Indexing (and) Pym

Hazel Bell

For my own pleasure and interest, I have compiled an index to Barbara Pym's fiction, covering all her published novels and stories. It is not comprehensive, either as to references or categories. I have included three classes of entries:

1) Characters, usually indicating only which novel they appear in, and giving page number/s for first appearance/s. This enables users to place characters in the appropriate novels, and to see which of them make fleeting appearance in others besides, so that, for instance, we can confirm in *Less than Angels* that Mildred did indeed marry Everard after the close of *Excellent Women*, and follow the fortunes of Esther Clovis through several books.

2) **Quotations** or books and authors mentioned (these are all indexed under the names of the authors). This brings fascinating insights as to which were Pym's most frequently quoted or cited authors. They prove to be, at the top of the charts, jointly Wordsworth and Milton, each with thirteen references (four of them to *Paradise Lost*). Anthony à Wood comes next with twelve references; Matthew Arnold has eleven, three of them to *Dover Beach*; Edward Young has eight, six to *Night Thoughts*; Jane Austen eight, two to *Emma*. Tennyson has seven, four of them to *In Memoriam*; John Donne, six; George Herbert, Shelley, Charlotte M. Yonge and Charlotte Brontë each have five (four to *Jane Eyre*); Shakespeare, Byron, John Cleveland, Andrew Marvell, Thomas Hardy and Christina Rossetti, each four; the Earl of Rochester, Robert Browning, Henry James and Anthony Trollope each get three mentions; Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*, two. (Of course, there may be other mentions too that I missed.)

3) **Topics** such as cafés, libraries, meals, places. These prove most illuminating.

An index does much more than locate specific items in the text: another effect is to bring together all references to the same topic. One byproduct of this is to show, from the length of the collated entries, which themes and topics the author has the most to say about. The largest topic entries in my Pym index are those for: Africa, anthropology, cafés, Christmas, churches, *Church Times*, clothes, cooking, flowers, food, hymns, languages, libraries, lunches, Oxford, restaurants, Roman Catholics, tea and wine. No surprises there.

For such long entries in an index that cover copiously treated topics, subheadings have to be devised to differentiate references. These can prove most enlightening to read through, clearly showing the author's attitudes and interests. Here are some examples from the Pym index (usually giving the first page of a reference only).

food *FGL* 159
  caterpillar in *STG* 49, 50
  for cats *UA* 19-20
  church *LTA* 166-7
  clergy house *FGL* 87; *LTA* 166-7
  conference *NFR* 12, 21
  Friday *FGL* 14; *GoB* 21, 38; *NFR* 196; *SDD* 67
  gourmet *FGL* 28-30
  Greek *FGL* 86-7, 311-2
  inspection *FGL* 15
  for invalid *UA* 106
  Italian *UA*
  junk *FGL* 185
  navy, Naples *GB* 87
  processed *FGL* 185
  nutrition *QA* 54
  rationing *SVS* 275-6
  tinned *QA* 54, 129, 135, 174-5
  wartime *HF* 259
  see also breakfast; cafés; cooking; dinner; lunches; restaurants; suppers; *and individual entries*

tea (drink) *UA* 47
  abroad *EW* 32
  -bags *FGL* 185; *QA* 8, 129
  in cafeteria *LTA* 107; *SDD* 57
  China or Indian *JP* 199
  in church hall *NFR* 164
  at church occasions *EW* 211; *GB* 59-60; *UA* 129
  Earl Grey *GB* 111
  early morning *JP* 188-9; *NFR* 20, 26
  elaborate apparatus *LTA* 204
  in hospital *QA* 14-15
  Indian *GB* 60, 250
  in Italy *UA* 144, 146-8
  Lapsang Souchong: *GB* 57, 111; *JP* 229, 230
  making *LTA* 10-11
  in office: *EW* 70; *QA* 8

  pouring *JP* 126, 193-4; *LTA* 85-6, 204
  in thermos flask *GBC* 355
  weak *EW* 147

tea (meal) *UA* 221-3
  in antique shop *GB* 240-7
  in café *UA* 133-5
  children's *AQ* 63
  in garden: *JP* 192-7; *LTA* 87, 89; *STM*
  at jumble sale *EW* 60, 62
  strong *SDD* 57
  on train *SDD* 157-8
  for unexpected visitor *LTA* 129-30
  at vicarage *JP* 67-72

So my index shows much about Pym's literary work besides where items in the text are to be found. Moreover, I greatly enjoyed the work of compiling it. This will surprise some who attended the 1998 Pym Society conference where the motion was debated 'that *Excellent Women* has a tragic ending': some members thought Mildred demeaned by the prospect of becoming a married woman indexer; that her time and energy had been more worthily directed to the organizing of jumble sales.

Pym was herself an indexer, and loved the work, as her friend and colleague Hazel Holt points out in her article reproduced above. In 1978 the Society of Indexers asked Barbara Pym to speak at their conference. She declined, but wrote about the copy of *The Indexer* that she was sent, 'It does make one realize the enormous expertise needed to make an index, and makes me wonder how I ever had the temerity to do one (several) myself'.

No, my heart cannot bleed for Mildred Lathbury, faced at the end of *Excellent Women* with the prospect deemed so daunting at the conference, of marrying the man she loves and becoming an indexer. I don't think that Pym was being sarcastic in allowing Ianthe Broome in *An Unsuitable Attachment* to claim, 'A card index may be a noble thing'.