

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

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As a title, *'No Fond Return of Love: The Birth of the 'Angry' Young Excellent Woman'* is even more tongue-in-cheek than it might seem, since, if there is one emotion absent in Pym, it is anger. Pique, frustration, indignation, umbrage, yes, but not anger. This paper will cover the massive influence of a literary school completely at odds with Pym's own sensibilities, as well as other societal factors which led to the writing of *No Fond Return of Love* – a book radically different than any she had previously written.

Most of us probably know the 'Angry Young Man' movement from the films of the late 1950s which seemed to give rise to all of the great British actors of the 1960s and 70s, actors who today are either dead or on the staff at Hogwart's. But the literary genesis is quite a bit different.

In 1984, our fellow Pymian Dale Salwak published *Interviews with Britain's Angry Young Men* (Wildside Press, 1984). The introduction is written by Colin Wilson, one of the authors interviewed. According to Wilson, 'It seems to be generally agreed that, as far as England was concerned, the new post-WWII literary generation didn't make its appearance until the autumn of 1953 with the publication of *Hurry on Down* by John Wain. It is a "picaresque" (a genre of satiric fiction involving rogues or adventurers) novel about a young man who "has been given the educational treatment and then pitchforked into the world" to find his place.'

Then came *Lucky Jim* by Kingsley Amis, in which a bored young man gets pitchforked in to an establishment job as a university lecturer and finds it irritating and boring. In 1954, Iris Murdoch completed the trio with her first novel, *Under the Net*, which features a hero even more rootless and purposeless than Wain's.

The question these writers seem to be posing is, what better purpose can the modern world offer the talented young? The Welfare State was already seven years old, although the complete end to food rationing did not occur until 7 April 1954. But what about the total nonfulfillment of the individual in this land of plenty, this society, run by businessmen, civil servants and politicians?'

Presumably, these individuals represent a generation of the lower middle class who are the first in their families to attend university. After graduation they take on the kinds of jobs that lesser members of the upper middle class, or even minor aristocracy, have always done. I think of P.G. Wodehouse working at the Shanghai and Hong Kong Bank (now HSBC) in London, or even William Caldicote in *Excellent Women*, puttering around the ministry.

In addition to the boredom experienced by this first wave of anti-heroes, in John Osborne's 1957 play, *Look Back in Anger*, the main character, Jimmy Porter, rails against the complacency of his own generation. As a child he watched his father die slowly from injuries sustained during the Spanish Civil War – the last great cause as he sees it. I thought the cleverest bit in the whole play was Osborne deliberately failing to mention whose side he was on. Perhaps even in 1956 it was still assumed that he would have fought on the Loyalist side against the Fascists, even though MacLean and Burgess had already defected to the Soviet Union.

In addition, most of the women in these works are either disposable or interchangeable, or both.

According to Wilson, 'It was fairly clear, by say, 1958, that there never had been such a thing as an Angry Young Man "movement". Perhaps there might have been more sense in calling these new heroes "outsiders" or even "alienated young men". In any case, all of them were now busily going off in their own directions. Amis, for example, told one interviewer that he saw himself quite simply as a humourist, with more in common with P.G. Wodehouse than John Wain. And Iris Murdoch – never angry, let alone a man – went on to develop a kind of comedy of strange sexuality that indicates she is basically a frustrated romantic.'

But in the mid 1950s, no one, not even Daryl Forde, Barbara's boss at the International African Institute (a man with no interests outside of anthropology), could avoid the hype. So much so, that, according to Hazel Holt, he asked to borrow Barbara's copy of *Lucky Jim*, 'to see what all the fuss was about.' This book was not among her books when she died.

Hazel Holt has written that Barbara was a great reader of contemporary fiction. One gets no sense of this from *A Very Private Eye* or any of the other novels, with the possible exception of *Jane and Prudence*. After a trying day,

Prudence] decided to go to bed early and read a book. It was not a very nice book – so often Miss Trapnell or Miss Clothier asked her 'Is that a nice book you've got, Miss Bates?' – but it described a love affair in the fullest sense of the word and sparing no detail, but all in a very intellectual sort of way and there were a good many quotations from Donne. It was difficult to imagine her love for Arthur Grampian could ever come to anything like this, and indeed she was hardly conscious of him as she read on into the small hours of the morning to the book's inevitable but satisfying unhappy ending.

While this reference can have nothing to do with the 'Angry Young Man' school, it is equally the kind of novel Pym would not be writing. However, *No Fond Return of Love* has much to say about the modern arts.

During the chapel service at the learned conference, 'The lay reader then gave a short address. He tried to show how all work can be done to the Glory of God, even making an index, correcting a proof, or compiling an accurate bibliography. His small congregation heard him say, almost with disappointment, that those who do such work have perhaps less opportunity of actually doing evil than those who write novels and plays or work for films and television.' Yes, it is difficult to see how one can 'do evil' compiling even an inaccurate bibliography.

Then just a few days later, when Dulcie runs into Viola 'sun worshipping, in her ugly, red canvas shoes',

'I've written a couple of articles,' [Viola] lied, 'and I'm thinking of writing a novel. It seems more worthwhile than doing research,' she added provocatively.

'Yes, perhaps it may be,' Dulcie agreed. 'It's creating something of one's own, certainly, even if it isn't any good. I'm sure,' she added hastily, 'that yours will be awfully good. I should think you have the gift for observing people and getting them down on paper.'

'Oh, it won't be that kind of novel,' said Viola distastefully.'

I thought all novels seem that kind of novel. Perhaps Viola feels that characters in modern fiction are not people, so much as attitudes.

At the gallery where Maurice works, the art world gets a little skewering.

'This looks more understandable,' said Dulcie, contemplating a black and white cat with a lemon in its paws. 'But is he really a good painter? This picture of onions and peppers and wine bottles,

with the view of boats through a window – hasn't one seen this sort of thing rather often before? And what made him turn from those rather pleasant pictures to the dreary abstractions in the other room?'

Or my personal favorite, Dulcie's thoughts about the artist in the 'speckled polo-necked sweater':

Dulcie hardly bothered to look in the direction indicated. It was boring, she thought, how young artists and writers still looked as one expected them to. How much more amusing it would have been had he appeared in a suite of one of the 'subdued business patterns' which she had read about the other day in Pontings' catalogue.'

Reading this again I immediately thought of the way Andy Warhol dressed, particularly later in his career and wondered....

But the most pointed commentary comes from Laurel after a night out in London.

'Was the play good?' Marion asked.

'Not really. He hasn't got anything new to say and one gets so tired of the same old hates and bees in the bonnet being trotted out all the time.'

'Does one?' asked Marion rather acidly.

Perhaps by 1961, this attitude about the attitudes was already passé.

So by the time Pym was seriously writing *No Fond Return of Love*, it may have been over for the 'Angry Young Men' but it's not as if the pendulum has swung back to the well-written observational novel. In fact, the sensation of 1957 was *Room at the Top*. According to Colin Wilson 'reviewers saw it as a novel about a ruthless young man determined to escape his working class origins. In fact, the hero never makes to the slightest effort to get to the top; he just seduces the boss's daughter and marries her.'

Penelope Lively in *The World of Barbara Pym* says of the 1950s novels, 'Looking back, though, it is possible to see how much she suffered for being praised as much for what she was not, as for what she was. Reviewers wrote, "This civilized and amusing novel makes a very nice change from the Brutalist school of contemporary fiction." "So many novels I pick up nowadays seem to deal with Saturday night in the back streets of Nottingham." "...far more fascinating than anything which could have come from the one-track minded proles of Nottingham and Huddersfield." It was such barbarities as this last that may have put off many potential readers who would have enjoyed her.' (Lively chose not to attribute these quotes, either to an author or a publication. Or even to a specific Pym novel.)

Those who have seen the film *Brief Encounter* will be familiar with the Boots Booklovers Library. This was a subscription library located inside Boots chemist shops, catering to a largely middle-class female reading public. In *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914-1939*, Nicola Beauman writes, 'By the mid-1930's it was the largest circulating library of its kind, with over 400 branches and half a million subscribers. ' But by 1955 the libraries, although not Boots, began to close. By 1966 they were gone. One assumes it was primarily due to the creation of public libraries, although changing demographics might have been responsible for early closures. And maybe Boots just needed more space for their skincare line.

Charles Monteith of Faber, whom Barbara sent *An Unsuitable Attachment* in 1965, wrote back 'novels have becomes increasingly difficult to sell, partly because of the "paperback revolution" and partly because of the collapse of lending-libraries such as Boots. In addition, paperback firms tend, I fear, to go for something rather more violent and sensational.'

Barbara makes two very small references to these trends. When Viola moves into Dulcie's house and ventures into the bathroom, 'A shelf on the wall held a selection of books, their covers now faded and buckled by steam. Viola noticed *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Poems of Gray and Collins*, *Enquire Within*, *The Angel in the House*, and a few old Boots Library Books, *A Voice Through A Cloud*, *Some Tame Gazelle* and *The Boys From Sharon*.'

Earlier when Dulcie is on her way to Viola's for supper she notices,

A woman was walking along one of the paths with a dog on a lead. She wore a grey tweed coat and transparent pink nylon gloves, and carried two books from the public library in a contraption of rubber straps. What is the use of noticing such details? Dulcie asked herself. It isn't as if I were a novelist or a private detective. Presumably such a faculty might be said to add to one's enjoyment of life, but so often what one observed was neither amusing nor interesting, but just upsetting.

Upsetting indeed! Especially if one is a novelist trying to sell some books.

Two entries in *A Very Private Eye* prove to be prophetic. On 4 December 1956, Barbara wrote about being at a party and said, 'I began talking about my novels, whether I should go on writing about the clergy.'

On 29 April 1958 she writes, '*A Glass of Blessings* published on 14 April. Only 3 reviews up to 29 April, none wholly good. My humour deserts me when I am dealing with romance. I am tone-deaf to dialogue, am moderately amusing. Reviewers all women. Young?'

In her essay, "Excellent Woman", Shirley Hazzard writes, 'As we cryptically say "Proustian" or "Jamesian", we may now say "Barbara Pym" and be understood instantly. Only a writer with a strong original view – an implacable view, one might say – can do that for us. Having read Barbara, one cannot recast one's consciousness in the pre-Pym mould; what did one do, pre-Pym with those observations and imaginings to which she has given voice and form?'

But if one begins reading Pym with *Excellent Women* or *Some Tame Gazelle* the 'implacable view' is at a much different angle than *No Fond Return of Love*. Pym chooses to announce this difference at a very early moment. The reader meets AylwinForbes on his own terms, fussing about his gin and yeast tables, unobscured by the observations of another character. Traditionally in Pym, this would mean a woman. He is seen obsessing about social niceties as seriously as Belinda Bede confronted by a cauliflower cheese with a caterpillar chaser.

But then, after a snortful of gin, we get a delightful glimpse of his mind at work. 'He remembered Miss Randall with her hair-net and pince-nez, and wondered if he would find himself sitting next to her and what they could talk about. Indexes I have known? Abortion, adultery, administration...pottery, prawns, pregnancy – good-oh! Perhaps he had drunk the gin a little too quickly.'

In her depiction of Dulcie, Pym starts small and continues small, layering details and actions which turn her into 'an original shining like a comet'. At the learned conference, Dulcie asserts that even if she did get married 'I don't suppose my character would alter much'. But what is her character?

When she returns home she has this exchange with Miss Lord.

'Oh, a garden's a responsibility,' signed Miss Lord. 'The fruits of the earth...Harvest festival soon. Will you be sending something along to the church?' she asked deliberately.

The same question was asked every autumn and the same answer given, for Dulcie was not a regular church-goer and Miss Lord was.

‘I don’t think so,’ Dulcie said, ‘but if you’d like to take anything, please do. Plums or apples, and flowers, of course.’

It’s something of a surprise that Dulcie is not a regular churchgoer. At the learned conference, she tells Viola that, after Alwyn’s lecture, ‘there’s to be a short service in the chapel, undenominational, taken by somebody who’s a lay reader and allowed to take services, I suppose, saying “we” and “us” instead of you.’ Viola looked puzzled, so Dulcie hastened to explain, ‘I mean in the blessing and that sort of thing – a lay reader can’t say the Lord bless *you*, he has to say *us*, because he isn’t in Holy Orders.’

Unlike Miss Foy whose idea of worshipping God involves ‘a brisk walk round the grounds’, Dulcie attends the service and is familiar enough with the hymns to feel cheated when an objectionable verse is left out.

It later becomes clear that the main reason Dulcie is not a ‘regular church-goer’ is to avoid being forced in to doing good works. She does not long to be ‘needed and useful’. Neither is she even the least bit self-sacrificing. Consider her response to Laurel when asked what happened to the Victorian watercolour of Mt. Vesuvius which used to hang in her room: ‘Dulcie wanted to explain that she too had once been a child who had loved that picture. ‘It’s in my room now,’ she said, ‘I always loved it.’

How would a Belinda Bede or Mildred Lathbury respond? Belinda would probably immediately offer to have the picture re-hung in Laurel’s room. Mildred might offer, inwardly hoping it will be declined. But if she did not, guilt would ensue.

But Dulcie does have a kind heart. She worries about ‘beggars, distressed gentlefolk, lonely African students having doors shut in their faces, people being wrongfully detained in mental homes....’ And she does donate the proceeds from the sale of her engagement ring to ‘a general’s daughter living in very reduced circumstances’.

When Dulcie decides to attend the Private View at the gallery where Maurice works, she thinks, ‘Perhaps there was some kind of pattern to life after all. It might be like a well-thought out novel, where every incident had its own particular significance and was essential to the plot.’

So it is with the relationship of Dulcie and Alwyn. Pym fills the novel with their parallel experiences and observations. Dulcie looks up Alwyn’s address in the telephone directory:

I might see him one day. Dulcie thought. She imagined herself in various places but could not exactly visualize the meeting. Perhaps, she told herself with a quickening of excitement, it would have to be contrived. Women were often able to arrange things that men would have thought impossible.

Then later, after Laurel has moved to Quince Square, Aylwin thinks about how and when he will see her again. ‘Having decided against a chance morning encounter with Laurel, Aylwin began to wonder whether a chance evening encounter might be arranged.’ After musing about schemes involving dog walking, the meeting takes place quite naturally.

There is a great deal in Pym about men and women leading completely different lives as if there were never occasions when both sexes might use the same kinds of subterfuge. Pym uses a similar interest in off-beat reading material to illustrate differences and similarities. ‘While [Dulcie] ate she read an old bound volume (circa 1911) of *Every Woman’s Encyclopedia*, thankful that it was not in these days necessary to join “a working party for charity”, making useful garments for “the poor”.’

While Aylwinspeculates on table arrangements at Dulcie's dinner party, he pictures 'an Edwardian dinner table, with carnations in little silver vases and smilax trailing down the corners – like those illustrated in the old bound volume of *Every Woman's Encyclopedia*, which had been a favourite childhood book in the lounge of his mother's hotel in the West Country.'

This is a much more typical Pym viewpoint about the differences between men and women – Dulcie concentrates on the labor, Aylwin on the finished product.

In most of her work, Pym has gone out of her way to make her couples intellectually unsuitable, their interests incompatible. Previously, she has treated this as comic or unimportant. Indeed, even in *No Fond Return of Love* it surfaces in her description of Laurel's mothers' life.

Charlotte, Laurel's mother, revealed an unexpected and presumably long suppressed desire to live a 'bachelor girl's' life in London; the idea of a bed-sitting-room with a little cooker hidden away in a cupboard, a concealed washbasin and a divan bed piled with cushions was to her as romantic as an elopement to the South of France with a lover might have seemed to one of a different temperament. It was rather sad, Dulcie thought, that an apparently happily married woman should confess to secret hankering for such a life. And yet, stealing a glance at her brother-in-law, at that moment preoccupied with classifying a pile of Masai warriors' spears and shields left to the local museum by a retired colonial servant, she could appreciate that perhaps a desire for escape was not so surprising. Many wives must experience it from time to time, she thought, especially those whose husbands smoked old pipes that made peculiar noises, and were so preoccupied with their harmless hobbies that they would hardly have noticed if their wives had been there or not.

But I think her true feelings and intent in the novel are expressed by Dulcie at the learned conference, the morning after Viola's 'dark night of the soul.'

Presumably, Dulcie thought, as she contemplated her hollow mattress, it wouldn't be particularly upsetting to hear a lecture on a rather dry topic on a Sunday morning from a man one loved or had once loved. But in this she may well have been wrong, not having experienced the power of the tie that shared academic work can forge between two people. Whatever there had been between her and Maurice, it had certainly not been that. 'You and your "work",' he would say, in a fond, mocking tone that Dulcie found painful to recall at this moment.

Of course, the incident with Viola notwithstanding, Aylwin has not experienced it either. However, their responses to unsuitable love are similar in content, if not form.

Theirs would have been one of those dreadful marriages, with the wife a little older and a little taller and a great deal more intelligent than the husband. Yet, although she was laughing, there was a small ache in her heart as she remembered him. Perhaps it is sadder to have loved somebody 'unworthy', and the end of it is the death of such a very little thing, like a child's coffin, she thought confusedly.

And Alwyn's less poetic response; 'Perhaps love for somebody totally unsuitable dies more completely, when it does die, than any other kind of love. Aylwin himself could not recapture the smallest vestige of his feelings for her – even the stone squirrel seemed ridiculous and embarrassing when associated with Marjorie.'

The running theme in the break-up of Dulcie and Maurice's engagement is that 'he was not worthy of her love', the modern equivalent being 'it's not you, it's me.' So for whatever reason, perhaps just a lack of confidence, given the opportunity, Dulcie makes no attempt to charm Aylwin with her 'natural goodness' or anything else.

At the dinner party, Aylwin pontificates on his latest work.

‘Edmund Lydden is – I suppose we should say was – one of that little band of neo-metaphysical poets of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries who have been curiously neglected by posterity,’ said Alwyn, beaming at Laurel and wondering if he ought to explain the term ‘neo-metaphysical.’

‘I shouldn’t have thought Edmund Lydden had left enough poetry for it to be worth writing about him,’ said Dulcie. ‘There surely can’t have been very much?’

‘That may be,’ said Alwyn, ‘but what remarkable stuff it is! The “Winter” sonnets – unfinished, admittedly, – and the three Epithalamia, not to mention the fragments...’

‘Ah, yes, the fragments,’ murmured Viola, throwing him an intimate glance.’

Not exactly the comments of a woman in love – Dulcie, that is, not Viola. And since this is Pym, there is always more meaning. Epithalamia is defined as a lyric ode in honor of a bride and bridegroom. Perhaps Lydden spent most of his time nurturing his wife and marriage, resulting in a meager literary legacy. And since the Lydden book is finished, any literary disagreement is brief.

More typical is when Aylwin arrives at his mother-in-law’s hour in Deodor Grove during the ‘Jumble Sale – In Aid of the Organ Fund’. Aylwin could imagine the entrance the young man would make, the pleased cries that would greet his appearance, the fresh tea that would be made, and his complacent acceptance of their tributes. No doubt, like all men connected with the Church – his own brother Neville included – the organist would be at ease with ladies. He could see the phrase – “At Ease with Ladies” – as the title of a novel or even a biography.’

Then, when Dulcie and Viola are having dinner at The Anchorage:

After a moment the clergyman took up the water jug and began to fill glasses for himself and his mother....

At last, and it was fitting that he should be the one to break the silence, the clergyman made an audible remark. Addressing the white-haired lady, whose table adjoined his, he said tentatively, ‘This must be a change from Uganda, Miss Fell.’

It was less than he deserved that she should be a little deaf, so that he was forced to repeat his not very brilliant observation, whose inanity she emphasized yet further by saying in a loud bright voice, ‘A change from Uganda – it certainly is!’

‘What a lovely title for a novel that would be,’ Dulcie whispered, ‘and one can see that it would be almost easy to write. The plot is beginning to take shape already....’

Viola has no response. How different it would have been if Aylwin had been dining with Dulcie. It might go something like this...after Dulcie says, ‘The plot is beginning to take shape already...’

Aylwin: Yes, perhaps the clergyman can be just back from his mission. It might explain why he’s so uneasy with that elderly woman.

Dulcie: Maybe the congregation is mostly men?

Aylwin: How odd that would be.

Dulcie: Yes, unlike in Brazil where it’s considered ‘not done’ for men to go to church.

Aylwin (looking at her): Darling, the things you know.

In any case, this is the sort of conversation Barbara and Hillary would have had. They both loved finding out about people and did much the same kind of detective work as Dulcie. In this way, Dulcie is the heroine most like Barbara.

It may be that the loosening of social strictures in the 1950s enabled Barbara to create Dulcie. Much of her behavior borders on stalking, a benign kind of stalking, but I'm sure Mildred Lathbury would not approve. And is it a far cry from Harriet Bede peering out the window through a pair of binoculars at the departure of Agatha Hoccleve, or is just a line in the sand?

But her behavior is very pro-active, consciously or unconsciously, a direct contrast to the female doormats of the 'Angry Young Man' movement. At least once the 1960s were underway there were novels like *Georgy Girl*, better known now for the film, with its unconventionally conventional heroine.

Critics have commented on the fantasy aspect of *No Fond Return of Love* from the time of the visit to Tavistock to the romantic ending. However, the real fantasy is the relationship of Viola and Bill Sedge. The early part of the novel is filled with disparaging comments about Viola's appearance. At the learned conference, Viola, is 'conscious of herself "making a contrast" in her black dress with her pale rather haggard face and untidy dark hair.'

When Aylwin saw Viola sitting in the gardens in front of Temple Station, he 'looked at her with curiosity before he recognized her, for his attention had been drawn to her feet in red canvas laced-up shoes, which he thought distinctly odd. That was why he had not realized at first who she was, for such a lapse of taste was not to be expected of the Viola he knew, though Vi or Violet might well have been capable of it.'

And when Laurel first met Viola, 'In the hall she found her aunt and a tall, untidy-looking woman in a rather dirty red coat...Life had, apparently been a bit difficult...but it might improve, thought Laurel, if Miss Dace – could one possibly call her Viola? - were to send that coat to the cleaner and get herself a new hairstyle.'

Not to mention how messy she is. And who becomes the man who makes her feel a woman? Bill Sedge, who 'just finished arranging my display of spring knitwear from Florence and Vienna. I felt I had to do it myself – this is a very special collection, a real scoop.'

And Viola is taller and more educated than Bill Sedge, if not older. Traditionally in Pym, it's always the woman who has to change, adapt, adopt for a man. There is no sign of that here. Although, I do sense a happy and productive future for Viola. Hopefully in her personal life, but definitely in her work. With her off-kilter fashion sense, I'm sure she will be able to help translate the coming 'hippie chic' into digestible garments for the middle class Englishwoman.

As *No Fond Return of Love* draws to an end, Dulcie is out of touch with the Forbes brothers. Left to her own devices she will probably find a new detecting project. Also, 'she still had her work. She was in the middle of making an index for a complicated anthropological book, and this would occupy her for some weeks'.

And she does not long to be 'a tower of strength.' Unlike early in the novel, when Viola confides in Dulcie about Alwyn's break-up with his wife.

'But comfort – surely one could do so much. I should be so glad to do with I could.'

'Yes, of course one does like to, perhaps women enjoy that most of all – to feel that they're needed and doing good.'

'It isn't a question of my enjoying anything', said Viola sharply. 'I want to do what I can for him.'

Or, Aunt Hermione after the sad death of the Vicar's sister, '...I think I shall telephone the Vicar again, just to find out if there is *anything* I can do.' Dulcie hoped that he would find something, even if it was a thing he

didn't really want doing at all. It was sad, she thought, how women longed to be needed and useful and how seldom most of them really were. '

True for both men and women, and a sentiment rarely expressed in Pym. As Miss Randall, in full morning regalia, does not find out, when delivering morning tea to Aylwin Forbes, while Dulcie doing the same for Viola does. Alwyn's tea is strong and bitter, and Viola's is *Indian*.

But a morning cup of tea is as far as the nurturing goes. Near the end of the novel she receives a letter from Maurice, 'I do feel', he wrote, 'that we should remain friends, and it could be such a pleasant relationship – you've no idea how I sometimes long to have somebody to tell my troubles to, and if she were a charming and sympathetic woman, so much the better!' Dulcie stood for a moment with the letter in her hand, remembering other letters in that extravagant writing, and then rejected the idea of herself in this role. She wrote back vaguely, saying that she was too busy at the moment but would get in touch with him some time.'

On the surface, this is just another example of how completely Dulcie breaks the mold of the traditional Pym heroine. But in *No Fond Return of Love*, based on previous male behavior, might this not just be a ploy on Maurice's part. After all, he has already tentatively suggested they should reunite and was rejected. Perhaps this is a new stratagem. If it is not, then Maurice just takes his place in line with the other self-centered men in Pym, unlike that master of strategy, Aylwin Forbes. Perhaps the ending, despite the Austenesque justification, wouldn't strike some as 'fantasy', if the reader had some idea of what Aylwin was doing and thinking after Laurel rejected him. Perhaps Pym just wanted the surprise ending. It is certainly one of the few in Pym.

It was after the publication of *No Fond Return of Love* that Pym began her correspondence with Philip Larkin. He had written suggesting he write an article about her novels to coincide with the publication of her next book. In her response, on 1 March 1961, she wrote, '...I could let you know when my next is ready – (so far only four chapters written). It will be my seventh which seems a significant number. *N.F.R.L.* (originally called *A Thankless Task!*) has had a better reception than I thought I would have, and your letter certainly encourages me to go on.'

As we know, the future of Aylwin and Dulcie is left unwritten. One wonders if there was any temptation to write a continuation since *No Fond Return of Love* was serialized by the BBC in 1965. In fact, during the wilderness years, as Philip Larkin writes in "The Rejection of Barbara Pym", 'Portaway Reprints Publishing, that infallible index of what people want to read instead of what they ought to want to read, reissued five others.'

It's left for another paper or just speculation as to how and why *An Unsuitable Attachment* developed the way it did. Why did she step back to a more traditional heroine and setting? There are many tantalizing references in letters to Bob Smith and Philip Larkin in the 1960's and 1970's about advice received from friends regarding her writing. Unfortunately, she is never specific about the suggestions. As Dulcie thought, in a very different context, 'How irritating it sometimes was, the delicacy of women!'

The work of Ruth Praver Jhabvala, now better known for her adaptation work in Merchant-Ivory films, has also been described as Austenesque. She was born in 1927 in Cologne to Jewish parents. Her family fled Germany for England in 1939 and in 1951 she married an Indian Parsi architect and moved to Delhi, India. From there she contacted twenty publishers in England, all of whom wrote back, and her first novel, *To Whom She Will*, was published in 1955. She was published every couple of years until the mid-1960's when she started working in films. I don't mean to denigrate her work by saying that the India hook has worked her entire career, but in 1975 Jhabvala won the Man Booker Prize for her novel, *Heat and Dust*, about a young Englishwoman in India.

And Jhabvala had no interest in India; love and marriage took her there, and that created the canvas for her novels. While Barbara had no interest in Africa and no reason to go there. But what if she had? What if her seventh novel had been about the life of Connie Aspinall and Bishop Grote in Mbawawa? Certainly, it would have been *A Far Cry From Belgravia*. Maybe she would have been the “Austen” of Africa .

Not that I would wish to sacrifice any of the later novels but wouldn't it be wonderful if there were four or five more novels for those inevitable 'bad days'? But as it is, we are left, all of us Pymians, like Senhor Macbride-Pereira, at the end of *No Fond Return of Love*, 'watching in his window....He took a mauve sugared almond out of a bag and sucked it thoughtfully, wondering what, if anything, he had 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-Pymish 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 have come here today to discuss it.