reviews

• In the *Boston Globe* of June 3, 2007, Katherine A. Powers wrote in her review of the novels of Patrick Hamilton:

> His [Hamilton's] portrayal of how manners and social relationships are integral to identity are akin to hers [Jane Austen's] as is the wickedness with which he dissects social situations. And, while we're at it, I, personally, would like to compare him with **Barbara Pym** in his bleak, biting wit and interest in the rotten deal given to quietly decent people of reduced means.

Thanks to **Nancy Macmillan** for sending this clipping.

Noted in Book Reviews (cont'd)

• **Hazel Bell** found this entry in the magazine newbooks [sic], issue 42, Nov. – Dec. 2007, p. 41. From *Dear Diary* by Lynne Hatwell:

> Wartime diaries are another favourite for that unique and personal glimpse of tumultuous world events. If you arm yourself with several different volumes such as *Few eggs and no oranges; The Diaries of Vere Hodgson 1940-1945*; *Vera Brittain's Diary 1939-1945* and then add in a volume such as *A Very Private Eye* by **Barbara Pym** and some Frances Partridge, you get four completely different perspectives on the same events. On exactly the same day, whilst Vere is shifting rubbish after an air raid, Vera may be taking Shirley to have her tonsils out and the donkeys may be eating the cabbage in Barbara's garden, meanwhile Frances is wondering whether there is any point in picking flowers in a world such as this.

Noted in Print

• Erica Marcus offers summer reading suggestions in Newsday, May 27, 2007:

> I don't know if I'm going to be able to explain why I love English comic novelist **Barbara Pym**, but I'll give it a try. Pym is funnier than Jane Austen, kinder than Muriel Spark, less creepy than Ruth Rendell. But she shares with these authoresses a gift for insight and humanity. In her minutely observed chronicles of the lives of resolutely average people, she manages to achieve something both hilarious and profound – and profoundly British.

• On www.LibraryJournal.com, Wilda Williams writes "Tea with Honey and Barbara Pym" on May 4, 2007:

> Yesterday . . . I was laid low by a bad head cold. I only had enough energy to make a cup of green tea (with a little bit of Trader Joe's mesquite honey) and settle on my sofa with a dog-eared, yellowing paperback copy of **Barbara Pym's** 1961 novel *No Fond Return of Love*, which I had found in my apartment building's unofficial basement library (where all the tenants discard their unwanted books). I couldn't resist after reading the opening sentence: 'There are various ways of mending a broken heart, but perhaps going to a learned conference is one of the more unusual.' And what a delightful sick-bed read it turned out to be . . . .

• Several Pym Society members reported having read the piece by A.N. Wilson in the Daily Telegraph of 9 July 2007, entitled "Do Nobel Prizes stand test of time?" The article can be found online at www.telegraph.co.uk. Excerpts appear below:

> I have a prejudice against authors who have won the Nobel Prize. Apply this simple test. Write a history of English literature over the past 100 years in which you are compelled to make the Nobel prizewinners the only subject matter. Yes, all right, you'd have T S Eliot and W B Yeats to help you through the chapters on early-20th-century poetry.
>
> But there is something perverse about a literature prize that bestowed the laurel crown on the brows of John Galsworthy and Pearl Buck, leaving many more illustrious writers unacknowledged. . . .
>
> Heinrich Böll had always seemed to me a typical Nobel author, a man who fitted the bill politically at some juncture in world history. Obviously, after the Second World War, the good Scandinavian liberals were desperate to honour a good liberal German, so as to – in that patronising and rather nauseating phrase – welcome Germany back into the family of nations. Herman Hesse got the prize almost as soon as war was over and then, scraping the barrel a little, or so I'd always thought, there was gentle Böll, who got the prize in 1972. . . .
>
> But I've reading old Böll lately and thinking I've been unfair. His best work belonged to the decade after the war, I believe. A novella that moved me is *And Never Said a Word* – a married couple, the Bogners, in bombed Cologne, struggling to maintain a living, and feeling the chill of marital failure dividing them. . . .
>
> This understated story moved me, and his routines (he works as an ecclesiastical pen-pusher in the bishop's office at Cologne), his life hopelessly ogling waitresses in cafés, his low levels of depression all rang bells.
>
> Even so, as a chronicler of post-war low-level depressives with a church background, is Böll better than **Barbara Pym**, who didn't get the Nobel Prize? Not really.

Miscellany

• **Christine Shuttleworth** notes that online bookseller Abebooks.co.uk listed *Excellent Women* as number six on its Top Ten Bestsellers for a week in-mid-October. Excellent news!