

Smoked Salmon and a Perfectly Ripe Peach: How Pym's Work Challenges the Soggy-Tinned-Peas Version of British Culinary History

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Julia Child had the true food-lover's gift of being able to take great pleasure in horrible food if the circumstances caught her fancy, so it was in that spirit that she wrote a splendid description of a meal she once had in England. It was the spring of 1949. She and her husband, Paul, were living in Paris, but neither of them had ever been to England, so they went over and toured London, and then they drove up north. "[We] stopped at a beautiful Tudor Inn, which was truly oldey worldy and charming," she recalled several years later. "Dinner, and we had boiled chicken with the hair still on partially covered with a real honest to goodness English white sauce. I had always heard of it, but thought it was just a lot of French chauvinism. But this was really it, flour and water with hardly any salt, not even made with the chicken bouillon. It was a wonderful experience and I enjoyed it immensely...sort of like seeing one's first red indian."¹

Julia came away from that first trip feeling that there really was no hope for the English. The fact that rationing was still on, that hotels and restaurants had taken a dive during the war, that many hadn't recovered – none of this entered into her appraisal. By the time she was writing this letter it was 1953, and she had been back to England many times, always staying with friends who served delicious meals – but even this didn't change her view. After all, as she pointed out, these particular friends loved France and French food. So as far as Julia was concerned, they didn't really count as English, at least when they cooked.

Julia's attitude towards English food – that it's inedible, that it has little relevant history apart from being inedible, and that a more sensible English population would simply take its meals in France – has been locked into place for a long time. Oscar Wilde, writing in 1896, blamed "the stupidity of cooks" for the appalling state of the English table, and evoked "the tyrant of the English kitchen...her entire ignorance of herbs...her total inability to make a soup which is anything more than a combination of pepper and gravy..."² In 1928 the food-and-wine writer Morton Shand summed up the daily fare of England as "faded lettuce...bottled sauces...tinned soups and fruits, a cut off the chilled joint with the boiled veteran potatoes and flaccid, malodourous cabbage..."³ Occasionally people will have a kind word to say about breakfast, or afternoon tea. Or they'll concede that there was indeed good food for a while, and then something came along – the industrial revolution, or World War I, or World War II, maybe it was just the arrival of Bird's Custard Powder – at any rate, there was a cataclysmic turning point, after which everything plummeted, not to be restored to grace until the arrival of Jamie Oliver.

I have to say, I never understood these grim assessments of the food in England. I first visited in the late 1960s, and found the bread, the cheese, the fruits and vegetables, the bacon and all sorts of other things far better than their equivalents back here in the States. The cheap restaurants I went to certainly could be dismal, but that was true in America, too. So I always wondered why the food had this terrible reputation. Now, granted, I didn't grow up in England. I didn't eat school dinners, I never in my life sat down to a Sunday lunch of boiled mutton and cabbage. Some of you here in this room have far more in-depth, lived experience with English food than I have. But as an American, I do claim the ability to recognize terrible food, both past and present. After all, we are sitting right across the river from the city of Boston, where the ginger-ale salad was invented in 1912. But in the case of my own country, I know that bad food is only one facet of a very lively and diverse culinary history. I

know it because that's what I study. I believe the same thing is true about England – and I believe it because I read Barbara Pym.

Barbara Pym was not a food writer, but she saw the world as if she were. There she was, one of the most English of English writers – growing up in Shropshire, then living in Oxford and then in and around London, later in a village, and all the while she was placing delicious food in her novels. You can read her books – you can read her life – as an inadvertent history of mid-century English cooking. She didn't set out to overturn our assumptions; but character after character, meal after meal, that's exactly what she does.

In 1949, for instance, the year that Julia encountered her ghoulish boiled chicken with the hair still on, Barbara Pym happened to be reflecting on the very same dish. She was finishing her revisions of *Some Tame Gazelle*, and boiled chicken with white sauce shows up early and often in that book. In fact, it's the centerpiece of the very first extended scene in the novel. Here's the dish as Pym sees and tastes it:

In the dining-room Harriet sat at one end of the table and Belinda at the other with the curate in the middle. Harriet carved the boiled chicken smothered in white sauce very capably. She gave the curate all the best white meat. Were all new curates everywhere always given boiled chicken when they came to supper for the first time? Belinda wondered. It was certainly an established ritual at their house and it seemed somehow right for a new curate. The coldness, the whiteness, the muffling with sauce, perhaps even the sharpness added by the slices of lemon, there was something appropriate here, even if Belinda could not see exactly what it was.⁴

So we have two entirely different responses to the concept of boiled chicken in white sauce, Julia's and Pym's. Of course, Barbara Pym wrote the first draft of *Some Tame Gazelle* in the 1930s, and the book is set in that period. A lot happened to food in England between then and 1949. But according to Morton Shand, the food was already disastrous in 1928; and according to Julia, it was just as disastrous in the early '50s. In other words, the reputation of English food stands on its own, independent of real time. It has to be bad, because bad is its identity.

And yet, it's not bad in *Some Tame Gazelle*. We know for a fact – that is, a fictional fact – that Belinda and Harriet live well and that they care about food. Harriet likes her roast beef rare; Belinda makes ravioli by hand; the scones at tea are fresh and hot. We also know that they put out their best for company, especially for the new curates. All this convinces me that boiled chicken as Pym knew the dish bore no resemblance to what Julia saw.

What could it have been? Judging from the way Belinda describes the chicken – it's cold, it's covered in white, it's got a bit of lemon – I wonder if it's similar to a recipe called Boiled Chicken with Special Sauce, from a 1935 cookbook by Helen Simpson. It's not inconceivable that Pym would have known this cookbook. Helen Simpson was a young, reasonably successful novelist living in London in the 1930s; she also wrote occasionally about food; and her cookbook, *The Cold Table*, was published by Jonathan Cape – one of several publishers to whom Barbara Pym submitted the early version of *Some Tame Gazelle* and later, of course, the house that published most of her work. Simpson's recipe for boiled chicken sounds to me very much like something you'd find on Belinda and Harriet's supper table. First and most important, you don't actually boil the chicken. You simmer it. This is key. I don't know why the term "boiled" is used so loosely in English cooking, but it doesn't do the reputation any favors. Meanwhile, before the chicken even goes into the pot, you truss it, which right there signals a conscientious cook. You simmer it with onion, parsley and carrots until it's tender; then you make what might be called a white sauce, but it's not just flour and water, it's flour, butter, cream, mace and lemon peel. You

add gelatine and let this sauce cool and jell, and then you spread it over the chicken. Finally, you decorate the whole thing with carrots and parsley and a little paprika.

Clearly this carefully-made poached chicken does not belong in the same universe as Julia's dinner. But it is typical of a great many meals in Barbara Pym's work. And Belinda is typical of a great many of the cooks. Their skill is not an aberration; Pym takes it for granted that an ordinary, pedestrian life will have respectable cooking in it. If we read her novels as culinary history – and I'll explain in a minute why I think we are justified in doing that – we discover a fine, resilient tradition of genuinely good food.

Look at Catherine, for instance, in *Less Than Angels*, 1955 – she can throw together a risotto at short notice, and she can make a classic *boeuf a la mode*, rejoicing that she's been able to obtain the requisite calf's foot.

Viola, in *No Fond Return of Love*, 1961 – she doesn't cook at all, but she brings in “exotic salads”⁵ when Dulcie comes for supper, and makes “very good coffee.”⁶ As for Dulcie, she's an excellent home cook – her company dinner is duckling, roasted to perfection, and a “splendid” wine.⁷

Rupert's cook, in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, 1963, makes an “admirable steak and kidney pudding,”⁸ and Penelope learns from Sophia how to make a long-simmered Italian tomato sauce with basil.

Leonora, in *The Sweet Dove Died*, mostly written in the '60s – she serves chicken with tarragon and a chocolate mousse, and a traditional English lunch featuring “a splendid piece of beef”⁹ and Yorkshire pudding.

And in *A Few Green Leaves*, written in the late '70s, Emma is nervous about serving a meal to guests who include Adam Prince, the gourmet restaurant inspector, but he's evidently very pleased with what she offers – “a tuna fish mousse, and a French onion tart with a salad.”¹⁰ In fact he compliments her on the “exquisite thinness of the sliced cucumber with which she had decorated the tuna mousse.”¹¹

Even in *Quartet in Autumn*, 1977, the one book where the food is almost as heartbreaking as the characters, Letty's friend Marjorie, out in the country, makes Poulet Nicoise for the vicar she is wooing, and serves it with a good Orvieto.

To me, fictional incidents like these constitute a powerful argument for the prevalence of good English food over time – powerful precisely because Pym was not arguing. She was not trying to persuade us to change our minds about English food. She had no agenda. She was simply doing what she always did – describing everyday life. As a culinary historian, I'm constantly aware that the main thing we write about – what people eat – is the very thing we don't know. Yes, we have cookbooks, menus, market surveys and statistics on commodities, and all these things are useful; but to find out what an ordinary, middle-class homemaker put together for dinner on a Tuesday night in 1955 is incredibly difficult. Barbara Pym's novels constitute one of the most revealing culinary sources I've ever seen. Not only are they full of food, but they're backed up by her notebooks, her shopping lists, and the popular cookbooks of her time. If you put all that together – and most important, if you add her method, the way she worked in fiction, you get a genuine challenge to the stereotype of English food.

Pym reflected once, in one of her notebooks, on what went into the writing of *Excellent Women*. She wrote just a few sentences about it; she may have been drafting an article or responding to a question, it's not clear. But what's striking and very characteristic is how matter-of-fact she sounded. She wrote, “I'd probably noticed that unmarried women seemed to be expected to do all kinds of things that nobody else was willing to do and of

course having got the idea I exaggerated it a little after all art must improve on life....”¹² That was it. And that was how she worked. She lifted it out of life, and she refined it a bit, she turned it into writing. After her renaissance in 1977, when people started flocking around and interviewing her, they wanted to know her ideas about the art of fiction, or her theories of literature. She never had much to tell them. She didn’t think that way. In one of the last interviews she gave before her death in 1980, she told the writer that a publication called the *New Review* had recently asked her, “[W]hat do you think has been the trend of the novel during the last 10 years”, and she said all she could possibly answer was, “...I didn’t care tuppence about the *trend* of the novel; I was just thinking how on earth can I get into print again....All this business about the trend of the novel, and how it’s not being experimental enough, this that and the other, just didn’t really worry me at all.”¹³

In other words, Pym worked close to home. She did not spend her career wrapped in theory, or evoking fantastic worlds. She evoked worlds that she knew very well. Whenever she went too far afield – as with, say, *An Academic Question*, which she thought of as her attempt to get into the much sought-after Margaret Drabble territory – the work did not succeed, it didn’t ring true. Tellingly, there’s very little food in *An Academic Question*. Without the food, it really doesn’t seem as though we’re reading Barbara Pym.

Pym’s best work is always the work that emanates from her experience and – this is the crucial point – from her observations. Her daily, unshakeable habit was to closely observe the world around her and write it down in a notebook. Those notes were the first steps to the fiction, and many of us first learned about them from Yvonne, whose archeological excursions into the notebooks have been a highlight of these conferences for years. (And today, of course, we get to celebrate her long-awaited book, not to mention her stunning victory over Barbara Pym’s handwriting, which has defeated many a lesser scholar). Pym started what the Bodleian calls the “literary notebooks” in 1948, while she was doing the last revisions on *Some Tame Gazelle*. Her life as a professional writer was about to begin, and the notebooks kept her constantly attuned to her profession. It’s not always clear whether she was jotting down her actual observations of the moment, or whether some of the notes were more like the footprints left by her imagination as it ran through possible scenarios, characters, language, incidents – the landscape of her fiction. A lot of her jottings ended up in the published books, but we don’t always know what prompted a specific note. (Neither did she, actually – once she scribbled next to a note, “What is this and where did I get it?”)¹⁴ But a leitmotif in these little scribbled pages was food. She was constantly taking note of specific meals, this or that dish, what’s in the string bag that woman is carrying, what are these people eating in Lyons or the train station, what are they talking about while they eat.

In her very first literary notebook, three pages in from the beginning, she jotted, “Two women at my table in D.H. Evans Help Yourself. Talking about somebody who has died. Hushed voices.”¹⁵ (D.H. Evans was an Oxford Street department store, and the Help Yourself would have been the store cafeteria.) In other words, the important place for her, as a writer, was the place where you go to eat. That’s where all the doors to the imagination would open. It wasn’t about standing on Westminster Bridge or gazing at a country churchyard, as our greater English poets did for their inspiration. Her material would come from the Help Yourself.

So the notebooks, just as emphatically as the novels, constantly correct our assumptions about English food. Elizabeth David, whose first book, *A Book of Mediterranean Food*, was published in 1950, is legendary today for leading the English out of the dark ages and into a new culinary world. According to her biographer, it was an “alien” new world, full of ingredients that David’s readers in 1950 would have found “expensive and exotic,” including olive oil, wine and aubergines.¹⁶ But Pym’s characters, humble though many of them are, need no introduction to these ingredients. Wine flows unceasingly through these books; and Pym loved poking fun at

characters who made a huge fuss about it. Olive oil may be hoarded in Mildred's 1948 kitchen, but this unsophisticated spinster is accustomed to using it two years before anyone has even heard of Elizabeth David. Or there's Deirdre, in *Less Than Angels*, a graduate student living at home in the suburbs in the early '50s, who's hungry for "Some rice, all oily and saffron yellow, with aubergines and red peppers and lots of garlic."¹⁷ Her mother is a little alarmed by this idea, but she's willing to give it a try, and Deirdre says she'll go to Soho and pick up the ingredients. Catherine, of course, in the same book, has been cooking this way for years; her hands smell of garlic.

So Pym's novels force us to rewrite the chronology of English cooking. A friend of mine just read *Excellent Women* for the first time – it was her first Pym novel – and she exclaimed over the scene in the restaurant where William and Mildred are having lunch. William is worried about everything on the menu, including the celery – "the weather had been too mild for the celery to be good"¹⁸ – and my friend was amazed to see that the English were aware of flavor, and eating in season, way back in the '40s.

One of my favorite examples of how Pym upends the usual chronology charting the arrival of good food in England comes in *Jane and Prudence*, and it's the incident I refer to in the title of this paper. Here, Prudence has just learned that Fabian, who has been more or less courting her, is going to marry Jessie, and Prudence is soothing her broken heart with a meal in a restaurant. "She must be more than usually kind to herself today. A dry Martini and then a little smoked salmon; she felt she could manage that.... 'And what would you like to follow, madam?' asked the waitress. 'I can recommend the chicken.' 'Well,' Prudence hesitated, 'perhaps just a slice of the breast, and a very few vegetables.' No sweet, of course, unless there was some fresh fruit, a really ripe yellow-fleshed peach, perhaps? And afterwards, the blackest of black coffee."¹⁹

Jane and Prudence was published in 1953. I doubt that any of us has heard a good word spoken about English food in the early '50s. But this refined little meal – ordered in a London restaurant by a young woman working in a nondescript office – could have been designed by Alice Waters, the godmother of California cuisine. Depending of course on how the vegetables were cooked, but believe me, if Prudence is fussy about that peach, she is not going to put up with soggy vegetables. And remember, Prudence – like Belinda – is a character with whom Pym was identified. She saw herself in Prudence. She knew that meal. It's real.

We actually know a fair amount about the "real" food in Pym's life, because she sometimes recorded it in the notebooks, jotting down her home cooking, her restaurant meals, even her shopping lists. (I can't tell you how rare this is – she is a biographer's dream, at least if the biographer cares about food). And what we see, over and over, is the culinary life of an unpretentious, middle-class Britisher who likes to eat. The food could be good or it could be bad, often it was delicious, frequently it was pedestrian. She bought olive oil, cooking apples, fish fingers, Coke and Beaujolais. She bought teabags, basmati rice and tinned gooseberries. At Lyons one day she was struck by the fact that she had just eaten an entirely brown lunch – "Macaroni Bolognaise with a brownness of meat in the middle, brown soup and coffee, dark brown chocolate trifle."²⁰ But another lunch, this one at home, was served to company – Philip Larkin – so it was quite a bit nicer. They had "kipper pate then veal done in a casserole with peppers and tomatoes – pommes Anna and celery...cheese...then summer pudding."²¹ There are other menus, too, probably served to friends because she had initials next to them – "P & S", "G & D"²² – so we know she made pleasant, comfortable food for guests: beef goulash, timbales of salmon, steaks and lamb chops, strawberries and cream. Occasionally she wrote down a recipe, like the one that was tucked amid her notes for *A Glass of Blessings*. It was for a casserole made with layers of chicken, onions and rice in a wine sauce, with basil and bay leaves placed here and there. (Apparently this dish stayed on her mind, whether or not it stayed in her

repertoire, because a few years later she happened to write in her notebook a phrase from *Paradise Lost* about a blissful Adam and Eve – “Imparadised in one another’s arms” – and this must have reminded her of the recipe, because she then added, “or was it somehow encasseroled. Bay leaf resting on chicken flesh.”²³

I cannot claim with any degree of scientific accuracy that this kind of culinary life in England was typical, but I tend to believe that Barbara Pym was not unique, and that a lot of middle-class people lived that way. One reason I believe it is that many of the published recipes circulating in those years reflect tastes and habits just like the ones documented in Pym’s novels and notebooks. Smart, witty cookbooks like *The Right Way to His Heart*, by Evelyn Board, or down-to-earth collections like *Definitely Different*, which offered recipes that had run in the Daily Telegraph – books like these were telling 1950s home cooks about quiche lorraine, risotto, homemade mayonnaise and vinaigrettes, even the way to make a good macaroni cheese, which Evelyn Board calls “one of our great national stand-bys.” You probably remember the numerous times that Pym’s characters sit down to a macaroni cheese. If they were lucky, they were having Evelyn Board’s version – her recipe starts, “Make a good quantity of rich cheese sauce, not forgetting to stir in a spoonful of French mustard.”²⁴

But of course, sometimes they’re weren’t lucky. Mildred, in *Excellent Women*, has been invited to have supper with Julian and Winifred Malory at the vicarage, and she’s quite resigned; she knows what’s coming. Their cook, Mrs Jubb, is notorious for her dedication to the lackluster. “Tonight she set before us a pale macaroni cheese and a dish of boiled potatoes, and I noticed a blancmange or ‘shape’, also of an indeterminate colour, in a glass dish on the sideboard. Not enough salt, or perhaps *no* salt, I thought, as I ate the macaroni. And not really enough cheese.”²⁵

Pym was under no illusions about the food of her time and place. Throughout her working life, right alongside the risotto and the olive oil and the strawberries, an ever-flowing stream of terrible food was making its way through England, through the cookbooks, and through her novels. *Food for Thought*, a cookbook subtitled “A Book of Parsonage Recipes,” came out in 1961, and it’s a volume that reinforces all our treasured stereotypes of the English kitchen. These recipes were contributed from parishioners, and I especially like a dessert called “High Church Pudding,” which certainly would have kept your mind on the sermon – you start by making a batter of flour, suet, a “small” cup of sugar and two spoons of jam, then steam it for three hours and serve it, presumably to the most pious people you know, with custard.²⁶

None of this would have come as a surprise to Barbara Pym. She fully understood what was out there on many a table. In that same first notebook, she jots down, “A revolting thing in the oven for one person – beans potatoes etc. Always some left over.”²⁷ Plenty of grim food crossed her path, and she transferred it directly to the novels. Interestingly, she often transferred it directly to the vicarage in the novel she happened to be writing. Maybe she owned a copy of *A Book of Parsonage Recipes*. Women in her novels love to flutter around the clergy offering them the very nicest cakes at the jumble sale, but when the priests get home and sit down to a meal served to them by Barbara Pym, it is likely to be dismal.

Wilf Bason’s high-end cooking, in the clergy house in *A Glass of Blessings*, is a vivid exception to this rule. Far more typical is the “cold mutton and beetroot”²⁸ for supper in *Jane and Prudence*, which Jane’s husband Nicholas finds so discouraging. And the dish known as “boiled baby”²⁹ that Mrs. Sedge prepares in *No Fond Return of Love* –that’s chopped meat covered with tomato sauce, followed on this occasion by stewed apple and semolina pudding. This is not technically a vicarage household – Mrs. Sedge cooks for a lay couple, Dulcie’s Uncle Bertram and Aunt Hermione – but they are both avid church-goers, and Bertram is about to retire to a

community of monks. So it's close enough. And there's the vicarage version of an idyllic Mediterranean lunch, in *A Few Green Leaves*. Daphne, who runs the house, is so homesick for Greece that she tries to set out a typical Greek repast, only it doesn't quite come off – “a hunk of stale bread, a few small hard black olives, the larger juicier kind being unobtainable here, and something approaching a goats'-milk cheese.”³⁰ Meanwhile, of course, throughout the novels, in vicarages and houses and flats and bedsitters, many tins are opened, a great deal of Nescafe is made; frozen meals show up; and even that good English cook Dulcie Mainwaring, in *No Fond Return of Love*, comes home from a trip to find that her housekeeper has a casserole waiting for her: “‘It's fillets of plaice in a mushroom sauce...the sauce is really that concentrated soup – you just pour it on,’ Miss Lord explained. ‘I saw it on TV.’”³¹

So Pym sees all sides of the picture very clearly. I think her point of view is captured perfectly in what she says about Mrs. Sedge, the cook who specializes in “boiled baby.” Mrs Sedge is an immigrant from Vienna, but after years of working for the unremittingly dreary Bertram and Hermione, Pym writes, “she had acquired all the worst traits of English cooking.”³² In other words, English cooking is not defined by awfulness; awfulness is just one of its permanent aspects.

What is splendidly clear, whenever food turns up in these books, is that Pym wrote about awful meals with the same pleasure she took in writing about the wonderful ones. For her, I believe, the truly important thing about the English food she was describing wasn't the quality, good or bad. It was the Englishness she wanted to capture. She loved Englishness, wherever it appeared. Very, very often – and you Pymites will remember seeing this a thousand times in these books – the vehicle for expressing Englishness is a cup of tea. Characters are constantly reflecting on the function, or utility, or significance of the ubiquitous cup of tea. “I did not want him to remember me as the kind of person who was always making cups of tea at moments of crisis,”³³ Mildred decides, in *Excellent Women*, as she is saying goodbye to the very dashing Rocky. Of course, the next time they meet he begs her to suggest making a cup of tea – “That's one of the things I remember most about you.”³⁴ She realizes there's no getting away from it, she is an excellent woman, that English archetype. She goes to make a cup of tea.

Or – there are so many examples, I'll give just one more – there's Mrs. Williton, the mother of the woman Aylwin Forbes has mistreated in *No Fond Return of Love*. One afternoon she has a terrible meeting with him in which he makes clear that not only is his marriage to her daughter probably over, but he is spending Easter in, of all places, Tuscany. Mrs Williton has never heard of it, but the word reminds her of tusks, so possibly it's Africa, “or something farther back in the dark ages.”³⁵ So she hastily leaves his house and goes in search of a cup of tea. She needs it desperately; the world she knows seems to be slipping away from her – men leave their wives, they go to prehistoric countries, they offer her sherry instead of the tea she craves. But now she's in the tea-shop, and she's drinking it at last – “strength flowing back into her with the sweet brown liquid, while a big jolly-looking woman from the West Indies cleared away the used crockery and wiped over the table top with a huge dusky hand.”³⁶ Mrs Williton's world has changed, yes, but her equanimity is restored. England remains, Britannia still rules, in that cup of tea.

Barbara Pym took occasional trips to Europe, but she rarely took notes on the food there. That wasn't her subject. Her subject was being English. When a party from the parish goes off to Italy, in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, they do taste some wonderful Italian food, but as Sister Dew says about *osso buco*, happy to recognize such a familiar-looking dish: “It's a sort of savoury rice with a bone in the middle.”³⁷ More to the point, for this group, is Ianthe's comment when they first arrive at their hotel. “How I long for a cup of tea,” she exclaims.

Penelope, who is set up as her opposite in the novel, thinks, "...how typical it was that Ianthe should long for a such a dull and essentially English thing as a cup of tea. She hardly liked to admit that she wanted one herself."³⁸

And so does Barbara Pym. Early in that first literary notebook, she was thinking about what it was like to travel, and she wrote, "A feeling of well being – sitting at an open air cafe in Italy or Switzerland, the sun glinting on the china, etc drinking wine (one of the little unpretentious vins du pays perhaps) or coffee." I think we all know – certainly if we are English or American – the particular traveler's bliss that she was evoking, when you're sitting at the outdoor cafe table in Europe. And then Pym goes on, she keeps on imagining. "But the spinster, though she can appreciate it, feels she is the kind of person who would spoil it by wanting tea. The little muslin bag and the weak yellow liquid even the occasional hot milk – hadn't that its own charm."³⁹ This very image will appear in *Excellent Women*: Rocky and Mildred conjure it, in one of their first conversations. They both rather like that spinster who orders the tea, they understand the charm, it's one of the things that brings these two very different people together.

I'm always bothered when I read critics who call Barbara Pym's women unhappy, unfulfilled, situated on the losing end of life. To my mind, nothing could be less true. Yes, they need that cup of tea. But as we can see so clearly throughout the books, they are also pouring wine, they are carving perfectly-roasted ducks, and when it falls to their lot to eat plain fish, or baked beans that someone's dropped cigarette ash into, Pym is smiling and so are they. It is all about being English – all of it. "Hadn't that its own charm."

NOTES

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- ¹ Julia Child to Avis DeVoto, March 3, 1953. Julia Child papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University.
- ² Oscar Wilde, review of *Dinners and Dishes*, by "A Wandered," in the Pall Mall Gazette, March 7, 1885.
- ³ P. Morton Shand, *A Book of Food* (New York, Knopf, 1928), p. 13-14.
- ⁴ *Some Tame Gazelle* (Dutton, 1983), p. 13.
- ⁵ *No Fond Return of Love* (Perennial, 1984), p. 56.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- ⁸ *An Unsuitable Attachment* (Perennial, 1983), p. 126.
- ⁹ *The Sweet Dove Died* (Perennial, 1980), p. 152.
- ¹⁰ *A Few Green Leaves* (Perennial, 1981), p. 91.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- ¹² MS. Pym 98, fols 24-36. Papers of Barbara Mary Crampton Pym, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- ¹³ Iain Finlayson, "An Interview with Barbara Pym," *The Literary Review*, 23rd February to 7th March, 1980, p. 2.
- ¹⁴ MS. Pym 41, Papers of Barbara Pym, Bodleian Library.
- ¹⁵ MS. Pym 40, Papers of Barbara Pym, Bodleian Library.
- ¹⁶ Artemis Cooper, *Writing at the Kitchen Table* (New York, HarperCollins, 2000), p. 142.
- ¹⁷ *Less Than Angels* (Perennial, 1982), p. 38.
- ¹⁸ *Excellent Women* (Plume, n.d.), p. 67.
- ¹⁹ *Jane and Prudence* (Perennial, 1982), p. 198.
- ²⁰ MS. Pym 45, Papers of Barbara Pym, Bodleian Library.
- ²¹ MS. Pym 77, Papers of Barbara Pym, Bodleian Library.
- ²² MS. Pym 48, Papers of Barbara Pym, Bodleian Library.
- ²³ MS. Pym 56, Papers of Barbara Pym, Bodleian Library.
- ²⁴ Evelyn Board, *The Right Way to His Heart* (Kingswood, Surrey, Elliot Right Way Books, 1952), p. 71.
- ²⁵ *Excellent Women*, p. 14.
- ²⁶ Shirley M. Hanson, *Food for Thought* (The Lincolnshire Old Churches Trust, The Subdeanery, Lincoln, 1961), p. 27.
- ²⁷ MS. Pym 40, Papers of Barbara Pym, Bodleian Library.
- ²⁸ *Jane and Prudence*, p. 130.
- ²⁹ *No Fond Return of Love*, p. 95.
- ³⁰ *A Few Green Leaves*, p. 29.
- ³¹ *No Fond Return of Love*, p. 236.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- ³³ *Excellent Women*, p. 166.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 222.
- ³⁵ *No Fond Return of Love*, p. 138.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- ³⁷ *An Unsuitable Attachment*, p. 160.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.
- ³⁹ MS. Pym 40, Papers of Barbara Pym, Bodleian Library.