

Fireworks in Suburbia: Space, Place and Symbolism in *Less than Angels*

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*Paper presented at the 19th North American Conference of the Barbara Pym Society
Cambridge, Massachusetts, 17-19 March 2017*

Less than Angels holds a very special place in my heart. It was my first Pym. I'm aware that I started my paper here two years ago in this way, but in Rome in 2005 – how appropriate – I read it and laughed - a lot.

It took, however, another few years for me to really love Barbara Pym. I read the later novels – the ones I just happened to find – and then *A Glass of Blessings* and *Excellent Women* cast the true spell and I became a Pym devotee. I went back to *Less than Angels*. It puzzled me. Despite my admiration for its comedy, and for Catherine as a heroine, I couldn't rate it with the other 1950s novels. It was a problem novel, perhaps, in the way that *Measure for Measure* is a problem Shakespeare. I've rarely heard it called Pym's best. But my friend Paul Binding – a Pym scholar some of you will know, and who was lucky enough to be her friend – constantly championed the novel as one of her very best, in fact one of his favourite novels of all time. I read it again last year, and just recently to prepare for this paper, and now I think I agree, and prefer it to even *A Glass of Blessings* and *Excellent Women*. This paper is an attempt to explain why.

The conclusion I have come to is that *Less than Angels* is a blend of everything that is best in Barbara Pym: it is an autumnal tragedy with the sadness of the later novels, but it also contains the witty and even surreal comedy of the best 1950s works. It is a novel with a wide canvas and a real sense of freedom and openness, almost totally unselfconscious. It is about loneliness, yet it is funny. What I wish to argue above all is that it is a novel held together by poetic symbols, tragi-comic, sustained by sense of place and movement, and finally even Forsterian: Pym is staking her claim in the canon. I'm going to refer to some key scenes: tea in the garden at the Swans' house; Catherine in the cafeteria on the night she loses Tom; Tom's return to Mallow Park and, above all, the fireworks party at the Swans'. The paper essentially contains three sections – comedy, place, and symbolism.

How has the novel been read?

I'd like to begin with readers' and critics' views of the novel, and what light this may shed on its status. Daniel George at Cape thought that it was 'as near perfection as could be'; Pym's friend Frances Atkin also said it was 'far and away your best'. An unknown fan agrees. Yvonne Cocking shows how novelist Elizabeth Taylor names it as Pym's best so far after reading it in 1955, and in 1979 Lord David Cecil also says it's the best. Cocking summarises however that reviews and sales were not as good as before. Perhaps the setting was a problem? For the first time, this was not a church world, with much more from a male point of view, and a big focus on anthropology. If we consider that the novel was Pym's fourth after *Some Tame Gazelle*, *Excellent Women* and *Jane and Prudence*, the break in pattern seems clear. Although Annette Weld calls it 'light-hearted', Anne Wyatt-Brown does suggest that the sombre tone reflects Pym's own doubts about publishing success at the time.

In the many books and articles on Pym that followed her death, the novel has been seen respectfully: Charles Burkhardt, for example, feels that Pym is at her 'most characteristic, exuberant command'. Critics have used the themes of anthropology and Africa, watching and suburbia as key themes: Barbara Everett in *Pleasures of Poverty* argues that Pym invests Barnes with feeling; previously Sandra Goldstein wrote on portrayals of suburbia in this novel and *No Fond Return of Love* for the Barbara Pym Society. These are all rich fields for scholarship. The use

of the very important background of Africa allows us to see the novelist as anthropologist; Tom in previous years would surely have been a colonial administrator. I'm going to return to place later, but the novel is of its time in its rendition of the other and the 'dark continent', perhaps. There are echoes of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, with a destructive nothing waiting for Tom 'out there'; he dies in Africa. Ephraim Olo is nothing but a cameo. Pym is a white middle-class novelist who sometimes mentions 'grinning natives', and Lydgate's masks, like Catherine's mincing machine Beatrice, seen as like a little god, are a bit sinister. There again, it would have been hard for Pym to render it any other way. There is nothing unkind in her view, nor is she forcing in subject matter just because it is politically correct. She worked for *Africa*, without having any real interest in the continent, but used what she learned in her novels.

The role of Pym's writing in post-colonial contexts is actually only beginning to be explored: she is acknowledged in *Intercultural Voices in Contemporary British Literature: The Implosion of Empire* (2001). Tim Watson in, 'Postcolonial Studies and Atlantic Studies - Interdisciplinary Reflections on Slavery and Empire', in Jana Gohrisch and Ellen Grünkemeier (eds), *Postcolonial Studies Across the Disciplines, Series, Cross/Cultures – Readings in the Post/Colonial Literatures in English 170 ASNEL papers*, admits that 'Barbara Pym, is typically read, if she is still read at all, as an archetypically English novelist who is about as far from postcolonial literature as you could possibly imagine', but then makes a strong case for her inclusion. The post-colonial element in Pym's work is noted in Gates's *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars*. Pym could be seen to have an 'ethnographic gaze': in recent years it has been argued that modernist writers sometimes saw the British not as a normality against which others were judged wanting, but as a strange tribe themselves. In a subtle way, then, Pym has affinities with not only modernism but postcolonialism after all.

Tragi-comedy

In *Less than Angels*, Pym excels at social comedy and the novel of manners, and this was the very first thing that made her appeal to me. This has already been very well done in scenes like Sunday supper in *Some Tame Gazelle*, for example, where Mr Mold is seen to go a bit too far, or at the greeting of Lyall the MP in *Jane and Prudence*. I want to consider the sense of narrator as a presence in public or small private events, complicit with the reader, Austen-like, signalling the comic. In this novel we have many exemplary instances: going to church (when Jean-Pierre Rossignol sits in someone's regular pew); Mainwaring's weekend party; the party in the library, and at Catherine's; tea in the garden at the Swans'. Pym is an ironic omniscient narrator. Comedy is achieved through clashes between eccentric characters and conventional ones, helped by the large cast in the novel, much larger than before. I'd like to share some examples of this, and to differentiate it from what I would call 'private comedy' where a narratorial consciousness is at an ironic distance from public or smaller events: when Bernard finds Deirdre's bra-strap, and she thinks how odd her shape must feel, or the Lovells' dog lolloping like a rocking horse.

Towards the end of the book, in Chapter 12, there is a very funny Sunday lunch at the Swans'. Malcolm's Phyllis is there, 'preening herself like a little bird': this is sketched briefly and brilliantly. In a discussion of why retired anthropologists would make good apiarists (the joke is that they have bees in their bonnet), Mabel asks Mr Lydgate 'Do you have hives in your garden'? The narrator tells us that the sentence 'fell with a thud amid general laughter and then there was a pause'. This is funny, but, for a moment, it marks Mabel out as an outsider (and there's nothing worse than being shut out from laughter).

Earlier, in Chapter 7, Catherine and Tom come to tea at the Swans', on Whitsunday. I'll say more about place and setting later, but the interest in the garden next door struck me: they hear 'a woman's voice, unusually loud and

clear ... declaiming, almost like a station announcer, "Ealing train, not stopping at South Kensington and Gloucester Road. Father Gemini was quite distracted – just think of it, he was carried right on to Earl's Court!" This is certainly a household associated with eccentricity: visited by Miss Clovis and Miss Lydgate, it is looked after by Mrs Skinner (with her surprised expression), and the over-the-hedge encounter ends in Father Gemini's 'striptease'. I found I kept coming back to Father Gemini, who by the end is seen as a 'criminal' in an ambivalent way. It is he who is so confused by potato croquette with mince in a cafeteria. Does he somehow not 'fit in'? There again, Pym hardly supports 'fitting in': quite the opposite.

The comedy in this novel brings the conventional and normal into conflict with the absurd; the novel is also a satire on anthropology and anthropologists. But the humour – and this isn't the only place this occurs in Pym – is linked to real pain and loneliness. I've noted how Mabel becomes 'outside discourse' for a moment; the same is the case with Father Gemini and his croquette. One of my favourite scenes is when Catherine goes to the cafeteria and sits with the two women – 'leopard-hat' and 'black beetle' - who talk on and on about the ages of clergymen. The conversation is repetitive and absurd, yet believable. Catherine, however, feels like it is a nightmare.

This is the evening when she has discovered Tom with Deirdre in the Cypriot restaurant, and comedy and tragedy are interlinked from the start. Catherine notes that 'Deirdre's hand still lay on Tom's' – their moussaka would be getting cold. The food detail is comical. At the cafeteria later it is 'too late for tea and too early for supper': it is a liminal, undefined time. Catherine has 'a little cake shaped like boat', which is curious; even more curiously, the image is continued when she is 'carried gently along on the flow of their conversation', which is 'unceasing'. To add to the confusion, an electric organ, 'which Catherine had not noticed before', 'now began to be played by a capable-looking woman in a tailored suit'. The sounds are purring, treacly and at the same time bouncy, mingling 'in a nightmarish way' with the women's voices. Catherine learns that 'It won't be *coffee*' till seven o'clock. This confusing logic suggests Lewis Carroll, perhaps, and links to Catherine's more pleasant confusion and displacement at the start of the novel. Catherine remembers the Cypriot restaurant and feels she has lost 'their' restaurant now, and the cafeteria turns into an echo of the Mad Hatter's tea party:

Catherine stood up rather abruptly. The nightmare, which the strong tea had temporarily dispelled, seemed to be coming back. She wondered how long they would sit there discussing the ages of clergymen, and whether they would ever discover who got the young ones just ordained.

Once home, she 'wanders aimlessly about'. In the same way, the 'party' at the airport to bid farewell to Tom has the comic simile of being like a military scene: it is tragic, yet seen in a detached way by the narrator.

The novel ends with Tom's death – this is very un-Pym, in hindsight as if Pym is preparing us for the death much later of Marcia in *Quartet in Autumn* – and it happens offstage, almost as an afterthought. But we have been prepared for this. *Less than Angels* is a novel about isolated characters: Catherine's parents are long dead, and she is a metaphorical orphan; she laments the lack of a woman friend. Lydgate lives alone, bitter and full of regret. Mabel Swan and Rhoda creep round their house alone at night, correcting the other's preparations; Deirdre contemplates drinking alone. Then there is Esther Clovis: although seen as a comic figure by the students, we have access to her interior thoughts, and her sadness about Hermann Obst. Elaine hides her loneliness and Pym links her to Austen's Anne Eliot in *Persuasion*. There is isolation in anthropology, among the competition: the result, the end, is what Professor Mainwaring has come to when he gives away his books, paralleling Lydgate burning his.

This rather comfortless aspect links to a world strangely for Pym without churches, as critics have noted, compared to earlier works. At Mallow Park, Tom's uncle sits alone in front of the TV: it is seen as an altar with its

sacrificial victim. Similarly, when Catherine enters or even wanders into a church it is an unnerving experience. She is misidentified as Miss Dewsbury, a church worker, suggesting she has lost her identity, rather than found comfort.

In Pym's work, then, pain and comedy go hand-in-hand, like in her friend Elizabeth Taylor's fiction, although I'm interested in the fact that in Taylor you lurch from one to the other, whereas here they seem to be conjoined. The novel may show Conradian pointless quests, things that come to nothing – Mark's research, Tom, the grant – and the wanderings of Catherine and Tom. *Less than Angels* is about, as Mason Cooley argues, an '... entirely modern world, secularized and alienated', where 'isolation is ubiquitous', a 'general condition of life' and also 'rich in possibilities for astringent comedy'. The extraordinary thing is that the loneliness and comedy are so closely connected.

Space, place and movement

Pym's use of space and place is integral to understanding what sort of novel this is, and I'd like to start by looking briefly at the opening chapter to develop this idea. This may seem a different question – it's something I'm interested in with novelists generally and have thought about working into a book – but it will lead us to our next point, and builds on the juxtaposition of comedy and pain.

The novel begins with Catherine, and we experience immediate confusion. She is lost in her imagination. Where am I? She seems to wonder. Not in Italy but in a teashop in London, speculating on the cult of peacock worship. The narrative eye, which is also here Catherine's, then takes us to Vere and Fairfax in the street, who Catherine can see, then Felix Mainwaring in his car then his library (which she can't). This is a very skilful blending. Catherine *would* be wryly watching the events in the library, we feel, just as Pym is creating them. Boundaries have been blurred.

But to look at our first principal building. The library is called 'Felix's Folly' – the name itself implies comedy – and it is a space that is being disrupted. Plates of food are being brought in, and it becomes a party venue. This is hardly a normal occurrence in a library, yet it creates exactly the right atmosphere for the comedy to follow.

This is a novel, then, about displacement and disruption. Tom, at the start of chapter 12, thinks he's in Africa, and at the start of Chapter 4 Deirdre awakes confused. There is (often more simple) movement and journeying, as in all Pym, throughout the novel, and it may not appear significant or complicated. But the comic scene with Digby and Mark moving the sofa for Miss Clovis - "How would you like to help move some furniture?" - becomes a parody of moving house and emphasizes the chaos and breaking boundaries of the library. This is, I think, a typical Pym event: it is both eccentric and undramatic, part of the flow of clashing lives in the story; it does not assert itself as a symbol in any way, but adds to the texture.

Tom's movements and journeys are more profound and bleaker, and restate the theme of isolation. He is often seen aside from events, and as rather pathetic or restless. He moves through a series of what Mason Cooley calls 'successive detachments', such as when he stands outside Mrs Beddoes' house and is moved on by a policeman; his life is transitory and one of temporary homes, rather like a milder version of a character in Steinbeck. But then there is Catherine's London, the London of all the anthropologists of course, a place where Cypriots have come in, a teeming mass of humanity for Catherine to watch as a 'flaneuse'. Africa and Catherine come into suburbia, too; and there is Mr Ephraim Olo and Lydgate, both of whom have 'come back'. Who will go 'into the field', we wonder? Miss Clovis remembers a time in Austria. It is a realistic representation of anthropologists' lives; but wandering and exile resonate.

This is a busy novel. As well as the aeroplane Tom catches at the end, there are bus journeys, and walking on foot, which Catherine delights in, while for Tom it is sad wandering. I thought of Deirdre, walking by the river with Bernard. Compare this to the comparatively static of novels of Pym's contemporary Angela Thirkell, who is too often seen as another Pym. The movement here shows energy and inquiry, the inheritance of Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre or the characters in Pym's beloved Elizabeth von Arnim. The joke about the station announcer tells us that Lydgate has been carried away on a train, beyond his destination, 'carried right on to Earl's Court' - even though it is bathos. Miss Lydgate adds that 'the train went on. It *would not stop* at Gloucester Road'. Miss Clovis starts discussing trains too. Does this show their stasis, by contrast? The chapter at Professor Mainwaring's house starts with reference to the candidates' train journey and how in one train each half goes in a different direction. This is a lot of transport, and it is telling.

Later, Catherine enters another large restaurant where the foyer is thronged with people. This scene builds on her earlier experience in the cafeteria. Here, the crowd seems not to know 'which direction they were going in', for they 'wandered, bewildered, rudderless, in need not only of someone to tell them which of the many separate cafes would supply their immediate material wants, but of a guide to the deeper or higher things of life.'

But to return to the suburban. Deirdre's encounter, on the afternoon when Catherine comes for tea, with the child next door has something almost sinister about it, and is again perhaps reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's *Alice*, a book also about spatial confusion. The constant 'why' could go on and on, Deirdre feels. The comedy and chaos of movement is best summed up by the sign Catherine observes for an oxymoronic 'Pilgrimage by luxury coach', and the sighting of what seems to be Mainwaring and Minnie Foresight in the latter's Daimler, with Catherine wondering if it could possibly be a confession. Overall, we have a wide terrain, scenes of confinement, stasis and restlessness seen through Deirdre, contrasted with the energy and movement of Catherine.

The use of space also takes us to the idea of the big house, and thus again Austen. Mallow Park occupies an extraordinary part of the book – the silent town has a Bowen-like feel, the house not so much decaying, as pointless. It is a place lacking in emotion. Professor Mainwaring's country house, by contrast, is governed by theatricality: Mainwaring talks in a convoluted and unclear way, as if 'gaga', Mark and Digby think; there is Henry, a manservant, not dignified enough to be called a butler. Although it sees a dramatic climax to the novel – the disclosure of the 'loss' of the Foresight grant – it is also a scene of farce, with the Professor playing frivolous music on the piano and slightly drunken candidates answering questions about what they would do if they won the grant. If we compare the two houses, both could be seen as corrupt in some way: the academic world owns property, and we might wonder if this is good; the country house in Shropshire has become the last stop on a strange pilgrimage towards oblivion. Overall, in fact, we move outwards: from London to the suburbs, to the countryside to Africa.

Poetic symbols

I've commented on the unselfconsciousness of Pym and how incidents like the hives, the sofa and the cafeteria are important but not overt enough to be symbols. I'd like now to focus on objects and moments that work on a different level.

There is of course a patterning here. In *CH* and *STG* we have unity of setting and a cyclical narrative; in *EW* we have unity of focalisation. *J & P* sets up two women in contrast (and I don't think this quite works). In *LTA* – like in *AUA* – we have a much more open structure and more perspectives. Unity is provided, subtly, through symbols and echoes.

If we move out from London to suburbia to the countryside and then (offstage) to Africa, we also move towards two big houses, offered perhaps for contrast. There are subtler things, though. In Chapter 3 Deirdre, coming home, sees ‘in the middle of the garden path lay a headless doll, no doubt left there by one of the Lovell children from next door’. Deirdre pushes it aside with her foot. In the same chapter Rhoda reads of murders keenly, bodies of women having been discovered in a house in a ‘not very nice part of London’. Pym is a very deliberate writer; we know of the care she gave to details and words. This doll, easily missed, has to be there for a reason.

Alongside the observation that Tom has lost his faith, Rhoda adds as a postscript to her complaint to the electricity board that the light is dimmer – she feels that there does not seem to be an explanation for it.

‘I have also noticed’, she concluded, ‘that the light has become much dimmer lately and should be glad to know how you would explain this’ ... Her remark about the dimming light had left her with a vague sense of disquiet, as if it might have a wider and more disturbing significance.

At Mainwaring’s country house, there is a portrait of melancholy Sir Robert Mainwaring (213); we learn (220) that one of his ancestors kept lions. This reminds us of the worn-down lions on the gates in Deirdre’s road that Catherine observes. It is a message of decay. All this together tells us that Pym is scattering her novel with subtle symbols that help the tone.

The centre of this paper came to me last year. I was struck by the fireworks party towards the end of the novel, something whose significance only became apparent after many re-readings. It is in some ways a very normal scene for that time of year, with no obvious symbolism. But then, next door Catherine is burning Lydgate’s books, which crumble to nothing; on the other side Mr Lovell is setting off rockets as his children cower. I think this could be the novel’s central scene.

We are introduced to the scene from the point of view of Miss Clovis and Miss Lydgate. Getting out of the bus and walking along the road – movement again – they hear a number of explosions. This may sound ominous, and I think Pym means it to. What sort of explosions? It is of course fireworks. As the scene progresses, Mr Lovell’s boys feel ‘fearful delight’ and their dog is ‘allowed to be frightened’. This language of paradox and oxymoron fits the chaos.

Catherine cries “pretty!” when Lydgate’s books collapse in white ash; Mrs Skinner is going to drink wine with them. Even Mrs Skinner: Rhoda is appalled. This is something of the ‘carnavalesque’, the term literary theorists use for licensed suspension of the normal in favour of an inverted hierarchy. Explosions and beauty surrounds stasis, the creeping dullness of the Swan household. There are two bonfires which may evoke the pagan, or even terrorism in English history, for Bonfire Night is of course (Americans may not know this) Guy Fawkes’ night, which marks the execution of the man who wanted to blow up Parliament. But although the explosions foreshadow Tom’s death, they also mark a narrative development: what might be Catherine’s future happiness, shared with Lydgate, and also Mr Lovell returning to boyishness as he launches rockets. It is much, much more fun being in these houses than at the Swans’.

Forster

The final part of my paper considers the shared terrain of Barbara Pym and E.M. Forster. Did Pym like Forster? I can find no evidence of her reading him, but it seems obvious that she would have: his work fits her liking of tradition and comedy. He is not an acknowledged influence on her writing – indirectly, though, one of her favourite writers was Elizabeth von Arnim, who was a friend of and influence upon Forster.

Wyatt-Brown, in her book *Barbara Pym: A Critical Biography* writes that ‘for the first time in *Less than Angels*, Pym skilfully borrowed some of the themes of Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster’. She adds that ‘The ending of *Less than Angels*, like those of *To the Lighthouse* and *Howards End*, combines an affirmation of family loyalty with respect for the power of evil’. Although I don’t really agree that Tom’s disloyalty to Catherine and subsequent death replace Beethoven’s goblins and elephants, as Wyatt-Brown suggests, the connection did make me aware of the type of novel – not quite realism and not quite modernism – that both authors have written.

Both novelists write comedies of manners: consider the social world in *A Room with a View*, for example. Let’s consider some important tropes and moods in E.M. Forster. Windows, and the very title of *A Room with a View*, a novel which is partly about watching and about movement. Boundaries: class and social boundaries are crossed in *Howards End*, and there is a key movement out to caves in *A Passage to India*, something on which the plot hinges. Forster uses symbols: the bookcase that kills Leonard Bast in *Howards End*, for example. Most importantly, Forster’s world is a calm and apparently traditional one, even serene, but at times broken by sudden violence: the murder at the beginning of *A Room with a View*, and the supposed attack at the Marabar Caves in *A Passage to India*. Orphia Jane Allen, in *Pym: Writing a Life* quotes a *New York Times* review of *Less than Angels*: Pym ‘introduces sudden death like as casually as EM Forster’. The Marabar Caves are a scene of sudden existential despair on the part of Mrs Moore; Catherine is no stranger to feelings of this sort, as we have seen. And both writers are at least aware of the role of suburbia.

Conclusion and Artistry

I’d like to keep this sense of Forster in mind as I conclude this paper. First of all: what kind of a writer is Pym, generally? A critic has said that there is something of a boneless quality about her work, an un-self-consciousness, with little imposition of design, something which is rare. I think a modern example of this may be Anne Tyler. It’s not something that Forster does Pym has advanced, here, far less overt about symbols and message.

But if we turn to John Bayley, who wrote what I think is one of the best essays on Pym, we see something further, when he identifies the spiritual and trivial in her work.

The selfhood of her novels embodies a true sense of duality ... it is a rare possession ... her novels take entirely for granted the fact that we live in two worlds, one of extreme triviality typified by the work situation, social exchange, irritations, small comforts of eating and drinking ... On the other hand we live in a world of romance, aspiration, love-longing, loneliness, despair.

I am quoting this here because this could be the novel that shows this most. Similarly, John Brannigan argues that ‘Pym is not merely [...] of her time, but vibrantly, even passionately, engaged in representing and debating some of the most consequential issues in her time’. These include the place of women, the changing status of religion, attitudes to homosexuality, the dynamics and difficulties of human communication, marginalisation, immigration, the elderly, the role of the welfare state and the breakdown of traditional community. Many of these form part of *Less than Angels*, but Pym is not forcing us to consider them. Many of them, I have tried to show, simply form part of her tragi-comic vision and sense of place and movement. How do we link this with Forster? Well, only connect, he said. Pym could have said it herself.

The moral underlying this book, shown in the fireworks scene, is the importance of energy, risk and life over stasis. This is symbolised in Catherine, and also in Tom: Rhoda and Mabel, Bernard, Malcolm and Phyllis, are the opposite. Stasis and the home may be valuable and desirable sometimes, but they must exist alongside joyousness

and danger. The title may be an ironic contrast with the Augustan age from whence it comes; better surely though, Pym implies, to strive than to fall without the attempt.

I find myself thinking of Catherine remembering an Elizabeth Barratt Browning poem, at the end of the novel. “What was he doing, the great god Pan/ Down in the reeds by the river?” Mystery, mischief. Keith, a symbol of something different and appealing, is compared to Pan, so it’s no surprise that energetic Catherine embraces this sense of the strange, the bizarre, here.

It’s appropriate that there’s a symbol of mystery at the end. Kerry Sinanan has written on the ambiguity of Pym’s endings in terms of realism. Who was Tom writing to before he died? He dies abroad like M. Paul in *Villette*; there is something unfinished about it. The novel also ends with single women Catherine and Deirdre awaiting the fate of Mabel and Rhoda, perhaps. This is not the traditional marriage close of *A Room with a View*, but more the unity of *Howards End* or the spiritual expansion of *A Passage to India*. The book ends with Deirdre at a window – a room with a view – looking at Catherine in the garden, as if we have come full circle, in reverse. What has she learned? Just as *A Passage to India* is about going out alone to the Marabar Caves, and *A Room with a View* is about journeying in every sense, so Deirdre and Catherine have moved across spaces, striving, enduring bleakness, but growing. The twentieth-century fictional worlds of Forster and Pym have doubt and despair beneath the comedy, signalled through symbols. But the ultimate vision does rest in connecting. And surely by the end of *Less than Angels* Catherine and Deirdre can say – even if not permanently - that they connect.