



The Making of Barbara Pym

Oxford, the War Years,
and Post-war Austerity

Emily Stockard

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Emily Stockard
Department of English
Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, FL, USA

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Dedicated to John and Atticus

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

More than twenty years have passed since I read my first Barbara Pym novel, a secondhand copy of *A Glass of Blessings*, at the suggestion of Don Adams, then a new friend and colleague in the Department of English at Florida Atlantic University (FAU). Thence followed more years of reading and rereading, with increasing avidity, all of Pym's published works, her diaries and letters in *A Very Private Eye*, and Hazel Holt's biography, *A Lot to Ask*. When my husband suggested that, given my accumulated knowledge and unstinting interest, I should write a book on Pym, such a thing seemed far-fetched. Yet it immediately began taking shape in my head, and I found myself working out passages during long walks. As I very gradually began to write, hardly believing that I would ever finish, I joined the Barbara Pym Society and was invited to present my work to an audience with whom I felt an immediate kinship. There I found others who, like me, found in Pym an ongoing source of nourishment. Although they did not know it, members of the Society, with their welcome, gave me encouragement and support to keep writing. As I did so, the natural next step was archival work. Researchers among the Pym Society members provided examples for such an undertaking, and the FAU Department of English and the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters provided the funds for me to spend time in the archives, during what would be the most enjoyable aspect of this process. Like clockwork, the Bodleian librarians in the Weston Reading Rooms exchanged my green request slips for boxes full of manuscripts, diaries, journals, notebooks, and letters, and even insisted on tracking down an elusive manuscript finally found awaiting repair to its disintegrating spine. The final stretch to the completion of my

book took place during a sabbatical (courtesy of my Department and College) that coincided with the onset of the global pandemic. During the months of seclusion that followed, it was the scrupulous and tireless editorial work of my husband, John Leeds, and his insistence that I never flag or lose heart that pushed me over the finish line. This book would not exist otherwise. My final thanks go to Hazel Holt, for granting us all access to more of Pym's writing than we would otherwise have, and to Tom Holt for kindly granting me, in particular, access to and permission to publish findings from Pym's archives. My final acknowledgment goes to the example provided by Barbara Pym, whose perseverance in writing her novels was so often an act of faith.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Stockard is Associate Professor of English at Florida Atlantic University, where she teaches primarily on the Davie Campus. Subsequent to taking her BA, MA, and PhD from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, she has taught classes in British literature, from Chaucer to the eighteenth century. She has published on the poetry and drama of Shakespeare and other writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, her area of specialization. Most recently she has published essays on the mid-century British novelist and journal writer Denton Welch, and on Barbara Pym.

ABBREVIATIONS

In chapters devoted to analysis of a specific novel, I will supply only parenthetical page numbers when quoting the novel in question; I will not supply abbreviations of that novel's title. Otherwise, as necessary, I will cite page numbers and titles of Pym's works using abbreviations as indicated in the list below.

All cited page numbers are keyed to the texts of Pym's novels published by E. P. Dutton:

<i>CH</i>	<i>Crampton Hodnet</i>
<i>EW</i>	<i>Excellent Women</i>
<i>GF</i>	<i>Gervase and Flora</i>
<i>HFN</i>	<i>Home Front Novel</i>
<i>JP</i>	<i>Jane and Prudence</i>
<i>LTA</i>	<i>Less Than Angels</i>
<i>SDD</i>	<i>The Sweet Dove Died</i>
<i>STG</i>	<i>Some Tame Gazelle</i>
<i>SVS</i>	<i>So Very Secret</i>

All parenthetical citations of manuscripts from the Catalogue of the papers of Barbara Mary Crampton Pym, held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, will be indicated by the abbreviation "MS Pym," followed by the manuscript number (shelf mark) and relevant page numbers assigned by the Bodleian, including indications "r" for recto (right side of page), "v" for verso (reverse of page), or "fol." for folio.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1913: June 2 born in Oswestry, Shropshire
1925 student at Liverpool College, Huyton (age 12)
1929 reads *Crome Yellow* by Aldous Huxley
1929: August begins novel “Young Men in Fancy Dress” (finishes
April 1930)
1931 enters St. Hilda’s College, Oxford (age 18)
1932: January begins Oxford diaries
1932: April meets Rupert Gleadow
1933: January first sees Henry Harvey and begins “Lorenzo” saga
1933: May 10 first evening with Harvey, at the Trout in Oxford
1934: January begins visits to Harvey and Robert Liddell at their Banbury
Road flat
1934: April meets Friedbert Gluck in Cologne
1934: June/July graduates from Oxford with a second-class degree (age 21)
1934: July begins *Some Tame Gazelle*
1935: December Chatto & Windus rejects *Some Tame Gazelle*
1936: January Gollancz rejects *Some Tame Gazelle*
1936: May starts a new novel (probably “Adam and Cassandra,” edited
by Hazel Holt for posthumous publication as *Civil to
Strangers* in 1987)
1936: September Cape rejects *Some Tame Gazelle*
1937: December meets Julian Amery in Oxford; Harvey marries Elsie
Godenhjelm; begins *Gervase and Flora* (edited by Hazel
Holt for posthumous publication in 1987)
1938: March with Amery in Oxford; he leaves for Spain; begins writing
“The Lumber Room”
1938: May/June in Dresden and Prague with Gluck (last meeting)

- 1938: August in Katowice, Poland, as tutor for the Dr. Michal Alberg family
- 1938: September returns from Poland
- 1938: October in London with sister Hilary, writing a novel (probably “The Lumber Room”); meets Jonathan Cape (age 25)
- 1939: July 4 visits the Amerys’ house in Eaton Square and meets Mrs. Amery
- 1939: August moves back to Oswestry to assist with wartime preparations
- 1939: September 3 Chamberlain’s declaration of war
- 1939: October begins *Home Front Novel* (edited by Hazel Holt for posthumous publication in 1987); writes “Goodbye Balkan Capital” (published posthumously in 1987)
- 1940 does home front volunteer work with the ARP (Air Raid Precautions) and at Park Hall, a military training camp
- 1940: April prepares second draft of *Crampton Hodnet* (edited by Hazel Holt for posthumous publication in 1985); boxes up Amery “relics”
- 1940: June begins “Something to Remember”; Curtis Brown rejects revised *Some Tame Gazelle*
- 1941: September begins writing *So Very Secret*
- 1941: November finishes draft of *So Very Secret* (edited by Hazel Holt for posthumous publication in 1987)
- 1941: December moves to Clifton, Bristol, to work in the Censorship; lives with Honor Wyatt and Hilary at the Coppice
- 1942: October 28 begins relationship with Gordon Glover (they part in late December)
- 1943: March joins Women’s Royal Navy Service (WRNS) (age 29)
- 1943: July travels to Nore Training Depot, Rochester
- 1944: March stationed at Southampton
- 1944: September posted to Naples
- 1945: May 8 war ends in Europe
- 1945: May 31 travels home on compassionate leave
- 1945: September 10 mother dies
- 1945: November/December awaits demobilization in London; moves with Hilary to 108 Cambridge Street, Pimlico

- 1946: February takes editorial job with International African Institute (IAI) (age 32)
- 1949: July moves with Hilary to 47 Nassau Road, Barnes, a London suburb
- 1950: May *Some Tame Gazelle* published by Cape (age 36)
- 1950 Hazel Holt takes a position at IAI
- 1952 meets Robert Smith; *Excellent Women* published by Cape
- 1953 *Jane and Prudence* published by Cape
- 1955 *Less Than Angels* published by Cape
- 1958 *A Glass of Blessings* published by Cape
- 1960: January moves with Hilary to 40 Brooksville Avenue, Queen's Park, London
- 1961: February *No Fond Return of Love* published by Cape; correspondence with Philip Larkin begins (age 47)
- 1962: August meets antique dealer Richard Roberts (nicknamed "Skipper")
- 1963: March Cape (under new director, Tom Maschler) rejects *An Unsuitable Attachment* (edited by Hazel Holt for posthumous publication in 1982) (age 49)
- 1964: May first visit to Liddell in Athens
- 1967: August completes draft of *The Sweet Dove Died* (early version)
- 1970: January Macmillan rejects *The Sweet Dove Died*; has begun drafting *An Academic Question* (edited by Hazel Holt for posthumous publication in 1986)
- 1971: April undergoes breast cancer surgery (age 57)
- 1971: October "How pleasant to know Miss Pym," by Robert Smith, published in *Ariel*
- 1972 Hilary, retired, buys Barn Cottage in Finstock, Oxfordshire; Pym travels between Finstock and London, living part time at 32 Balcombe Street, London
- 1973: October at work on *Quartet in Autumn*
- 1974: April suffers stroke (age 60)
- 1974: July retires from IAI and moves to Finstock permanently (age 61)
- 1975: April 23 first meeting with Philip Larkin, in Oxford at the Randolph Hotel
- 1977: January 21 named most underrated British author of the century by both Larkin and Lord David Cecil in *Times Literary Supplement*
- 1977: September *Quartet in Autumn* published by Macmillan (age 64)
- 1977: October "Tea with Miss Pym" (with Cecil) on BBC 2 *Book Programme*; *Quartet in Autumn* on Booker Prize shortlist

- 1977: November attends Booker Prize night
1978: July *The Sweet Dove Died* published by Macmillan; guest on radio show *Desert Island Discs*
1979: January diagnosed with cancer recurrence
1979: February completes first draft of *A Few Green Leaves* (published posthumously in 1980)
1980: January 11 dies in hospice at Michael Sobell House, Oxford (age 66)



Introduction

“To make my (literary) soup I don’t need cream and eggs and rare shell fish, but just this old cod’s head, the discarded outer leaves of a cabbage, water and seasoning.”¹ So Barbara Pym described her creative method in a notebook entry of February 1962, after having published six novels during the years 1950–1961. The substance of Pym’s “literary soup” had been a long time in the making. As her culinary-inspired list of the ingredients that make up her “soup” suggests, Pym’s outlook as a writer was shaped by and reflective of change, the changes that Britain underwent during wartime and that were keenly felt during the period of post-war austerity. A close look at her earliest novels, both published and unpublished, together with pertinent biographical material from those years, reveals that from the start Pym took change as her fundamental concern.²

¹ MS Pym 56, 3r–3v. Citations that appear in this form refer to the manuscript number (shelf mark) assigned by the Bodleian Library, followed by the assigned page number(s). The “r” designation attached to a page number is an abbreviation for “recto,” the right side of a page, and “v” refers to “verso,” the reverse side of a page. For archived material consisting of single sheets of paper (letters, for example), the abbreviation “fol.” (“folio”) will be used, followed by page numbers.

² Important previous studies of Pym have given attention to her portrayal of change but in limited ways. Katherine Ackley devotes one chapter of a book-length study to Pym’s various portrayals of her characters’ views of change, asserting that “Pym became increasingly interested in the subject over the several decades she was writing” (Ackley 1989: 144). In a book that also looks at Virginia Woolf and Christine Brooke-Rose, Judy Little, taking a Bakhtinian

The roots of this essential interest, and the complex perspectives that she brought to bear on it, can be traced back to her pre-war writing; subsequently, she honed a more nuanced view in her wartime writing. My purpose here is to show that the perspective Pym develops is far from the one often assumed in studies of her work, a view of her set out first and most extremely by long-time friend, novelist, and critic Robert Liddell, who bluntly pronounced in a letter to Pym, “Like yourself I detest change” (Holt 1990: 198).³ Pym certainly had a traditionalist bent. As shown very clearly in her journals and diaries of these early years, she commemorated her past in a ritualized fashion. But this tendency to look back at the past with nostalgic fondness is balanced by both an enjoyment of the present, clearly evident in her personal writing and her novels, and a forward-looking anticipation, a stance emphasized in her novels’ conclusions. Pym achieved the coexistence of these seemingly contrasting but very characteristic impulses by adherence to what I will call the principle of continuity. The principle of continuity entails both treasuring the past and looking ahead to future possibilities in a way that establishes a link between past,

approach, focuses on the change (renewal) that is available to the “experimental self” that Pym constructs for certain of her characters by the intermingling of three discourses: that of the ordinary (which includes the domestic and the trivial), of Christianity (particularly “Anglo-Catholicism” and its sacramental view of the ordinary), and of English literature (Little 1996: 76–121).

³In Pym’s “canon,” as Liddell refers to the novels published prior to her rejection in 1963, he identifies “a faint, ungrudging nostalgia for ‘better days’ in the past.” His reflection that “alas, the 1950s which [her novels] depict can now be felt in some ways as ‘better days’” exemplifies his view that the world is always “worsening,” a view that he assumes Pym to have shared (Liddell 1989: 36–37). Similarly, according to Charles Burkhart, Pym’s “historical outlook was that worse times still succeed the former. ... The dreariness, the calamity of history was nonetheless the material for comedy” (Burkhart 1987: 23). And again, in Ackley, “Time and again, Pym contrasts the way things are with the way they used to be. More often the old times are viewed as having been better—or at least simpler—than the way things are today” (Ackley 1989: 157). Even more emphatically, Michael Cotsell finds in Pym’s wartime fiction “an attachment to an ideal past social order, and a detachment from its present representatives” and argues that she found “images of [her class’s] allegiance in relics of the Victorian age” (Cotsell 1989: 37, 44). By contrast to my argument for her emphasis on continuity, Cotsell sees Pym as “in her direct way, the chronicler of the end of a phase of her civilization, of the home view of the end of Empire” (Cotsell 1989: 44). But his discussions of the novels do not pursue this argument in any detail. While giving a more balanced analysis, Orna Raz, in a final book chapter, nevertheless identifies Pym’s negative view of cultural change with that voiced by some of her primary characters, one of whom Raz quotes in the chapter’s title: “‘Change is a Bad Thing’: On Pym’s Social Commentary” (Raz 2007: 187–193).

present, and future. As such, continuity accommodates and even requires change rather than resisting it. Without change, continuity is mere stasis, and without continuity, change yields only disorder, two negative possibilities that Pym will explore in her fiction.

Moreover, Pym sought to establish the importance of change, understood as occurring within the context of continuity, in multiple realms—both in her personal life and in her fictional world, and, in her fiction, at the levels of both character and culture. As is clear from her diaries, Pym loved and nurtured her own memories; what is equally clear but not equally recognized is that, early on, she harbored no desire to return to the past or to live in a bygone world. She wrote, for example, in her wartime journal, “My childhood, my innocent childhood, it is all gone ... I do not want it back” (MS Pym 146, 26r).⁴ In her fiction, Pym applied more generally this view that one cannot return to an earlier, presumably preferable time, extending this principle to include a cultural perspective. As a nation, England, especially post-war England, should not look back or wish to return to an idealized time in its history. Yet understanding how strong the desire to do so could be, Pym provides multiple perspectives on change; as early as her wartime fiction, she identified ways by which elements from the past have, in sometimes surprising ways, an ongoing presence. The conclusions to her books bear out this pattern, consistently pointing to future possibilities rather than to finalities. These suggested future possibilities emphasize the open-ended rather than backward-looking quality of her characters’ lives while at the same time maintaining continuity of character and narrative arc.⁵ Later, toward the end of her life and career, such a stance toward the necessity of change, which had never been a simply sanguine one, was increasingly hard-fought, as her journals give evidence. Nevertheless, she persisted in it, portraying fictionally, in quite harsh terms, the consequences for one who refuses to accept a continuous, which is to say continuously changing, life.

Pym’s portrayal of change, understood according to the principle of continuity, is closely related to her early established and long-standing but

⁴Pym is alluding to lines from Anton Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*.

⁵Pym’s understanding of change within the context of continuity distinguishes her literary response from the more truly conservative, even reactionary responses to the altered conditions of post-war England that David Pryce-Jones calls the “three points of a defensive post-war bastion.” They are the “outrage” of novelist Angela Thirkell, the “resigned melancholy” of dramatist Christopher Fry, and the defiant “need to carry on at all costs” stance of T. S. Eliot (Pryce-Jones 1963: 225–226).

underappreciated interest in social roles, a method by which she would often define her characters. The title of her first (unpublished) novel, “Young Men in Fancy Dress,” gives a heavy hint that by 16 years of age Pym was intrigued by the idea of role-playing. Young men who want to become artists begin by literally dressing the part. In her mature works, the emphasis on one’s social role, the “excellent woman,” for example, is portrayed as being unsatisfying and restrictive when its fulfillment is misunderstood as requiring stasis. But in Pym’s fiction, characters’ social roles also provide the means for accommodating change in a continuous fashion. Because the changes that her primary characters undergo are carried out within the context of their social roles, such change is not radical; it broadens rather than breaks the parameters of a particular role, thus maintaining a connection to an earlier form. To add emphasis to this principle of continuity as it is carried out in a character’s narrative arc, Pym peoples her fiction with negative examples—those who would impede the continuous form of change in another’s life or who themselves embody stasis rather than the kind of alteration that might occur within the context of a continuous life. The presence of these examples of static or unchanging lives sharpens the implicit argument that continuity does not consist in remaining the same; change, not stasis, is the necessary component of continuity, linking what one was to what one could be.

My study, with its focus on the idea of continuity, established early on as the guiding principle in Pym’s conduct of her own life and in the development of her writing, makes no overt attempt to relate her to any particular literary school. The difficulty of doing so is exemplified, perhaps unintentionally, by Michael Cotsell, who locates in Pym’s juvenile effort, “Young Men in Fancy Dress,” the beginning of her vexed relationship with modernism. He judges that “Pym can usefully be described as a post-modernist,” but goes on to maintain that “By choosing to exclude modernism, she confines her fictional world to English social comedy.” Nevertheless, in Pym’s first published novel, *Some Tame Gazelle*, Cotsell finds “a humorous and perceptive reworking of [modernism’s] assumptions and practices” along with elements that lead him to hedge his bets: “it might be said that Pym constitutes a post-modernist art, but what it accepts from modernism must also be recognised” (Cotsell 1989: 13, 19, 24). As these multiple classifications of Pym’s fiction by a single critic suggest might be the case, many book-length studies situate her work in a variety of literary contexts. When taken together, this variety indicates that her relation to the literary tradition exemplifies the very principle of

continuity that she was concerned to establish in her writing. Pym wrote novels in which she loosely assimilated the framework of the comic genre to her own purposes, thus maintaining, exactly *because* of her singularity, the literary continuity implied by her frequently noted relationship to Jane Austen.⁶ The slightly satiric ingredient in all her works also connects them to the novel of manners—in her case the manners of the very clearly identifiable “Pym world” that she is credited with creating.⁷ This fictional world, which she established very early, is peopled by recurring types: unmarried women (“spinsters”), selfless “excellent women” devoted to church work and to helping others, clergymen (sometimes celibate), and academics in either anthropological or literary fields. The counterpart to the “excellent woman,” the “Pym man,” is obviously self-centered, often reticent, but beloved even so by the women in his life.

Clearly Pym places these figures within a recognizable genre, and just as clearly she alters that genre in significant ways that are distinctive to her fiction—the very definition of continuity with respect to a literary tradition.⁸ So important is this distinctive experience of reading Pym’s books that it has been set forth as *the* important question for Pym scholars to address, thus tending to render moot the question of her literary categorization.⁹ It is not surprising that those undertaking an analysis of an

⁶For discussions of what has become a critical truism regarding Pym’s relation to Austen, see, for example, Jane Nardin (scattered references in Nardin 1985), Liddell (1989: 27–37), and Cotsell (1989: 142–145). Pym did look to Austen as a guide. “Read some of Jane Austen’s last chapters and find out how she manages all the loose ends” she tells herself (Holt and Pym 1984: 188). And, much later, she touches the dust on Austen’s desk for inspiration (“Oh that some of her genius might rub off on me!”) (Holt and Pym 1984: 250). For Pym’s view of Austen’s influence on her, see “Finding a Voice” (Pym 1988: 377–385).

⁷For a characterization of the “Pym world,” see Philip Larkin’s appreciation of her novels subsequent to the 1977 “rediscovery” (Larkin 1984: 240–244). See also Liddell’s discussion of “Pymdom” (Liddell 1989: 29), and that of Penelope Lively (1987: 45–49). In an essay published in the same volume as Lively’s, John Bayley invokes this idea of a Pym world, asking in his title, “Where, Exactly, is the Pym World?” (Bayley 1987: 50–57). Janet Rossen’s book-length study takes as its title *The World of Barbara Pym* (Rossen 1987).

⁸For books that place Pym’s novels in relation to a genre, see Mason Cooley (1990), Annette Weld (1992), Ellen M. Tsagaris (1998), and Barbara Kowalik (2002).

⁹John Bayley demands this approach to Pym’s novels in “Where, Exactly, is the Pym World?” (Bayley 1987). Deborah Donato has risen to Bayley’s challenge in an illuminating study of Pym’s prose, where, drawing from four novels, she tracks the impression that Pym’s writing makes on the reader. In doing so, Donato identifies what she calls “the Pym real”—a relaxed and nonjudgmental understanding that Pym’s prose invites and allows the reader to experience. Further, Donato demonstrates by example how the experience of reading Pym’s

author's work would focus on her difference from others, and if scholarly efforts are any indication, Pym seems to have been particularly capable of writing novels that elude attempts to label them. Some, even so, have sought to fix her place within the novelistic tradition. But, much like the attempts made by characters in Pym's novels to fix the identities of others, efforts that seek to contain or to fix Pym's literary identity have been unsatisfactory. She has been seen, variously, as assuming the mantle of Jane Austen, as a modernist, and as a post-modernist.¹⁰ And she has been described as exemplifying all of these at once, as employing a fictional method that overlaps the various narrative strategies associated with classic realism, with modernism, and with post-modernism (Donato 2005: 56). To put the issue in terms relevant to the content of Pym's writing, this amalgam, acknowledged in the totality of Pym scholarship, exemplifies continuity in artistic method. That is, she has been recognized generally as a novelist who reaches back to older forms of narrative and weaves them inextricably together with strands of newer forms—a formulation no less true for its being obvious.

Rather than placing Pym in a literary school or genre, as has often been done, I offer instead a thematic analysis of her early novels that is both supplemented and complemented by frequent references to the content of her more personal writings. The study that most closely shares my focus on Pym's early years, *Barbara Pym: A Critical Biography*, as psychoanalytic rather than thematic, takes a very different approach. Anne Wyatt-Brown (1992) gives an analysis, bordering on the Freudian, of Pym's early writing as it reveals fundamental psychic patterns grounded in the circumstances of Pym's childhood. On the assumption that the act of writing is a form of therapy, she focuses on the particular ways that Pym's creative work, by filling a need in her psychic life, reveals suppressed elements of that life.¹¹ Quite distinct from mine, such psychologically oriented

novels differs fundamentally from reading novels by some of her female contemporaries (Donato 2005).

¹⁰Margaret Diane Stetz, for example, finds similarities between Virginia Woolf and Pym that show Pym's alignment with the interests of modernists, rather than with a novelist like Austen (Stetz 1985). Little's reading of Pym's novels, as exhibiting the dialogic understanding of human identity expounded by Mikhail Bakhtin, positions her novels as post-modern in character (Little 1989).

¹¹Subsequent notes will provide more details of Wyatt-Brown's specific analyses. In a less strictly psychoanalytical study, but one also focused on the act of writing as an avenue for expressing one's personal life, Orphia Jane Allen argues that Pym "used the novels, at least

biographical studies seek to provide an analysis of Barbara Pym the person, to look at Pym's fiction for evidence of that person, and so consequently place her fictional works in a subordinate position to their author, who provides a test case for theories concerning the relation between an author and her writing.¹² So although I do look at Pym's personal writing and details of her life from her early years, I am looking, by contrast to these efforts at biography, to define a perspective on change—the importance of finding continuity—that forms the root of Pym's thought, a perspective that her novels encourage and to which she herself aspired. Above all literary and thematic, my study traces Pym's early artistic development, not precisely in the sense of artistic improvement, but as she came to portray different modes of continuity from novel to novel. Only by looking at each novel separately can one properly appreciate how, while making use of common fictional elements, Pym refined her notion of continuity in individual novels and considered the principle in greater complexity. Broadly speaking, I will trace how she first considered change at the individual level (in *Crampton Hodnet* and *Some Tame Gazelle*), then moved to recording, in her wartime pieces (*Home Front Novel* and *So Very Secret*), how historical changes affected the individual in a directly causal manner, and next devised characters (in *Excellent Women* and *Jane and Prudence*) whose individual changes can be seen as analogous to or representative of larger cultural movements.

To establish the ubiquity of the principle of continuity for Pym, as it appears in all her work, I have consulted the written record, available either in published form or, if unpublished, in the Pym archives held at the Bodleian Library. This record consists primarily of Pym's own writing—her journals, diaries, datebooks, notebooks, letters to friends, working draft material, unpublished work, and published work. When it pertains to my focus, I also include writing by those who knew Pym: personal letters to her and retrospectives written by close friends and acquaintances. Aside from this archived material and Pym's published fiction, two indispensable

on an unconscious level and perhaps even consciously, to explore and shape the fundamental issues that governed her life." Primary concerns identified are Pym's decisions to remain unmarried and to become a writer, and her focus on the importance of ritual and of the commonplace in everyday life. Because they are the vehicles by which she "wrote her life," "Pym's novels reflect her awareness that the self is in many ways a fiction" (Allen 1994: 64).

¹² *A Lot to Ask. The Life of Barbara Pym*, the official biography written by Hazel Holt (1990), Pym's long-time friend, colleague, and her first literary executor, is unquestionably best positioned to offer that perspective.

and irreplaceable resources for my endeavor have been *Barbara Pym. A Very Private Eye. An Autobiography in Diaries and Letters*, edited by Hazel Holt, and the biography, *A Lot to Ask*, written by Holt. To supplement what Holt has thus made available in published form, I have consulted the abundance of archived material in the Bodleian that lies outside the scope of either of her two volumes, but that is directly relevant to the importance of continuity in Pym's life and fiction.¹³ As a result, my study provides the reader access to writing from Pym's archives, much of which has not been published elsewhere—material that greatly augments what is currently available in the biographical and “autobiographical” works given us by Holt.¹⁴ In the course of indicating the importance of this archived writing, my book also contributes a new analytical framework for understanding the previously published autobiographical material, which, heretofore presented in a raw and unsynthesized form, then gains in significance. Thus my contribution functions as a companion piece to these foundational works by supplying a context within which the many journal entries and letters that make up *A Very Private Eye* can be seen to contribute to the pattern of Pym's characteristic way of thinking about and responding to change. For example, the importance she placed on the natural world very early on, especially its seasons and cycles, is a clear instance of change in continuity for which Pym had a sustained and deepening appreciation. Additionally, of Pym's manuscript fiction that I have consulted, the drafts of those pieces written during the war years are of particular importance. The *Home Front Novel* and *So Very Secret* have been posthumously published by Holt in a form both curtailed and unified, an effort that required substantial revision to the unwieldy manuscripts. But by providing unpublished details from these drafts, I give new evidence of Pym's earliest response in fiction to the changing political scene. And so we can see more clearly how Pym went about developing her stock of characteristic

¹³For *A Very Private Eye*, Holt estimates that she “only used just over half the material” made up of Pym's personal writing that is available in the Bodleian (Holt and Pym 1984: xiv). Understandably, Holt sought to “avoid repetition,” but it is the very repetition that, for my purposes, indicates those activities and concerns that held the highest degree of importance for Pym. For the reader's convenience and also my own, I have made an effort to cite *A Very Private Eye* or *A Lot to Ask* (rather than the manuscript source) when the quotation in question, of Pym's personal writing, is contained in either of those volumes. Another valuable published source of archival material, which I also cite, is Yvonne Cocking (2013).

¹⁴Paula Byrne's biography, *The Adventures of Miss Barbara Pym* (William Collins, 2021), appeared too late for me to incorporate in my study.

ingredients—the cods' heads and cabbage leaves that make up her literary soup. The making, that is, of Barbara Pym.

To chart the making of Pym as an author, Chapter 2 sets up the elements of continuity in Pym's early life, identifying the themes and patterns that she would persistently explore and follow, as these are manifest in her youth, in her years as a student at Oxford, and in those closely following. I look at her earliest creative forays and set out her initial interest in social roles. As has commonly been noted, Pym's entanglements with men she met at Oxford, particularly Henry Harvey and Julian Amery, had a marked effect on her fictional portrayal of male characters. But her account of these relationships, in which she examines her reactions to her own emotional change during these youthful years, reveals a fear of discontinuity and the steps she took to avoid leading a fragmented emotional life. Pym's pre-war interest in change, then, was personal, focused on the circumstances of her life, particularly her relations with men, and on the roles that she established for herself, some of them unsatisfying and restrictive. Writing, of course, was already a fundamental element of her life, and she was also a prodigious reader of novels and poetry, keeping a commonplace book in which the entries, excerpts from her reading, establish a model for the kind she later recorded in journals and notebooks. These entries not only demonstrate her reliance on literature as an avenue for understanding the difficulties she faced in her life but also make clear that she situated her own experiences in an ongoing context—that of the English literary tradition. I give a close account, absent from previous studies, of the sorts of passages that she copied into her commonplace book during the Oxford years, a collection that reveals clear patterns of interest, particularly perspectives on love and change. Pym's extensive reading would be reflected in her novels, which contain direct quotations and allusions to such a degree that a separate study would be required to examine this feature fully.¹⁵

Chapter 3 focuses on Pym's response in her life and in her fiction to the extreme alterations brought about by wartime. During this period, her fiction became more pointedly political, dovetailing changes in characters'

¹⁵ Lotus Snow identifies and discusses how literary allusions and quotations operate in the context of various individual novels (Snow 1987). For an in-depth discussion of Pym's use of allusion and quotation in one novel, see Anne Pilgrim (2003). Her essay appears in a collection (Lenckos and Miller 2003) that contains a subsection of essays focused on the important place Pym accords in her novels to the act of reading.

lives with those taking place on the national level; at the same time, however, it traces the surprising persistence of established patterns. Personal written documents of these years exhibit the importance that Pym placed on continuity in the way that she lived, despite altered circumstances that necessitated change. The striking juxtaposition of life's ordinary activities with quite extraordinary historical events led her to take a very nuanced view of change, whereby continuity could flourish even in the midst of upheaval. This complex perspective is notable in manuscript versions of the *Home Front Novel* and *So Very Secret*. Pym's commonplace book entries for the war years display her entertaining a variety of positions, particularly on the topics of change and memory. Another affair of the heart brought Pym to respond, yet again, to painful shifts in her emotional life and prompted her to join, during the final years of the war, the Women's Royal Navy Service (WRNS). While in military life Pym struggled to maintain what she saw as activities essential to her identity, while also expanding her sense of capability in this new institutional role; thus she attained the kind of broadened view of self and social role that she would later trace in her characters. Pym's life as a writer was also altered by her wartime service; she continued to write in journals and diaries but halted her creative output.

Pym returned to writing fiction after the war ended, publishing works that, in their quiet way, were concerned with ongoing social issues and cultural changes, which she addresses at the level of character.¹⁶ Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7, each devoted to a different novel, look carefully at how the principle of continuity underlies each novel's logical progression, albeit in very different ways. The sequence of chapters charts a progress by which Pym increasingly develops characters that embody or represent responses to cultural change. Chapter 4 drops back chronologically, focusing on the posthumously published *Crampton Hodnet* (1985), a book that was written (at least partly) in wartime but given a pre-war setting. Pym was writing and revising *Crampton Hodnet* for submission while she was simultaneously planning and writing wartime pieces, an exercise in itself of maintaining close contact with both past and present. In constructing this very early novel, which sets out her most truly conservative version of continuity, Pym fastens on cyclical models, primarily the annual cycle of the academic world, but also the natural, seasonal cycle. In both, change

¹⁶In individual book chapters, Orna Raz focuses on specific aspects of the 1950s culture that Pym depicts, with an aim "to restore the meanings that Pym's target audience possessed but which now, half a century later, may have become obscure" (Raz 2007: 5).

coexists with stasis, in a continuously renewing and repeating manner. Interwoven plots offer characters the opportunity to relinquish their usual positions in the social fabric, but happiness, they find, consists in their return to accustomed places, with increased appreciation of undervalued pleasures. The book asserts the importance of maintaining one's essential self, while at the same time overturning the mistaken idea that one can do this by reliving the past. On the brink of an adulterous affair, Oxford student Barbara Bird realizes that she cannot act in a way counter to her view of her fundamental identity, and Francis Cleveland, seeing that he was foolish to try to recapture his vanished youth, recognizes the comforts of his married life. Very substantially revised from its early pre-war version, *Some Tame Gazelle* (1950), the subject of Chapter 5, similarly embraces the joys of the status quo. In ways that suggest continuity from *Crampton Hodnet*, its comforts are exemplified by the regular rhythms and rituals of village life, cycles again seasonal but also ecclesiastical and celebratory. Sisters Harriet and Belinda Bede embody contrasting versions of contentment. Harriet finds contentment in caring for the succession of young curates who come to and leave the village in a cyclical manner; Belinda is content to maintain her long-standing but unrequited love for the village Archdeacon, a love that has undergone a change analogous to the changing seasons of the year. Both women reject the marriage proposals of men who seek, as it were, to acquire them, and both express their love and conduct their lives in generous rather than acquisitive terms. Thus, although the novel has a pre-war setting, Pym promulgates a set of values, embodied in the Bede sisters, that had particular importance for the austere period of post-war England.

In Pym's signature novel *Excellent Women* (1952), the subject of Chapter 6, her interests in the personal and the historical, developed separately in her earlier work, clearly converge. Pym sets the novel in the immediate aftermath of the war and moves her focus from ever-repeating cycles to the continuity of a person's life as it develops over time. In the course of the narrative, Mildred Lathbury finds a way to broaden the track of her life while maintaining her role as a self-sacrificing "excellent woman." The scaled-back expectations, both material and emotional, that Mildred grapples with have clear cultural resonances for the post-war moment. At the same time that she expands her view of herself, Pym's excellent woman finds value, even pleasure, in shouldering life's burdens rather than pining for unobtainable luxuries associated with pre-war life. The qualities of pre- and post-war life are exemplified in the romantic plot,