

women's writing — which embodied their voice — and their public actions were gathering critical power. Leder and Abbott explore the poets' lives and work to establish them as participants, through their work, in the events and great issues of their day. Dickinson, for example, was affected by the American Civil War, and Rossetti was active in social reform work during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

The poets' status as single women, in an age when "unmarried women of all classes were society's largest group of outsiders," is presented by the authors as among the most important keys to the poets' sense of exclusion and their resulting roles as clear-sighted observers of the society which had little room for them.

Rossetti's poetry was informed by the English women reformers and radicals who were focusing on marriage reform and women's exclusion from education,

professional and economic opportunity. Dickinson commented critically on the American Civil War, religion and marriage.

It has taken nearly one hundred years for Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti to be assessed in terms of their work and their experiences, rather than the degree of their conformity to or divergence from traditionally acceptable feminine behaviour.

While their writing style could be smoother, Leder and Abbott have assembled a convincing case, utilizing biographical data, critical evaluation of the language and writing of Dickinson and Rossetti, and a survey of existing literary criticism and feminist theory of language. Extensive notes, indexes and a selected bibliography all add to the usefulness of the study.

People in the literacy field may be interested in approaching this book as a

model for analyzing women's writing within a societal and historical context. Much of the strength of current literacy practice comes from its respect for and encouragement of the learner, her life and her experience. It is interesting to see this acceptance and respect applied to women in another context, and the historical perspective is a constructive addition to the learner-centered approach.

The examination of the lives of these women, who were educated and middle class (both stunning examples of literate power), may seem at first to be of limited relevance to the literacy movement. It is, however, a useful reminder of the long struggle women have waged to find their own authentic voices and to have them heard. The move toward literacy is an important part of women's struggle to free themselves from involuntary exclusion and to enable all our voices to be heard.

PARADISE ON HOLD

Laura Bulger. Toronto: Bramble House, 1987.

Marie-France Silver

This arresting collection of short stories by Toronto author Laura Bulger created a considerable sensation within the Canadian Portuguese community when it first appeared in its original language. Now

that it has been translated, it should attract a good deal of attention from English Canada.

These are tales of loneliness, inadaptation, and alienation. Bulger's characters are misfits — people caught between conflicting views of life, torn between the illusory world of their imagination and the drab reality of daily life, disenchanted by the present while tormented by nostalgic memories of their long-gone youth. Many of them have immigrated to Canada from Portugal or Italy. Torn between the

old world and the new, they are as estranged — psychologically and spiritually — from the former as from the latter. They remain outsiders, forever pulled in opposing directions. "What a helluva life!" exclaims the narrator of "Vaivém," the last story in the collection. "Always coming and going, from here to there, there to here, um vaivém ..."

In a classically sober style, Laura Bulger succeeds in dramatizing the peculiar ambivalence of all those who have left one country to settle in another.

CIVIL TO STRANGERS AND OTHER WRITINGS

Barbara Pym. Edited by Hazel Holt. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1988.

Anne Pilgrim

Not long before her death in 1980, Barbara Pym gave some thought to the proper disposition of her remains — her literary remains, that is, which were then occupying a large cardboard box in her bedroom. Eventually she gave all of her manuscripts, notebooks and papers to the Bodleian Library in Oxford, a most suitable (her favorite adjective) choice given

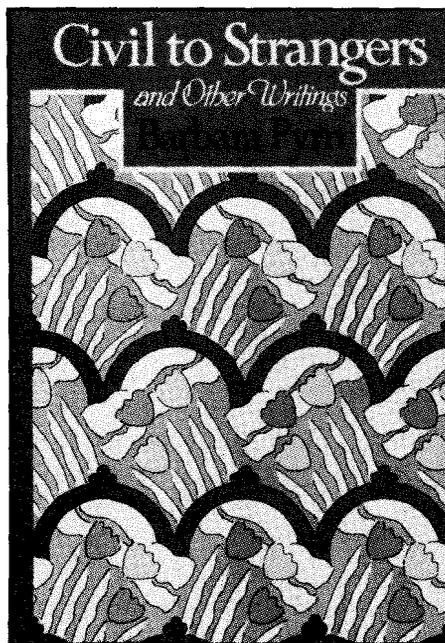
the importance of Oxford in her life and her fiction. It is from that treasure trove of manuscripts that the present collection of some of her earliest work is drawn.

The appearance of *Civil to Strangers* brings to thirteen the total number of Pym novels, in a thirty-eight-year publishing history which falls into three sharply defined phases. First came the six gently satirical comedies, peopled with "excellent women" much put upon by vicars or anthropologists (or both). This sort of novel went out of style in the early 1960s, leaving Pym in an enforced silence that ended only in 1977 when both Lord David Cecil and Philip Larkin singled her out in a *TLS* survey as an "under-rated" author; at the end of the decade she was able to place three more novels with Macmillan

in rapid succession, including the much-praised *Quartet in Autumn*. Since her death her sister Hilary, her literary executor Hazel Holt and other friends such as Larkin have been active in editing the manuscript material, a project which has yielded the invaluable 1984 autobiography, *A Very Private Eye*, and four posthumous novels: *An Unsuitable Attachment*, *Crampton Hodnet*, *An Academic Question*, and now *Civil to Strangers*. To make up what she describes as "a last sheaf" of Pym's unpublished writings, Hazel Holt has added to the full text of *Civil to Strangers* sizeable extracts from three other novels, four short stories, and the script of a talk Pym gave on BBC Radio in 1978 after her rediscovery by the press and public.

When Barbara Pym, barely twenty-one, came from Oxford in the summer of 1934, she had received a thorough grounding in English literature, but also in the experience of unrequited love, for a fellow undergraduate, an egotistical young man whom she romantically nicknamed Lorenzo. In unromantic reality he was Henry Harvey — fickle, petulant and spoiled. Separated from this unworthy object of her affections, Pym turned to fiction-writing for solace, producing her hilarious *roman à clef*, *Some Tame Gazelle*, in which she imagined herself, her sister and their friends all thirty years in the future: Henry became the blissfully complacent Archdeacon Henry Hoccleve tyrannizing over a wife named Agatha, and patiently adored by his parishioner Barbara/Belinda who is now glad they never married. While this novel made the rounds of publishers (ultimately it became her first published novel, but not until 1950), Pym launched into *Civil to Strangers*, a fresh re-imagining of her future, this time in the role of Henry's wife. Cassandra Marsh-Gibbon at twenty-eight has been married for five years to a Miltonically domineering mate named Adam, a writer who has laid aside his novel and is "contemplating an epic poem." The marriage which seems threatened by his cool selfishness, separate vacations (Adam gives himself a week in the Bodleian for his) and the absence of children, is in the course of the novel restored by Adam's reluctant discovery that he has a rival, by a "second honeymoon" in Budapest, and the news of a "little Adam" to come. Wish-fulfillment indeed!

Though this novel comes from Pym's apprenticeship in fiction and may be partly directed, as the editor admits, to Pym enthusiasts and specialists who have read everything else available, it includes



ample evidence of the particular pleasures intrinsic to her work and may well serve to create new admirers. As in the later novels, she provides a cast of mildly dotty characters in an enclosed setting — this time the village of Up Callow — and a sharply observant consciousness in Cassandra that misses no foible in herself or in others. Literary allusions, more or less obscure, abound (the title is taken from Pomfret's 1700 poem *The Choice*) and so do scenes of high comedy such as that of the rector's sermon in which he unadvisedly attempts to introduce the metaphor of life as embroidery: "Some people don't put in enough stitches," repeated the rector, in a slow, emphatic voice. 'Isn't that true of many of us?'"

Civil to Strangers is a complete and, so far as one can tell, even, polished text, which is not true of the next three works, all of which the editor found "in a fairly 'raw' state" and which she says she has "reduced... in Barbara's favorite culinary sense of the word" to their present forty of fifty page length. What this means in bibliographical terms, rather than culinary, is far from clear. The first of these, which Pym called "my Finnish novel" and is here titled *Gervase and Flora*, is of interest mainly as testimony to the sad continuance of her obsession with Henry Harvey in 1937 and 1938, even after he had gone to teach

in Finland and married Else Godenhjelm there. Finally, it seems Pym steeled herself to write a closing scene of parting, complete with the escaping lover's protestation "We can always be friends." The



other two fragments, or reductions, of novels both date from the early years of the war and echo many of her diary entries of the time, reflecting as they do such activities as practicing bandaging, coping with evacuee children, and placating housemaids who have begun "talking about munitions factories in a very sinister way."

The Pym papers include twenty-seven short stories, very few of which were ever published.

Here we have a glimpse of two early ones which were rejected (one with characters plundered from the abandoned *Crampton Hodnet*), and two which, in the brief heyday of her rediscovery, were actually commissioned, by the *Church Times* and *The New Yorker*. What other fiction writer could possibly have been so honored by those two periodicals at once? The *New Yorker* story, "Across a Crowded Room," is heavily autobiographical, featuring an unnamed woman at an Oxford ceremonial dinner, sentimentally dreaming of an encounter with — yes, "Gervase" — but rational enough to dismiss the idea as "too much like a romantic novel" and to finish the thought with the tart observation that nowadays "fiction...tended to be rather more realistic than life." The story leads smoothly into Pym's all-too-short and modest radio talk surveying her own life in fiction, with its definition of "the kind of immortality most authors would want — to feel that their work would be immediately recognizable as having been written by them and by nobody else." This immortality she achieved long ago; *Civil to Strangers and Other Writings* should make many more readers aware of it.