

HILARY & HAZEL IN THE US

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In the 3 or 4 years following Barbara Pym's death the popularity of her novels in the United States rose to extraordinary heights. Before she died only three of her books had been published there, by Dutton in hard-backed editions – *Quartet in Autumn* and *Excellent Women* in 1978, and *The Sweet Dove Died* in 1979. The paperback rights of these three titles were sold to Harper and Row, who retailed about 12,000 copies in five months.

In October 1980 Paul de Angelis, Senior Editor at Dutton, wrote to James Wright at Macmillan, Barbara's English publisher

I thought you would be interested to know that we have now sold the paperback rights for *A Few Green Leaves* to Harper and Row. The advance, as for the earlier books, is \$2,000. They are also taking on *A Glass of Blessings*...I enclose a copy of a sort of 'round-up' review of the Pym oeuvre which just appeared in *The Washington Post Book World*. I'm told that *The New York Times Book Review* plans a similar overview article soon.

In January 1982, Paul de Angelis, still calling her Miss Walton at this stage, wrote to Hilary

As you no doubt know, Barbara Pym's works have now generated an entire cult-like following, especially among professors of English, but not only they. Though hard-cover sales remain modest (mostly in the 6000-copy range) the soft covers put out under licence to Harper Perennial Library are selling very well. In fact Harper nearly quadrupled their latest offer, for *Jane and Prudence*, from \$3000 to \$10,000.

He wrote to her again in August

I hope you have been getting the many and almost uniformly lavishly praising reviews of *An Unsuitable Attachment*. In sales, we just passed 10,000 copies, a new high mark.

By September, Harper and Row Paperbacks had bought the rights of *No Fond Return of Love* for \$12,500, a sum reflecting the ever-growing measure of interest in Barbara's books, but even this was topped when they paid \$13,500 for *Some Tame Gazelle*. Said de Angelis:

No Fond is doing very well indeed'. We are back to print for a third printing, bringing the total in print to 15,000. The Pym boom continues! ... You should see the bookstores in Manhattan, all awash with displays of Barbara Pym, hardcover and paperback!

This was helped, of course by the endorsements of such eminent writers as Eudora Welty, Alison Lurie, Anne Tyler, Shirley Hazzard and Joyce Carol Oates.

Back in February that year James Wright had sent a proposal for *A Very Private Eye* to de Angelis who said he liked the material 'quite a bit' and hoped that they might 'be able to come to some arrangement'. Shortly afterwards however, he declared himself 'absolutely fascinated by what I saw there, particularly the diaries and letters of Barbara Pym herself.'

Hilary made a private visit to the United States in September 1982, possibly in pursuance of her research into her father's family, but accepted an invitation from Paul de Angelis to stop in New York where he held a lunch in her honour at the National Arts Club, with guests from Duttons, from *Harpers*, *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*,

and three well-known American authors. She had also been invited by the University of Oklahoma at Norman to be ‘distinguished guest speaker’ at a ‘scholarly session entitled ‘Barbara Pym: a retrospective’. Hilary accepted, but was then told that the University could not fund her expenses. The venue was then changed to Los Angeles, so not surprisingly, she withdrew from this engagement.

Now Hazel comes in to the picture. In 1983, de Angelis was writing to both Hilary and Hazel, mainly about the forthcoming *Very Private Eye*, about which he was most enthusiastic, but made lengthy and detailed comments on style, and other suggestions for improvement. The nature and compilation of the index seemed to bother him somewhat. Apparently Hazel did not agree with him in some respects, and gave as good as she got, for de Angelis wrote

I received your very thoughtful, diplomatic yet impassioned letter today, and must say that Barbara is indeed being well-served by those she selected to look out for her inheritance!

And he added – and this is prescient – ‘Are you certain you don’t have some novels of your own tucked away in a drawer?’

The continuing popularity and ever increasing sales of the novels, together with the forthcoming publication in the US, scheduled for July 1984, of *A Very Private Eye*, made it very desirable that Hilary, preferably accompanied by Hazel, would be able to come to the States. Lotus Snow wrote June 1983

You speak of returning to the US, as I hope you very soon can do, and of Hazel’s coming along. Wonderful! We shall roll red carpets all the way down the drive at 250 West Lake Road [Lotus’s address]!

And a few weeks later

In her last letter Hazel really speaks as if she were *really* coming with you to USA in 1984.

In April 1984, Robert Graham from Penn State University wrote to Paul de Angelis

That *A Very private Eye* is near publication is good news as is the possibility of a tour by Hilary Pym and Hazel Holt.

It was now almost certain that they were prepared to come, but in view of Hilary’s experience with the University of Oklahoma, I was keen to know who would fund this proposed trip, and was pleased to find a letter dated 24th October 1983 from Paul de Angelis addressing this issue.

Please start thinking, both of you, about whether and when you might be able to come over, near publication date. I’m not sure what financial arrangements could be made, given that we want to spend most of our promotional funds on actual advertising and promotion. I will start looking into the various groups in Boston, Philadelphia and elsewhere who might want to sponsor events centred around the publication of *A Very Private Eye*, but I will have to know whether our authors will be here to be celebrated...I think it is probably safe to say that Dutton could probably take care of arranging your accommodations here, either in hotels or in interested people’s private homes, and possibly take care of internal U.S. travel, if you could manage the flight over and a certain amount of expenses.

Not only did Hilary and Hazel agree to this, but they actually flew to New York by Concorde, who had been operating commercial flights since 1978. The journey, which would have taken more than seven hours on a Boeing 747, took just three hours and 20 minutes, less time than it took by train from London to Edinburgh. The cost of the return flight in 1984 was £2399, not really that much more than a Boeing first class ticket at £1985. In an article earlier this year on Luxury, the *Daily Telegraph* reported ‘that during the flight itself vintage champagnes were

served and gourmet dishes were presented on Royal Doulton bone china. A menu from a 1989 flight from London to Washington allowed passengers to choose from foie gras mousse, and caviar and sour cream barquette to start; mains included prime fillet of beef or crayfish tails garnished with sautéed pimento; a more restrained dessert was limited to a crème brûlée or assorted cheeses. Personal attention was assured, with one crew member attending to every nine passengers'. Among her papers in the Bodleian is Hilary's Concord Souvenir Flight Certificate with a sumptuous menu printed inside. How they would have enjoyed that flight!

They flew out on 15th September, staying at the Algonquin Hotel in Manhattan until the 19th when the tour officially started. The Algonquin, named for the tribes that had been the first residents of the area, opened in 1902, and was famous for 'hosting literary and theatrical notables, most prominently the members of the Algonquin Round Table, a group of notorious literary figures, mainly critics, including Robert Benchley, George S. Kaufman, Dorothy Parker, and Alexander Woolcott, who made the Algonquin their daily meeting place'. Our travellers would have delighted in the fact that the hotel had a tradition of keeping a cat that had the run of the hotel, named Hamlet if a male and Matilda if a female. However, owing to Department of Health regulations in place since 2011, the current Matilda is confined to the non-food area of the lobby by an electric pet fence.

A tour programme had been arranged by Paul de Angelis and others, and began in Boston. Hilary and Hazel went there on 19th September where they were met at the airport by Ellen Miller, so well known to many of us here. They spent the night at her house in Carlisle, MA, and she accompanied them to all Boston events. They stayed thereafter at the Lenox Hotel at the Prudential Center – a part of Boston where I always stay when I am there – their first engagement being lunch at the Ritz with columnists of the *Boston Globe*, followed by tea at the English Speaking Union and an evening event at the public library in Belmont, MA.

The next day they had lunch at the Faculty Club with a group from the Harvard Business School, no doubt arranged by Ellen who at that time filled the post of Director of Publications at Harvard Law School.

The next day they moved on to Philadelphia where they were met by Charles Burkhart, of Temple University, who had arranged for them a dinner party that evening and another the next day (Sunday). Charles Burkhart was to become a great friend. He had been a Fulbright Student at Oxford from 1949, and when visiting Greece he had met Robert Liddell. He was the author of *The Pleasure of Miss Pym* published in 1987, that very fruitful year for Pym scholars. After his death in 2001 Hazel wrote an obituary in *Green Leaves*.

On Monday they went by train for a day trip to the University of Delaware in Wilmington where they were met by Judy McInnes; an afternoon reception was held featuring readings from Barbara Pym novels, and a talk about her by Hazel and Hilary. Judy was not a regular Pym commentator but she gave a paper at the 2002 North American Conference on *Communal rites: tea, wine and Milton in Barbara Pym's novels*.

They spent the next morning at leisure in Philadelphia, then took an afternoon flight to Rochester in north New York State, where they were met by Lotus Snow who took them to their hotel near her home in Penn Yan. Hazel and Hilary had met Lotus as early as 1981, when she received permission from Hazel to consult the Pym archive in the Bodleian. She became one of their closest friends. She had received her doctorate at the University of Chicago, and had taught English at Hope and Albion Colleges in Michigan. Later she went to Keuka College in the Finger Lakes region of New York State and lived at nearby Penn Yan. According to Hazel, Lotus published in 1987 *One Little Room an Everywhere: Barbara Pym's novels*, which Hazel described as 'one of the first, and certainly one of the best, studies of Barbara's work'. An interesting fact, however, I discovered on the Amazon website where *One Little Room an Everywhere: the novels of Barbara Pym*, is attributed to Constance Hunting, but

the illustration of the book cover gives Lotus Snow the authorship! This is really odd, especially since Constance Hunting, a poet and English teacher on the staff of the University of Maine, Orono, had been corresponding with Hilary on behalf of her husband Robert, Chair of the English Department there, who wanted to write about Pym. Constance appeared not to be interested in doing so herself, which makes the attribution of *One Little Room an Everywhere* more mysterious. The answer, I think, must lie in the fact that in 1978 Constance founded the Puckerbrush Press, of which she was also the Editor, which published this book, so author and publisher/editor have become confused

Lotus's essay *Literary Allusions in the Novels* appeared in Dale Salwak's *Life and Work of Barbara Pym* in 1987. Lotus had also written on Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, Ivy Compton-Burnett and Anita Brookner, some of whose work had been compared or contrasted with that of Barbara.

Another free morning on Wednesday, then tea with the local American Association of University Women book group where Lotus opined that 'everyone in town will be there'.

The next morning they were driven to Middleton, Pa, by Robert Graham, Assistant Provost and Dean at the University of Pennsylvania at Harrisburg, at whose house they stayed on Thursday and Friday nights. On Friday they were guests on the radio programme 'Open Mike', and in the evening there was a reception on the Penn State University campus. It was at this meeting that Hazel and Hilary first met Jan Fergus who became a great friend and who phoned Hazel daily until she died.

Robert Graham's paper *Cumbered with much serving: BP's Excellent Women* appeared in the journal *Mosaic* in 1984, and his essay *The narrative sense of Barbara Pym* was one of those included in Dale Salwak's *The life and work of Barbara Pym*, 1987.

The Harrisburg newspaper *The Patriot* ran an article on the visit by Sharon Johnson on 4th October, which began

For readers who had already fallen under the spell of the ten published novels of Barbara Pym, there was good news on the literary front during the summer. The late novelist's autobiography, *A Very Private Eye*, was published by Dutton and immediately became an international best seller... Because Pym was too modest to write it, her autobiography actually was compiled from her diaries and letters by her sister, Hilary Pym, and her literary executor Hazel Holt.

The two British women were in town last weekend to meet with local Pym readers at Penn State's Capitol Campus...But Hilary Pym and Holt emphasised that they were not on a promotional tour for *A Very Private Eye*...but to visit friends...who are interested in Barbara's work. And they have discovered, Holt says, that those who read and study Pym's books are 'all lovely, nice people' – a fact confirmed by the staff of Oxford's Bodleian Library where Pym's manuscripts and other papers are housed. Hilary says that the two 'hadn't really planned the book'. But when Holt was asked to write a biography she decided that the writer 'must speak for herself'.

The article goes on to give a brief survey of Barbara's publishing history, and Hazel Holt's plans for the future

Holt has found a number of unpublished Pym novels and fragments of novels among her papers, but only one (*Crampton Hodnet*) is to be published, tentatively in 1985. She believes it would be unfair to her friend's reputation to publish books she had not completed or polished. *Crampton Hodnet* is the exception to the rule, Holt says, because the Bodleian Library staff reports that anyone who reads the manuscript 'laughs out loud'.

It is interesting to note how Hazel later revised her opinion, and actually did complete or edit for publication several other works of Barbara's, and wrote a biography, no doubt partly because of the public's insatiable desire for more. Sharon Johnson's article concludes

Even non-readers may become familiar with Pym's novels, since *Quartet in Autumn*, the story of the relationship of four aging workers in a London office, is scheduled to be adapted for British television, and movie executives are interested in the rights to *The Sweet Dove Died*. It's a project that would please the author whose autobiography reveals that she was an avid movie fan.

Alas, neither film nor TV play was ever produced.

The whirlwind tour continued with Robert driving them to Harrisburg for a flight to Washington, DC, where they stayed for three nights at the Tabard Inn, a traditional hostelry famous for having 'no TVs in the rooms, and in the kitchen everything made from scratch, ingredients sourced from local farmers and most importantly no microwaves to heat the food'. On Monday afternoon there was a reception given by the English Department at Georgetown University, but I found no interesting details of this engagement.

On the Tuesday they took an Amtrak train to New York City where reservations had been made for them at the Gramercy Park Hotel in Lexington Avenue. A representative of Dutton took them on Wednesday to 40 Central Park South, where they were guests on the Pegeen Fitzgerald Radio Show, which was broadcast daily from an apartment there.

Pegeen Fitzgerald's 1989 obituary in *The New York Times* said that 'she pioneered the at-home radio format'. For 42 years, she and her husband, Ed, broadcast from their apartment near New York City's Central Park, or, less frequently, from their week-end home in Connecticut. At its peak, their programme had an audience of 2 million people. A colleague described the Fitzgeralds' programme as being 'like you were eavesdropping on a conversation with a loving but not always agreeing couple'. Her early programmes, *Things that interest me* and *Pegeen prefers*, devoted to fashion and other aspects of life style, she presented alone. But she and her husband co-hosted *Breakfast with the Fitzgeralds*, and *The Fitzgeralds in New York*, and in the late 1940s and early 1950s *The Fitzgeralds* was on TV. A 1949 review noted 'Theirs is the first regularly televised married duo session, Instead of the typical breakfast table setting, the Fitzgeralds move easily about a facsimile of their own living room'. Pegeen also appeared in advertisements for Clairol, which appeared in *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *The New Yorker*. Always devoted to helping animals, Pegeen became involved with The Millennium Guild, and the Vivisection Investigation League, eventually becoming president of both of those organizations. Previously, she had shared duties with Gypsy Rose Lee as being Board members of the Greenwich Village Animal League. She opened several homes for stray cats and dogs. Quite a girl!

However, not everyone was appreciative of the garrulous Pegeen. Jan Fergus sent a cutting about Pegeen to Hilary: 'The woman seems impossible – it's hard to see how you ever managed to escape from her apartment!'

Later that day there was a 'Celebration of Barbara Pym', hosted by Dutton in a room that was once Dutton's sales conference room, at the Gramercy Park Hotel. This, one more of the interesting hotels which their hosts found them, was built in the 1920s. Many famous names are associated with it. Humphrey Bogart married his first wife here, and the Kennedy family lived there for several months before moving to London when Joseph Kennedy was appointed ambassador. In the 40s Edmund Wilson, Mary McCarthy and S.J. Perelman all lived there. In fact Perelman died in his room there. Its bohemian character, low prices, locale, and reputation for discretion later

attracted such musicians and actors as Bob Marley, Madonna, and Matt Dillon, as well as David Mamet, the playwright. By the late 1990s the hotel's ratings began to decline, the management changed and the prices started to increase rapidly. Further changes of management also altered the character of the hotel, but it apparently continues to exhibit paintings by noted artists, including Damien Hirst and Andy Warhol.

Paul de Angelis introduced himself to the audience, outlined the programme, and told them how he came to be an admirer of Pym's novels. He had written to her early in 1980 to express his appreciation, but she was already dead by the time he posted the letter. He then introduced Hilary and Hazel with the words 'We are lucky today to have two very close loved ones of Barbara Pym with us'.

Gail Godwin, Joyce Carol Oates and Shirley Hazzard all gave papers which were later published in *The Life and Works of Barbara Pym* by Dale Salwak who was also present on that occasion.

Next day they were driven to Long Island where at noon there was an informal reception in the Faculty lounge at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, followed later that afternoon by a book signing party at the Corner Bookstore. On Friday they attended Tom Rogers' class at Stony Brook on Austen vs. Pym, their last engagement of the tour. Tom and his wife Sally they had previously met in England, and were among their closest American friends.

Next morning Tom drove them to JFK for their 2.45 flight home, but as Hilary noted in her American scrap-book, 'the 2.45 Concorde had to turn back with engine trouble! We had to wait 'til 8.30 to catch the one which had got in at 6.00, so we got to know the Concorde lounge quite well. We had the same crew, which included this (picture added) amusing Greek steward'.

Hazel and Hilary made several more visits to the US in subsequent years. Although these visits were not sponsored as in 1984, the friends they had made ensured them accommodation, and talks and receptions at their universities and other venues. It was the all-important 1984 visit however when Hilary and Hazel cemented friendships that endured for many years, and inspired many US academics to write theses, books and journal articles attesting to the growing importance of Barbara Pym in modern English literature.