Green Leaves

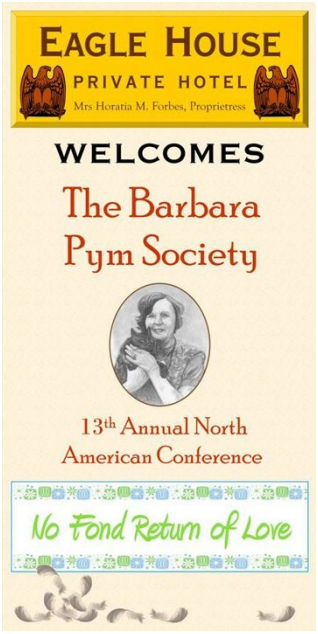
The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society **Vol. XVII, No. 1, Spring, 2011**

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

The Thirteenth Annual North American Conference of the Barbara Pym Society
Cambridge, Massachusetts, 18-20 March 2011

by Isabel Stanley

When I checked into the Inn at Harvard and saw Yvonne Cocking, Robin Joyce and Janet Fithian enjoying a glass of wine in the atrium, I knew I was with my people, Pym people. Sufficiently refreshed by our late afternoon libation (for they had asked me to join them), we repaired to the Church of the Advent for more congenial visiting and a delicious dinner. Tom Sopko, a member of the choir at the church, had arranged to have his excellent organist play for a hymn sing after the meal. A newly printed 'Pymnal' containing many hymns mentioned in Pym's novels was available, as well as the traditional Episcopal hymnal. If the hymns of the faithful can save the world, our doughty choir came to the aid of 'the saints of God [whom] we meet in shops and at tea', 'those in peril on the sea', and even 'the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate'. A hearty rendition of *Jerusalem* brought the hymn sing to a successful close.



The conference began in earnest on Saturday morning at the Barker Center, Harvard University. We were greeted by directional signs and a banner welcoming us to the Eagle House Private Hotel, which featured eagles, as did our nametags. A stately stuffed (toy) eagle watched over the proceedings in the meeting room. Proceedings began with welcomes by Tom Sopko and Clemence Schultze, chair of the Barbara Pym Society, who reminded members of the upcoming joint meeting of the BPS and the Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship in Canterbury.

In keeping with tradition, Yvonne Cocking presented the first paper, 'A Thankless Task?', which examined the initial reception of *No Fond Return of Love*, originally entitled *A Thankless Task?* She cited two particular influences on the book, Barbara Pym's lifelong interest in the goings on of her neighbors and her attendance at a literary summer school at Swanwick School, which she used to good effect in *NFRL*.

Next Martha Wilson helped the listeners with the intricacies of 'Cooking in a Bedsitter' in her paper of the same name (which shares its title with a book by Katharine Whitehorn), illustrated with amusing pictures of the period.

The ensuing discussion evoked memories of strange war-time and post-war food, which many professed to have been 'quite good' and 'better than you might think'. Some skepticism reigned despite these assurances, but all enjoyed Martha's presentation.

After a pleasant break for a boxed lunch, the conference resumed. Thad Cockrill presented his paper, 'Sister Acts: the Unlikely Pair in the Early Novels of Barbara Pym'. His paper generated a lively discussion concerning unlikely pairs and what constitutes likeness or unlikeness in Pym.

Gloria Nakamura's paper, 'The Birth of the "Angry" Young Excellent Woman', compared and contrasted Pym women with the angry young men depicted in novels and plays in the era about which she was writing. Gloria's paper helped us to realize that, while Pym was not depicting the worlds of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* or John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, she was depicting the slowly evolving world of women in characters such as Dulcie and Viola. ➔

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A highlight of the day's activities was the arrival of a reporter from the *Boston Globe* newspaper who photographed and chronicled our Bring-and-Buy Sale in a subsequent issue of the paper. Members of the Society had been enjoined to bring suitably fetching items to impress the reporter. Many felt the faux fur hot water bottle cover was the *pièce de résistance*, while others favored the antimacassars. The reporter did the Bring-and-Buy Sale justice in her article, even quoting Robin Joyce's comment that Barbara Pym wrote about 'strong happy spinsters'.

Bring-and-Buy Sale treasures

Sunday morning commenced with Sandra Goldstein's presentation on suburbs and sagas in *NFRL*. Sandra reminded us that Barbara had been making up stories about important people in her life and those at the periphery since she met Henry Harvey at Oxford and dubbed him 'Lorenzo'. Later Barbara and her sister Hilary had a running 'saga' going about the two men who lived next door to them. Sandra noted the rich inner life Barbara Pym always had unfurling in her mind while going about work-a-day tasks.

The conference concluded with a dramatized reading of *NFRL* entitled 'Perhaps It Would Have to Be Contrived,' adapted by Tom Sopko. A talented cast was led by Tim Burnett, who both provided the narration and played the roles of the housekeeper at St Ivel's and of Horatia Forbes, complete with suitable accents. The cast included ingénues Denise Marois-Wolf and Susan Bramson as Viola Dace and Dulcie Mainwaring, as well as many favorites from previous dramatized readings. The Pym Players were much appreciated by their audience. All left the conference happy to have been so entertained and enlightened, and eager to attend the August conference in Oxford (UK) and next year's conference in Cambridge (US).

Susan, Lisa, Rita, and Denise, along with the eagle

Fine wines at Friday dinner, served by Richard Wolf

Chatting at the conference reception

Tom Sopko and the eagle

Summaries of all papers read at the conference appear on pages 3-7. Full texts are available at www.barbara-pym.org.

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A Thankless Task?

by Yvonne Cocking

Barbara Pym started to write *No Fond Return of Love* within a few months of the submission to the publisher of *A Glass of Blessings* in the summer of 1957. Documents in the Bodleian Library do not provide much information about the development of the novel, and there is not even a complete draft. Notebooks and diaries shed some light.

Two themes appear, based on Barbara's personal experience; first, her interest in, and 'stalking' of, some neighbours in Barnes, which activity was transferred to Dulcie and Viola, and from which she also derived Neville Forbes's church, Mrs Forbes, the Eagle House Private Hotel, and many of the events in Taviscombe; second, a Writers' Summer School, which Barbara had attended in August 1957, which she adapted as the setting of her opening chapters. Readers of the novel will recognise many details mentioned in her notebook:

> At the end of the long tables the woman (or women) who happen to be sitting there serve out the soup and the portions of food. (Men very seldom do.) Often an unmarried woman does it, perhaps it satisfies some deep need, something finer than mere bossiness. At the end of the meal plates are piled up and taken to the tables by the hatch, but it will do if one goes away carrying just a small thing like a jug of custard. One sits in a basket chair in the vinery where the grapes hang already ripe. It could be an orangery or old conservatory. Splendid place for long sad conversations.

The first hint of the future Viola comes here:

> Undenominational service in the chapel with the green leaves of huge rhododendron bushes outside the windows so that we might be in an aquarium or under water in the greenish light. We sing all things bright and beautiful and an Indian lady plays the harmonium. But wouldn't she be a heathen, someone might ask anxiously? A rather intense woman with reddish hair cut in a fringe and dress with gathered skirt is older than one thinks.

Viola is based on this 'intense woman', and the woman serving the food becomes Miss Foy. In the same notebook Barbara introduces Dulcie, said to be the character most like Barbara herself. As she worked on the plot, some aspects fell into place almost complete, while others were greatly modified.

> Dulcie works at a sort of religious publishers, a lot of women, all poorly paid, rather noble and bad-tempered. She is engaged in some kind of literary quest, but it can't be after anyone too famous or the facts would be known. At least the quest can involve a St Laurence-like church. ... Viola is also very literary. (Don't make her too Prudence-like.)
>
> What is the relationship between Dulcie and Viola? How do they come to live together? Viola has been turned out of her flat – the Rent Act is vaguely referred to – so comes to share Dulcie's suburban house. The soft-hearted Dulcie has come across Viola weeping. This worries her, as she worries over 'beggars and people wrongly imprisoned in mental homes'.

The notebook also includes various ideas that Barbara has toyed with and then rejected. This little scene, which demonstrates the different temperaments of Dulcie and Viola, takes place on holiday in France.

> They were walking in the hot little French town, their heavier luggage left at the station, for the plane had been nearly two hours late and they had missed the bus they had meant to take to the small unfashionable Riviera resort where they were to spend a fortnight's holiday in the villa of an English lady who took in paying guests.
>
> Viola [scornfully]: It is typical of Dulcie, to notice a chicken's head lying on the dusty road and seize upon that as a topic of conversation.

Ann DiPietro and Yvonne Cocking

> Dulcie: I always thought the French used everything in cooking. No waste at all.
>
> Viola [dryly]: It is difficult to see how one could use a chicken's head.
>
> She felt a headache coming on and longed, though she would not have admitted it, for a reviving cup of good English tea.
>
> Dulcie: But surely simmered with the feet – well washed of course – and a bouquet garni, it would make stock, wouldn't it?
>
> Viola [aside, sighing]: Our contrasting personalities are shown in this situation. How unpromising it sounds!

Reception of the published novel by newspaper critics was mainly warm, and readers were very appreciative There have been several dramatisations of the novel – by the BBC, at a Pym conference, and even a public

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performance. This was the last of her novels to be accepted without demur before her reinstatement in 1977. As one critic recently said, 'After this book appeared in 1961 her publishers decided they wanted no more. What fools they were.'

Yvonne Cocking *is a founding member of the Barbara Pym Society, was formerly its secretary and now serves as its archivist and historian. A retired librarian, she worked for more than two years in the early 1960s at the International African Institute in London, where she made the acquaintance of Barbara Pym and Hazel Holt. She lives in Oxfordshire and spends countless hours sifting through the richness of the Pym archives at the Bodleian library.*

Cooking in a Bedsitter

by Martha Wilson

Living alone means autonomy. That's one reason Laurel, once she moves into Dulcie's spare room, is so keen, so quickly, to move on again, this time to share a house with her fashionable friend Marian and a number of other people. 'She longed for the impersonality of the hall as one came into the house, the utter privacy of Marian's room, with its concealed washbasin and the little electric cooker in a cupboard where she really cooked meals.'

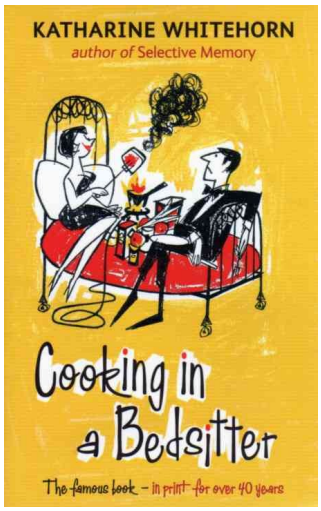
Freedom is what Laurel wants, independence, and of course a little taste of that is unsatisfying. Small wonder that she wants to move on from having Aunt Dulcie comment, with politely hidden dismay, on Laurel's unmade bed. So she moves to Quince Square, where she behaves like Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music*, bounding out of bed and throwing open the curtains 'as if she were flinging open the shutters on to a prospect of the Bay of Naples or some soaring mountain peak in Switzerland instead of just the dripping February trees of Quince Square'.

This is way better than staying with Dulcie. She finds life 'what one called "intoxicating" from this moment of waking, through all the stages of getting up and making her own breakfast on the little concealed cooker, to the final rush to the bus stop'.

Cooking in a Bedsitter was a cookbook written by British journalist Katharine Whitehorn, first published under the title *Kitchen in the Corner* in 1961. It was enormously popular, remaining in print for more than 40 years, and was recently reissued. It's a treasure trove of recipes that you just aren't as likely to see now, like Spam fritters, or kidneys and corn. The book also makes abundantly clear what nearly insurmountable challenges cooking in a bedsitter entailed. For example, Whitehorn writes early on in her book about what she calls 'the water problem': 'No one who cooks in a real kitchen can imagine the unbelievable inconvenience of having no tap near the cooking. Nothing can be washed, swabbed, diluted, strained, or extinguished without first making that trip to the water-hole down the corridor.'

Still, for all its inconveniences in post-war England, the idea of living alone (or sharing a flat with a friend) is an indicator of freedom and adventurousness for young women – but for women who aren't young, it's trouble.

Yet over and over we read, from a range of characters, references to the satisfactions of solitude and the pleasures of living alone.



Here's Mildred, near the start of *Excellent Women*: 'Now that Dora had gone I looked forward to being alone once more, to living a civilised life with a bedroom and a sitting-room and a spare room for friends.' If Mildred concurs with the position generally held by the wider culture, that marriage is the be-all and end-all – and I think she does: 'That was the thing,' she mused about the ring on the left hand – then she also, simultaneously, is undercutting that.

Pym makes it clear in many passages, in different books, that marriage is 'the thing'. It's at the heart of what you're expected to achieve. And yet she also says – even while affirming how important marriage is – that its centrality is wrong. Moreover, I think she's saying not just that it's wrong, but that it's an outright lie.

Dulcie, of course, isn't much looking forward to Laurel's arrival at the beginning of *No Fond Return of Love*; she feels obligated to offer Laurel a room, but she doesn't want to. Dulcie has been enjoying her time alone. Single life also sounds pretty good when you

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consider Dolly Arborfield, Caroline's friend in *An Academic Question*. Dolly is in her 60s, has never married (though she has made it clear to Caroline 'that her life had not been without love'), and lives exactly the way she wants to.

There's another piece of evidence that being married isn't life's central achievement: the importance Pym gives to the inner lives of many of her passed-over characters. A number of her unmarried characters seem unattached, overlooked, nearly invisible. Letty, for instance, is a person who seems not to be at the center of anyone else's plans. Yet over and over Pym shows a glimpse of their private worlds and reveals rich interior lives – a whole mental landscape that's undetectable from the outside. There's no shame in being solitary; we're all equally human, she says.

In Pym's books, the way you appear in the world has little or no bearing on your worth or on the richness and validity of your interior life.

***Martha Wilson**, an ardent Barbara Pym fan for over 20 years, recently discovered a new application for Pym's work: keeping a child entertained during a long, boring wait in the emergency room – definitive proof, if any was needed, that it's always worthwhile having a Pym book close at hand. (The scene that saved the day was the cactus incident at the beginning of* Crampton Hodnet*.) Martha is an American who lives in Canada, where she handles communications projects for innovative entrepreneurial organizations. She has written for* Real Simple *and for a number of newspapers.*

CENTENARY UPDATE: 1913-2013

The Alliance of Literary Societies meets annually, in a different venue and hosted by a different literary society each time: BPS has put in a bid for 2013, and we should hear the decision soon.

The suggestion of a formal dinner-dance did not find much of a welcome from members: what you seem to prefer is the idea of a Pym-world fancy dress party (probably in Oxford). Come either as a character or a thing: you could be chic Wilmet, scary Mrs Bone, elegant Leonora -- or just don a droopy cardigan and slightly-too-long skirt to impersonate an Excellent Woman. And the men have a wide choice of curates and cads, heavy husbands and awkward anthropologists. Alternatively, the realm of Pymmian things lies open: what about becoming a glittering Faberge egg, a nice cup of tea, or a few green leaves?

On the website, there'll be a month-by-month online scrapbook for 1913: events from the wider world, from Oswestry and the Pym family, and from an Oxford which did not yet know that Barbara would be living there some 20 years later.

Sister Acts: The Unlikely Pair in the Early Novels of Barbara Pym

by Thad Cockrill

Sandra Goldstein, in 'Fashion in *A Glass of Blessings*', invites us to consider all the 'contrasting pairs' in Pym's novels, an invitation that I take up happily in my own reading of Pym's first three published novels – *Some Tame Gazelle, Excellent Women* and *Jane and Prudence* – each of which presents the 'unlikely pair' motif: a dowdy, traditional 'older sister' with a 'younger sister' who shuns the conventions of the past. I am interested in how these opposites evoke a cultural shift in Britain that occurred during Barbara Pym's lifetime. In her first three novels – as well as in *No Fond Return of Love* – the author's juxtaposition of these characters calls to mind the passing of a parochial English past and the emergence of a 'global' British present.

The world of *Some Tame Gazelle*, Pym's first novel, conjures the atmosphere of a time earlier than its publication date in the 1950s, owing perhaps to its rural setting of relative ethnic homogeneity, where the Established Church holds sway. Belinda and Harriet Bede are the prototype for the unlikely pair: Belinda, in her ill-fitting dowdy clothes, has pledged herself (without sex) to the parish clergyman, while Harriet's penchant for rich foods and her 'rapacious' appetite suggest a passionate character, who is sexier, more 'elegant' than her older sister. Harriet's 'greatest interest' is curates, though she merely flirts with them, taking them about as seriously as she takes her religion.

In *Excellent Women*, Mildred is fully in the Church, while Helena Napier is fully outside of it. From the first, Mildred muses doubtfully about the possibilities of friendship with her new neighbor, an atheist who shares something of an open marriage with her husband. An anthropologist, Helena occasionally displays a scientific curiosity toward Mildred's religious habits, though mostly she dismisses Mildred as a bit of an oaf, awkward and old-fashioned in her piety. Helena seems to revel in shocking Mildred, for example, 'unabashedly' serving tea in mugs, not cups: 'I hope you don't mind tea in mugs … I told you I was a slut.' Helena is one of Pym's sexy, glamorous types, her smug antipathy for the Church and her rejection of old-fashioned manners aligning her with a modern, plain-speaking Britain.

In *Jane and Prudence*, the contrast between country

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vicar's wife and single girl in the city drives the novel. Jane's archaic role leaves her somewhat disillusioned, and she bemoans a life that 'hasn't turned out like *The Daisy Chain* or *The Last Chronicle of Barset*', a disillusionment typical of the 'excellent woman', serving to heighten the sense that these characters are mourning the loss of a past age. Jane's friend, Prudence, is a figure of the irreligious modern age. Prudence's rare churchgoing is in the manner of Harriet Bede – for romance – and liturgical props serve merely to promote Prudence's own glamorous view of herself: she imagines herself 'on holiday in Spain, a black lace mantilla draped over her hair, hurrying into some dark cathedral'.

Like so many Pym characters, this black lace mantilla resurfaces in a later novel, *No Fond Return of Love*, linking its owner, Viola Dace, to Prudence. Viola is another of Pym's exotic types for whom religion is merely aesthetic. But though Dulcie, her landlady, insists that Viola can have as many men over as she likes, there is a lack of dashing sexuality in Viola's character. She is no Prudence.

We would expect Dulcie Mainwaring to be the 'excellent woman' here. After all, the name suggests dullness, striking a dowdy note that we have come to associate with Belinda, Mildred and Jane. But the unlikely pair in this novel seem more complex: despite her Victorian associations, Dulcie is not a churchgoer and appears more like Prudence in retaining a vague fondness for its lost trappings. Dulcie seems aware of having lived into a different age. Seeing Viola's uncovered head in the Anglo-Catholic church, Dulcie asks, 'Oughtn't you to be wearing a hat – or don't they mind about that sort of thing nowadays?'

I would venture to say that, unlike Dulcie, even middle-aged English people today are less likely to have been weaned on *Hymns Ancient and Modern* than on the Beatles' *White Album*. Pym's novels chronicle a cultural shift that begins in a rural, parochial age, and takes us up to an urban, secular present when the word England seems anachronistic, less appropriate as it is than Britain, as we more accurately call the modern state. To borrow Charles Hansmann's metaphor from a couple of conferences ago, I am inclined to view the unlikely pair as the reflection of two larger `bookends' that framed Pym's own lifetime – the 19th century and the 21st – bookends that amplify a cultural shift that occurred in the author's lifetime, giving dimension to her artistic determination and animating her work's lasting appeal.

Thad Cockrill *is an associate professor of English at Southwest Tennessee Community College in Memphis, where he teaches composition and contemporary American literature. His master's thesis,* Prudishness, Promiscuity, and Peacock Worship: The 'Unlikely Pair' in Three Novels of Barbara Pym *(University of Mississippi, 1992), examined the connection between Anglo-Catholicism and the 'unlikely pair'. He suffers, nobly, from gout.*

No Fond Return of Love: The Birth of the 'Angry' Young Excellent Woman

by Gloria Nakamura

It is often said about *No Fond Return of Love* that it is the one novel in the Pym canon that does not fit. The massive societal changes in the 1950s – not incorporated in the earlier works – are here addressed, at least to some extent. This paper seeks to set forth some of the main events and trends in the 1950s that affected the writing of *No Fond Return of Love*.

The first post-WWII literary sensation was the 'Angry Young Man' movement, followed by the 'Brutalist' school of fiction and plays, best remembered now for *Lucky Jim* by Kingsley Amis and *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne, respectively. Pym, an avid reader of contemporary novels, may have thought these literary schools just a fad. However, by 1959, when she began seriously writing *No Fond Return of Love*, this trend still continued.

Beginning in 1955, the closure of the Boots Booklovers Library was an ominous portent. Boots, with over 400 branches and half a million subscribers, was undoubtedly a keen purchaser of Pym's novels. In addition, *A Glass of Blessings,* her fifth novel, was her worst-reviewed, and also least-reviewed. The few reviews were all written by women, perhaps, as Pym speculated, by young women. Young women dissatisfied with the relationships and romances in previous Pym novels?

These factors and others were on her mind as she was writing *No Fond Return of Love.* She created Dulcie and Viola, her two most singular heroines: Dulcie, who does not go to church, but knows all the rituals, and Viola, a spinster-in-waiting, who will not go quietly. The relationship of Dulcie and Aylwin is unique in Pym. She fills the novel with their parallel observations and experiences to create a match of equals.

It was after the publication of *No Fond Return of Love* that Barbara began her correspondence with Philip Larkin. The book was well received and she was encouraged to 'go on'. While not exactly a blueprint for an Excellent Woman navigating the 1960s, this was arguably her most modern book. Why, in her seventh

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novel, *An Unsuitable Attachment,* did she step back to the settings and preoccupations of her early work? There is no documented answer. Perhaps she was writing for herself and hoped readers would come along for the ride.

In the spirit of *No Fond Return of Love,* I have a surprise ending for readers to speculate about. What might have been done to avoid Pym's long publication drought? For, like Senhor MacBride-Pereira, I can't help wondering what I might have missed.

***Gloria Nakamura**, a long-time member of the Barbara Pym Society, was born in Vienna, Austria, but has lived most of her life in the very non-Pymmish neighborhood of Pacific Palisades, California. She is grateful to the Santa Monica Public Library for placing* No Fond Return of Love *on the book shelf in the 1980s, without which she wouldn't be discussing it now.*

The Barbara Pym Society 2010-2011

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Membership Secretary: Eileen Roberts

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Committee: Kathy Ackley, Rosamond Cleal, Deborah Fisher, Rose Little, Chris Rutherford, Christine Shuttleworth, Tom Sopko, Libby Tempest, Alex Ward

Commissioning Editor, Green Leaves: Jean Harker

Assistant Editor, Green Leaves: Martin Rush

Archivist: Yvonne Cocking

Society correspondence and queries to:
Eileen Roberts
The Barbara Pym Society
St Hilda's College
Oxford, OX4 1DY
Tel: 01865 373753
(Outside the UK) 44 1865 373753

E-mail: eileen.roberts@st-hildas.ox.ac.uk

In North America

North American Organizer: Tom Sopko

Treasurer/Membership Secretary: Judy Horn

Board: Kathy Ackley, Barbara Boles, Denise Marois-Wolf, Donna Safreed, Sarah Saville Shaffer, Isabel Stanley, Diane C. Thompson

Technical Editor, Green Leaves: Judy Horn

E-mail: barbarapymsociety@gmail.com

Pym Website: www.barbara-pym.org

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The Things I See! — Suburbs and Sagas in *No Fond Return of Love*

by Sandra Goldstein

'Going to the window, he had seen the lady from next door ... being handed out of a taxi by a gentleman who had kissed her hand in the Continental fashion. "The things I see!" he said to himself.' Senhor MacBride-Pereira is watching Viola Dace from the window of his flat in Barnes, a suburb of southwest London, where Barbara Pym and her sister Hilary moved in 1949. They lived at 47 Nassau Road, not far from St Michael's Church, in a self-contained flat on the upper floor of a house owned by a very 'refined' lady, like Senhor MacBride-Pereira's landlady, Mrs Beltane.

The suburbs have traditionally been portrayed as isolated and dreary, and *No Fond Return of Love* is replete with such negative comments. The house of its heroine, Dulcie Mainwaring, is so far from central London that her niece Laurel is depressed and disappointed, thinking that it is really not London at all. Viola Dace feels the same way: 'It had seemed such a very long way in the taxi, as she watched the fare mounting up on the clock and familiar landmarks were left behind.'

Like Senhor MacBride-Pereira, Barbara and Hilary enjoyed watching people from their upstairs window. They named two young men who lived nearby Bear and Squirrel, and built around them a wonderful saga – for that is what it was – with timetables of 'sightings,' and various expeditions, including a trip to the west country. The Bear and Squirrel saga ended in friendship when Barbara and Hilary moved to Queen's Park in 1961, becoming parishioners at St Lawrence's Church, where Bear was the organist. They had to be careful not to reveal details of the saga. Barbara would sometimes say: 'Are we supposed to *know* that?' or 'Is it true or did we make it up?'

Of course, you don't have to live in the suburbs to indulge in sagas; Barbara had always enjoyed them, wherever she was living. In her memoir *A Lot to Ask*, Hazel Holt explains that the subject of a saga 'can be anyone, a famous person alive or dead, an animal, or an ordinary person whom you can observe'. In 1932, smitten with fellow Oxford student Henry Harvey, Barbara diligently started recorded sightings of 'Lorenzo' in her diary. On 18 January 1933 she wrote: 'This diary seems to be going to turn into the Saga of Lorenzo.' Later on, at the International African Institute, Barbara and Hazel re-

lieved their boredom by making up mini-sagas around the anthropologists. According to Hazel, Barbara usually got it right. Several years later, on receiving a card from one of the subjects of their sagas, she wrote to Hazel: 'How nice of him to write to me and so typical of the character we have invented for him.'

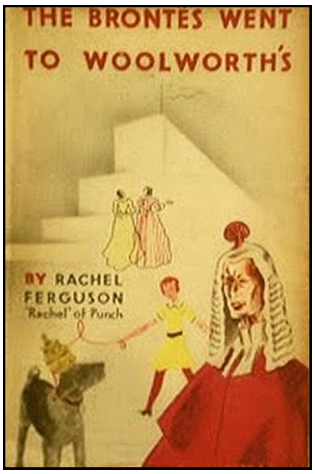
One of Barbara's favorite authors, Rachel Ferguson, wrote the definitive chronicle of the saga in her novel *The Brontës Went to Woolworth's*, published in 1931. Deirdre Carne, the novel's narrator, explains that she and her two sisters 'learn everything there is to learn about people we love. We get their papers, and follow their careers, and pick up gossip, and memorise anecdotes, and study paragraphs, and follow their moves about the country ...'.

Vintage postcard of the Carlton Private Hotel in Minehead, Somerset, which served as the inspiration for the Eagle House.

The saga provided the theme for *No Fond Return of Love*. Infatuated by Aylwin Forbes, as Barbara was by Henry Harvey, Dulcie determines to learn as much as possible about him and his family. She explains that her interest in the Forbeses is a kind of game – though in her unhappiness it is as much a refuge for her as a game. Dulcie is able to create a small drama out of an everyday situation. In the same way, Senhor MacBride-Pereira, from his solitary vantage-point, watches his fellow suburban dwellers come and go and speculates on what it all means.

In a talk, 'The Novelist's Use of Every-Day Life', given in Barnes in the 1950s, Barbara Pym said that 'reading novels is like looking through a window'. Conversely, looking through windows or otherwise observing other people provides interesting images which may turn into sagas, or even novels. At the end of the book, Dulcie's Aylwin saga promises to become reality, when Aylwin realizes that it is she, not Laurel, whom he loves. Three similar but different types of saga played their roles in Barbara Pym's life and literary work: those she invented from her own experiences, providing raw material for her novels; sagas of the type described in *The Brontës Went to Woolworth's*, which created a complicated fantasy life for the Carne family, and which may have helped inspire Pym's use of the saga in *No Fond Return of Love*; and finally the sagas devised by Barbara Pym's own characters, as much a refuge for Dulcie as a game for Senhor MacBride-Pereira.

***Sandra Goldstein**, a native of Solihull in the West Midlands of England and a graduate of Bedford College for Women, University of London, where she studied German and Russian, came late to the works of Barbara Pym, but has since made up for it and has succeeded in passing on her enthusiasm to her twin daughters. Recently retired from a position in the US Government, Sandra enjoys having more time for reading and travel. She lived in Notting Hill, probably quite near Quince Square, in the early 1960s, but was never invited in for drinks by Aylwin Forbes.*



***Rachel Ethelreda Ferguson** (1892-1957): actor, suffragette, novelist and columnist in Punch magazine. The Brontës went to Woolworth's is available from Bloomsbury; and her masterpiece,* Alas, Poor Lady, *from Persephone.*

Breaking news ...

Kindle e-book editions of *Some Tame Gazelle, A Glass of Blessings,* and *Less Than Angels* are now available on Amazon.co.uk, and we hope that additional titles will be forthcoming.

Unfortunately the downloads are not available in the US or Canada because of licensing restrictions.

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A Letter from my Love

by Barbara Pym

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It was very hot in Budapest. Margaret walked down past the gay shops to the hotel where her party was staying. At the corner of the street there was an old woman selling peaches. Margaret bought twenty fillers worth in a pointed bag. Then she walked up the cool stone steps. The hotel was on the third floor, and on her way up she passed the offices with the Hungarian name-plates, Fodor Árpád, Vago Bela, and Petöfi János. She had often wondered what these people did. Even if they were only lawyers or insurance agents, their strange names made one imagine that their business must be something mysterious, or even a little sinister.

Margaret reached the Hotel Florio and walked into the lounge. Here it was cooler and rather dark. The two middle-aged spinsters were sitting at a table, writing post-cards home. Margaret remembered that she had promised to write Geoffrey a letter, and found herself thinking that it was a nuisance. And yet to write to one's devoted fiancé should be a delight, she reminded herself. Dutifully, she tried to imagine what Geoffrey would be doing now. The bank did not close till four on a Wednesday, so he would still be hard at work, his brow furrowed with anxiety over a column of figures, if columns of figures were what he was likely to be dealing with, for Margaret was ashamed to remember that she did not really take much interest in his work.

She took a postcard out of her bag. It was a suitably romantic one of Budapest floodlit at night. She wrote a few remarks about the hot weather and the lovely time she was having, and then, finding that she still had an inch of space left, sat thinking of what else she could say. Obviously she ought to say something like 'I have thought of you so much, and wished you could be here with me in this romantic town', but she was determined not to say this when she had had such an argument with Geoffrey as to how they should spend their holidays. Geoffrey had wanted her to go with him and his family to the usual place in Wales for a fortnight at the end of August, but Margaret had insisted on taking this holiday abroad. She had joined a tour, and although Geoffrey had said he quite understood, there had been a little coolness between them at parting. If Margaret wrote saying how much she wished he were with her, he might think that she had regretted her decision.

After a little hesitation she took up her pen, and wrote 'Tomorrow there is to be a carnival on the Danube, and the day after we are going to a wonderful lake to bathe for the whole day. Love, Margaret.'

She went into her bedroom. It was unbearably hot here, and the noise of the trams in the street was deafening. Margaret leaned her arms on the window-sill and looked down at the people passing. A cart drawn by two horses rumbled by; a peasant woman with a shawl over her head was flicking them lazily with a whip. The mixture of things in Budapest was enchanting, how sensible she had been to come! It was probably the last chance she would get of having a holiday abroad, for this time next year she and Geoffrey would be married, and there would not be very much money. Margaret supposed that she was in love with Geoffrey, but somehow she could not see him in this romantic atmosphere, learning to dance the *czardas,* or splashing plump elderly Hungarians in the open-air swimming baths. But Geoffrey would be an excellent husband, she thought, sighing a little, and throwing a peach-stone down on to the pavement.

This evening they were going to dance and hear some Hungarian gipsy music. Margaret took great care over her appearance. She was glad that she looked like a fair English girl, because she could not help wanting to make a good impressions on the Hungarians. Her knowledge of foreigners was so far limited to a chance acquaintance on the boat, a fat German who had offered to show her round Munich, and a handsome Belgian who had made a pillow out of his overcoat for her when she was asleep in the train. There was something so romantic about foreigners, she thought naively, remembering Geoffrey's rather rosy face and sandy hair. The Hungarians were all dark and sunburnt.

She went into the lounge and found the party already assembled, but among the crowd of rather dull people there was somebody she had not seen before. He was so dark, so sunburnt, and had such flashing white teeth, and such a charming foreign accent, that he hardly needs to be described.

Margaret gazed at him, enchanted. He stared back very boldly.

'This is Mr. Miklos Foldy,' said the leader of the party. 'He is coming to be our guide.'

'I hope you're not going to lead us *astray*,' said a gaunt woman coyly.

Mr. Foldy bowed, and smiled again.

'Please?' he said, showing his excellent white teeth.

'He doesn't speak English very fluently,' explained the leader, 'but he speaks German.'

The party filed down the stairs. Margaret found herself walking by Mr. Foldy. We are drawn to each other, she thought suddenly, excited at the idea.

'You like Budapest?' said a thrilling voice in her ear. He pronounced it Buda*pesht* lingering over the last syllable.

Margaret blushed and stammered 'Oh, yes.' She wished she could have thought of something more interesting to say. 'Oh, yes, I *do*,' she said again, more fervently.

They went to an open-air café, with terraces overlooking the Danube and a round stone floor for dancing. The band played tangos, waltzes and a *czardas*. Margaret danced three times with Mr. Foldy. He whispered snatches of amorous German into her ear, at least she supposed it was amorous, but, having no knowledge of the language, she could not be sure. She reassured herself by thinking that his eyes were as eloquent as any words he might say. There could be no mistake there. He danced two dances with other girls in the party, while Margaret sat looking down at the lights of Budapest.

'The lights of *Pest* incidentally ...' said the practically-minded leader of the party.

But Margaret was not listening. She was thinking of Mr. Foldy and praying that he was not whispering German to the other girls he was dancing with, for she dared not look.

At last he was back by her side, and once more they were dancing. After a time the dancing stopped, and the band began to play wailing gipsy music. It was more romantic than Margaret would have imagined possible.

'You will come into the garden?' said Mr. Foldy, his foreign voice adding to the romance of the evening.

Margaret hesitated. What would Geoffrey think? He had talked to her quite seriously about the perils of foreign travel, and she was sure that going into gardens at night with handsome Hungarians must be one of the greatest.

'I don't know,' she said vaguely, with a backward glance towards a little group of her fellow tourists, who were trying, with melancholy concentration, to get drunk on Tokay.

'You wish that your friends come too?' he asked, looking at her seriously.

'Oh, no ...' Margaret walked resolutely in the direction of the garden. 'Only it's rather late, Mr ... I'm so sorry, I can't pronounce your name', she said with a little giggle, for the wine and dancing had gone to her head.

'My name is Miklos,' he said. 'What is yours?'

'Margaret,' she said softly, wishing it had been something less ordinary.

'Margarete,' he repeated. 'That is a very pretty name.'

'You seem to make it sound *different*,' she said.

He laughed. 'Oh, that is my bad English! You will forgive me, please?'

'Yes.'

'And you will kiss me to show that you forgive?'

Margaret had no choice in this matter, and indeed it began to get so late that the leader of the party, with his inevitable list in his hand, penetrated the wilderness of the garden in search of her.

He broke into embarrassed apologies when he saw that Margaret was with Miklos. 'I thought you were lost,' he laughed nervously, 'but I didn't realise that Mr. Foldy was with you.' He smiled reassuringly. 'We're going home now, but I expect you'll just follow when you feel inclined,' he said, and with another nervous little laugh he left them.

'You seem to be enjoying yourself here,' said the gaunt woman at breakfast next morning. 'I expect you know all about Hungarian gardens by moonlight by now,' she added, with rather a bitter laugh.

Margaret felt rather embarrassed, for she was a nice girl and would gladly have provided romantic Hungarians for all the women in the party, had it been possible.

'Well, I don't know,' she said doubtfully. 'Isn't it funny the way they give you hot milk with tea here?'

After breakfast Miklos called.

'We will go to swim,' he said, 'you and I alone. You must see the Margarete island, *your* island.'

Margaret could not do anything but agree to this, so they spent a glorious day by themselves, and in the evening they danced on a boat on the river, and gazed at the floodlit towers reflected in the water.

Afterwards, Miklos took Margaret back to the hotel and came inside with her. There was a letter for Margaret in Geoffrey's handwriting.

'*Ein Liebesbrief, kleine Margarete?*' asked Miklos.

'I don't understand,' said Margaret, who had no knowledge of languages except the Hungarian for 'I love you' which she had been taught that afternoon.

'A love letter?' repeated Miklos.

'Yes,' said Margaret. 'From my fiancé,' she added, rather proudly.

'You have a fiancé?'

'Yes. Have you?'

'I have a wife,' said Miklos, with no show of emotion. 'She is now in Vienna with the children.'

Margaret tried not to show that she was surprised, but she could not help feeling a little shocked, for she had been well brought up.

'Well, I shall soon have a husband,' she laughed.

'And ten children?' said Miklos, kissing the back of her neck.

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'No, twelve, I think,' said Margaret lightly.

'That is too many,' said Miklos. 'I have five.'

'Have all Hungarians got wives?' asked Margaret rather puzzled.

'Oh yes,' Miklos assured her. 'And if they have no wives they have fiancées or mistresses. We do not trouble about such things. In England it is different, yes?'

A few days later Margaret went back to England. She was excited rather than sad at leaving Budapest. Miklos had come to the train bringing a huge sheaf of gladioli tied up with gold ribbon.

'How lovely, but you'll find them a nuisance on the train,' said the gaunt woman.

Margaret agreed, for she was a polite girl. But what an exciting nuisance, she thought. They couldn't be put up on the luggage rack without being crushed by the suitcases, and Margaret had to hold them in her arms until they reached Vienna. They made her feel like a bride.

She missed Miklos, but her sadness was almost counterbalanced by the anticipation of telling people at home about him. She wondered what Geoffrey would say. She had no intention of making any sort of *confession*. She would just drop hints, and be tantalisingly vague.

In Vienna she was able to put the flowers in water. She decided to leave them there. It would be so much more romantic never to see them die, or, at least she would think of them as withering in Vienna, rather than see them being thrown into the dustbin at home.

The journey passed too slowly. They reached Passau and then came into Germany. Margaret slept and was awakened from her dreams by the customs officers at Aachen. She was disappointed that she had not been dreaming about Miklos, but she made up for the omission by thinking about him for the rest of the sleepless night.

At breakfast, which they ate hurrying through Belgium, she was thoroughly depressed. She was dirty, and felt tired and stiff. Miklos was miles away in Budapest. He was married and had five children, and she loved him.

As the boat drew away from Ostend she realised that they were now divided by the sea, as well as by three countries. She took his card out of her bag. It was a large thin one and had on it, *Foldy Miklos, Budapest*. No address. Margaret's eyes filled with tears. The boat began to roll a little and the wind was cold.

'Margarete,' she whispered sadly.

'Are you feeling ill?' asked a sympathetic female member of the party. 'I have some Mothersill in my bag.'

Margaret would rather have been left alone in her romantic unhappiness, but she did not like to hurt the woman's feelings. Then suddenly she found that she couldn't speak at all.

'You'll feel much better after you've been sick,' said the woman gently, leading Margaret by the arm.

It was quite nice to be back in England, and, by the time they reached Victoria, Margaret was pleasantly excited. She could not help looking forward to telling Geoffrey about Budapest.

He was there to meet her, his rosy face a little browner than usual with sunburn.

He took possession of Margaret and hurried her away almost before she had time to say good-bye to the rest of the party. He was in a very husbandly mood, and called her 'dear' after every sentence. Margaret felt suddenly miserable again as they sat having tea in Fuller's. It was all so unlike Budapest. As she sat listening to Geoffrey's chatter about *his* holiday she felt herself freezing up inside. He had adopted a patronising manner towards her, and hadn't asked her anything about Budapest. When she said something about having developed a taste for Tokay, Geoffrey stared at her uncomprehendingly, and called for the bill.

By the evening Margaret was quite desperate. She might never have been to Budapest at all for all the notice Geoffrey had taken of her. He had never asked her how she had liked the Hungarians, or the climate, or the food. He showed no signs of jealousy when she dropped hints about dancing every evening, and listening to the *tzigane* bands, and looking at the moonlight on the Danube.

At supper, which he had at Margaret's home, Geoffrey talked of nothing but the new adding machines they were having at the bank. Afterwards he and Margaret went into the garden. It was a lovely summer night.

'A real Budapest night,' said Margaret provocatively.

'We had nights just like this at Llancymyll,' said Geoffrey exasperatingly. 'There's only one moon you know'.

Margaret said nothing. She was thinking of the first night she had met Miklos. How *could* she go on with Geoffrey? How could she marry a person who didn't even understand her? She winced as she remembered what he had said about the *tzigane* music being like a lot of cats squalling. He didn't know anything of the real romance of being in love. He had only become engaged to her because other clerks in the bank were engaged. She would have to be honest with him and tell him that she could no longer go on with it. Poor Geoffrey, it would hurt him terribly, but it was better that he should know the truth.

'Geoffrey,' she asked, when there was a suitable pause in the conversation, 'Do you still love me?'

'Why Margaret, darling,' Geoffrey turned from admiring the Budapest-Llancymyll moon, and took her in his arms. 'So that's why you've been so quiet and different.'

Margaret was dismayed at the turn events had taken. This was not at all what she had expected. She waited patiently till he had finished.

'Geoffrey dear,' she said, breaking it as gently as she could, 'When I was in Budapest there was a Hungarian.'

'You *don't* say!' exclaimed Geoffrey with sudden facetiousness that jarred terribly on Margaret's mood, 'I

should have thought there were several thousand at least.'

'Yes, but you don't understand. He made love to me. We loved each other.' Margaret decided to say nothing about Miklos being married and having five children. Somehow it would make her affair sound less romantic, and even a little ridiculous. 'And now I feel as if I can't go on being engaged to you.' Margaret heaved a sigh of relief. She had told him.

'But, dear, what does it matter if you imagined you were in love with some Hungarian chap? I expect the moonlight went to your head. It must be stronger in Budapest,' he laughed. 'But I'm not narrow-minded, and, even if it were true, I wouldn't let a thing like that spoil our lives.'

'But Geoffrey, I can't marry you now.' Margaret twisted her engagement ring despairingly, but it was tight and would not come off.

'There, there,' said Geoffrey soothingly, as if he were speaking to a child. 'You girls are always trying to make us jealous. But don't you see how ridiculous it is? As if I could believe that my Margaret would let a Hungarian make love to her. You see darling, I know you so much better than you think.'

'Better than I do myself,' echoed Margaret weakly.

'Margarete ... that is a very pretty name.' And yet Geoffrey said it had never happened. If he persisted in his refusal to believe her, she too would begin to doubt. If only Miklos hadn't had that wife and five children she would have been able to stay with him, perhaps even to marry him. As it was she would have to spend the rest of her life trying to convince a fiancé and then a husband that a Hungarian had made love to her. It was a dreary prospect.

For the next few days she said no more about it, but one evening when she and Geoffrey had been to the pictures together, she came home to find a letter waiting for her. It was a fat envelope with a foreign stamp. It was addressed to her in strange sloping writing, and the postmark was Budapest.

'I expect it's from that Hungarian chap,' laughed Geoffrey. There was not a trace of uneasiness in his voice.

'Yes, it's probably from Miklos,' said Margaret, not quite so steadily. She opened the envelope, tearing it in her excitement.

Inside it was a printed circular advertising the charms and amenities of the city of Budapest. It had been sent by the Budapest Municipal Information Office in Deák Ferenc-Utca.

Margaret turned and went into the drawing-room. The expression on her face was one of resignation rather than disappointment. Geoffrey would never believe her now.

THE END

Thanks to Hazel Holt, Barbara Pym's Literary Executor, for permission to copy this story from the Bodleian Library Pym Archive.

Coming Events

Please visit ***www.barbara-pym.org*** *for details.*

2011 Annual General Meeting

The AGM and Conference will be held at St Hilda's College, Oxford, on 26-28 August (Bank Holiday weekend).

The conference will focus on **Crampton Hodnet** *and will include papers on Pym and the Oxford novel, on recurrent characters, and on the literary merits of this novel. Among the speakers are Kathy Ackley and Eleonore Biber. There will also be a presentation about fashions of the period; and a dramatised reading.*

On Friday afternoon there will be a visit to the Bodleian library. As there are limited numbers for this visit, booking will be strictly on a 'first come, first served' basis.

If you would like to raise anything at the AGM, please email barbarapymsociety@gmail.com, with the words BPS AGM in the subject line.

Garden Fête

Boston-area BPS members will gather at 3:00 p.m. on ***Sunday 26 June 2011*** *at the home of Denise Marois-Wolf in Acton, Massachusetts.*
RSVP to ***barbarapymsociety@gmail.com*** *by 20 June.*

2012 North American Conference

The fourteenth annual North American Conference will be held on ***16-18 March 2012*** *at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.*
The conference will focus on **Jane and Prudence**.

Call for Papers: *The North American organizing committee is soliciting proposals for talks at the conference. Preference will be given to papers dealing with aspects of* **Jane and Prudence**, *but any other Pym-related topics are also welcome. Please send a 100-150 word proposal by 20 November to* ***barbarapymsociety@gmail.com***.

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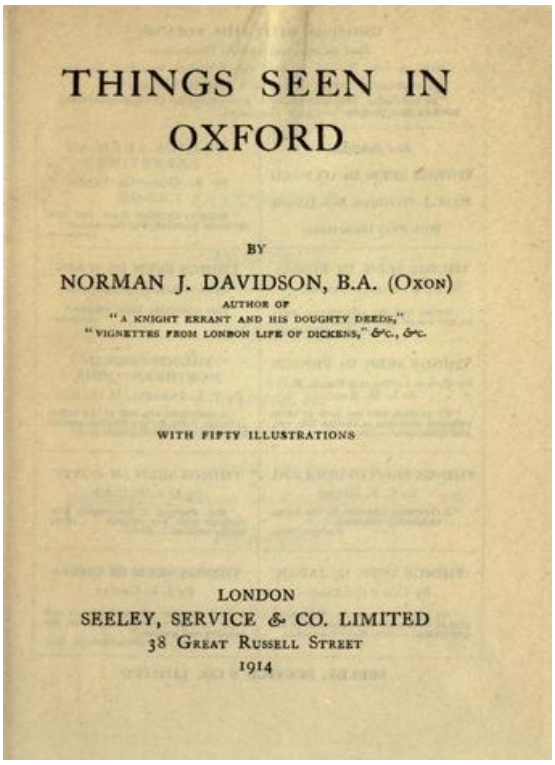
From the Archives

by Yvonne Cocking

Looking through the Archive material for something for this issue, I came across a couple of books I had forgotten about. *Things Seen in Oxford* is a small, nicely produced guide to the Colleges, Halls and public buildings of the University, municipal buildings and churches, and University life in general, by Norman J. Davidson, BA (Oxon), published in 1927. As I was going through it I began to notice that there was no mention of women's colleges or women students. A further scrutiny of the complete text confirmed that Oxford might have been exclusively a male preserve, except for a brief mention of the existence, that's all, of Somerville College and Lady Margaret Hall, and in a chapter on Examinations, 'One may see a crowd of men ... and ... that product of the higher education of recent years – *innuptae puellae* [unmarried girls] – mingle together ... awaiting the summons to the examination room.' The two women's colleges named had been founded in the late 1870s, and St Hugh's and St Hilda's which were ignored altogether, a little later. If Barbara owned this book before she went up to St Hilda's she would have learned nothing about women's position in the University, but lots about the history and buildings of the men's colleges.



THINGS SEEN IN OXFORD

BY

NORMAN J. DAVIDSON, B.A. (Oxon)

AUTHOR OF

"A KNIGHT ERRANT AND HIS DOUGHTY DEEDS,"

"VIGNETTES FROM LONDON LIFE OF DICKENS," &c., &c.

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1914

Title page from the 1914 first edition

The other book, however, told her all about her status and responsibilities as a student. Its cover title is *Excerpta e Statutis*, and a copy of it was given to every new student. The Excerpta (pp. iii-xxviii, the book's preliminaries) are chapters 14, 'De Vestitu et Habitu Scholastico' ['On Academic Dress and Demeanour']; 15, 'De Moribus Conformandis' ['On Behaviour to be Observed'], both in Latin, and 22, 'Of Women Students', of the University regulations.

The volume proper contains the Examination Statutes, revised to the last day of Trinity Term, 1931. Here are set out the courses of study offered by the university, including all set book options and required reading for that academic year, the qualifications needed to sit them, and other rules governing the conferring of degrees. In this we can see the syllabus for the exams Barbara would have to take, and ticks she had added indicating the subjects of her choice.

For Pass Moderations it was necessary for her to take four subjects from two groups, in the first of which either Greek or Latin was compulsory. Barbara chose three subjects from the first group: Latin (Tacitus and Pliny); French (*Le Cid*, *Tartuffe*, and de Tocqueville's *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*); and Old English, extracts from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, and Ælfric's *Homilies*. Her fourth subject was, surprisingly not English History and Literature, but Greek Literature, which required a study of Greek Tragedy in the 5th Century BC. She passed Moderations at her second attempt, noting in her diary on failing the first time that 'de Tocqueville was my downfall'.

For her final examinations in the Honours School of English Language and Literature, Barbara marked as the required nine subjects: Modern English philology; Old English (*Beowulf* etc.); Middle English (including *The Owl and the Nightingale*) ; Chaucer and his contemporaries, with special reference to *The Canterbury Tales*; Shakespeare (*Two Gentlemen of Verona, Richard III*, *Hamlet,* and *The Winter's Tale*); Spenser and Milton, with special study of *Paradise Lost*; and English literature from 1499-1830 (three papers, with particular study of Donne, Dryden, Pope, Johnson and Wordsworth).

References and quotations in all her novels testify to these and many other authors Barbara studied, none more than the first draft of *Some Tame Gazelle*, where, for example, the fiancée of the significantly named Mr Donne was writing an essay on *The Owl and the Nightingale*, encouraged by her aunt Agatha Hoccleve. 'I am also hoping to be able to help her with some of my notes on *The Ormulum*,' said Agatha, about a Middle English text on which she herself had written 'a dull but scholarly book'. One of the reasons why *Some Tame Gazelle* was originally rejected was because it contained an inordinate number of quotations, and when the book was finally published in 1950 a large number of them were excised. But Barbara did really love literature, especially poetry, and was not going to abandon it when she became a novelist. She ceased to quote extensively, but the careful reader is aware of the many literary allusions in her subsequent work.

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The Reverend Prebendary Gerard Irvine, 1920-2011

by Kate Charles

When Father Gerard Irvine died on 15 January, at the age of 90, the Pym Society lost one of its honorary life members and the Church of England lost someone irreplaceable, the last of a generation of exceptional Anglo-Catholic priests. Eccentric, learned, artistic, hospitable: Father Gerard was all of these things, and yet the thing that most defined him, along with his deep faith, was his gift for friendship. He had a particular affinity for writers, including Barbara Pym, whom he knew well. He counted John Betjeman among his closest friends, and knew A N Wilson, Rose Macaulay, P D James, Stevie Smith, Dorothy L Sayers and a host of others.

I met Father Gerard when he came to St Hilda's as a speaker at the legendary Pym conference of 1993. It was a friendship almost literally made in heaven: he was a clergyman who collected writers, and I was a writer who collected clergymen. We began corresponding; he invited me to visit him at the splendid Regency townhouse in Brighton which he shared with his devoted sister Rosemary. Over the years I shared many special times with the Irvines, from memorable luncheon parties to grand celebrations of milestones in his life. In 2006 I attended the commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of his priesthood, and it felt almost like a funeral with the frail guest of honour still alive and among us. In his last years he suffered from debilitating medical conditions, but his heart and mind were strong to the end. He will be hugely missed by me and a host of other friends. The world is a much poorer place without Father Gerard—one of the most gifted, funny, loving people it has ever been my privilege to know, and I feel very honoured to have counted him as a friend.

Diary of a Provincial Pymmite

by Clemence Schultze

Packing (indisputably the worst part of any holiday) is rendered worse than usual by suspicion that Boston in March may be Icy and hope that South Carolina will be Balmy: Since there is no possibility of having the appropriate wardrobe for both, may have to resort to wearing all garments at once against the wintry rigours of the former. At the last minute, put in sunhat. Husband asks Whether I Really Think I shall need that, and suggests packing an Umbrella instead. Ignore this, and sit on suitcase to close it.

Arrive safely in Boston: we have two days in hand, so visit Salem. Driving rain forces us into small store where we buy two umbrellas. Husband refrains from comment, but Silence can sometimes Speak Volumes. Peabody Essex Museum is superb; and rain in courtyard of Chinese house (re-erected in museum precinct) surely adds to its authenticity.

Hymn singing (from 'The Pymnal') on Friday is most enjoyable. Memo to self: investigate whence the Reverend John Bacchus Dykes (vicar of our parish in Durham) received his extraordinary middle name. Rest of Pym conference runs smoothly and delightfully as ever, with insightful papers and congenial company, under the sardonic eye of the moulting eagle.

South Carolina (balmy on first day) degenerates into thunderstorms before we leave, so umbrellas come into their own yet again while sunhat languishes in suitcase. At the Comp. Lit. conference, Charlotte Yonge figures as the only 19th-century author represented, so I do my best to convince the audience how indispensable she is to connoisseurs of literature. Also sing praises of Pym and BPS to all whom we meet, and make two converts; delighted later in DC to find a copy of *Excellent Women* to send to new-found friend.

Aisle seat next to ours on plane is occupied by young woman of about 30, clutching on her lap a rather worn teddy bear, as big as fair-sized dog. Feel like suggesting that Teddy would be Much Happier in the luggage compartment, Wouldn't He? but fear this might provoke Hostility or Hysterics. Air hostess asks Whether we are All Together? Husband and I quickly repudiate any connection with teddy bear or its owner. Air hostess then suggests that there is a spare window seat in another row; and Husband cheerfully extols virtues of window seats, to which he is addicted. Young woman looks doubtful but takes the bait, so we enjoy six hours of teddy-free travel. It was 80º in DC; 48º (and drizzling) at Heathrow. Decide I might as well throw sunhat away.

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Pym Gleanings

No Fond Return of Love, which was the theme of March's Pym Conference at Harvard, received an extra boost from two sources.

Firstly in a blog entitled 'Books on my Nightstand':

> *... I'm currently reading a novel by Barbara Pym called* No Fond Return of Love. *Pym is the only author I have ever read that [sic] can cause me to fall out of my chair laughing ... she is the most underrated English satirist of the 20th century.*

Ian Jack, in his *Guardian* column on 1 January 2011, wrote:

> *On Boxing Day I finished Barbara Pym's* No Fond Return of Love*, as greedily as I used to polish off my gift box of Liquorice Allsorts. I shouldn't have been understanding it at all – as I bought it for my daughter – but there's no stopping with a Pym novel after the first accidentally read page. After this book appeared in 1961, her publishers decided they wanted no more. What fools they were.*

In the 'Book Club' feature in *The Times* on 4 December 2010, Alyson Rudd noticed that

> *In the space of a few weeks the name Barbara Pym kept cropping up ... Pym seems destined to be an author whose reputation soars and dips.* Less Than Angels *explains why. It is occasionally an infuriating novel with an odd structure but it is also fascinating.*

The following week, in the same feature, Catherine Boyle offers her view of *Less Than Angels*, concluding that '[Pym's] *characters are passionless, and occasionally plain annoying*'. Tom Dart had the final word on 1 January 2011 – '*easy to like, but hard to love*'.

Letters to Monica by Philip Larkin, edited by Anthony Thwaite, was widely reviewed, and in two reviews, at least, both on 23 October 2010, Barbara Pym was mentioned. Martin Amis, in the *Guardian*, suggested that in his letters to Monica Larkin made

> *little effort ... [his] prose is habitually perfunctory and pressureless ... Larkin would never have written so exhaustedly to [Kingsley] Amis, or to Thwaite, or to Barbara Pym...*

Philip Hensher in the *Spectator* also thought that Larkin's letters to Monica were drearily uninteresting, in particular one written in 1959:

> *I have four rolls of pink toilet paper on my low table, more or less at my elbow, but their only significance is that I've been too lazy to put them away.*

Hensher continues:

> *One rather admires ... one devoted to the dogged transcript of the stuff of daily life – Barbara Pym comes to mind.*

A strange juxtaposition appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 22 October 2010, in the article 'Striptease', a review of the life of Paul Raymond, famous (infamous?) owner of a strip-club in Soho in the 1950s.

> *Soon he had made enough money to move with his wife ... to the London suburbs, where he lived next door to Barbara Pym.*

In an article in the *Wall Street Journal* on 12 February 2011 Eric Ormsby reviewed a book by Susan Hill, who, he says,

> *is passionate about authors who have been inexplicably neglected, including the incomparable novelist Barbara Pym.*

David Crystal, reviewing Simon Heffer's *Strictly English* in the *New Statesman,* 11 October 2010, cites Barbara Pym as one of the 'stylistic saints' of English grammar.

Finally, one of the staff of the West Falmouth Library on Cape Cod (a Pym member) told us that they featured *Excellent Women* at their discussion group on 8 March 2011.

Thanks to Christine Shuttleworth, Martin Rush, Tom Sopko and Jacqueline Lee for these contributions. Send more to yvcocking@aol.com, please.

***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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Thank you to Sherrie Saint John for photographs.

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