sel and Gretel's parents and focused on the "destructive desires" and "uncontrolled cravings" of the children. Bettelheim insisted that such an accusatory meaning satisfies the child's psychological needs. "We want our children to believe that, inherently, all men are good. But children know that *they* are not always good and often, even when they are, they would prefer not to be." Stories such as "Hansel and Gretel" "enlighten him [the child] about himself, and foster his personality development."

Tatar, a professor of German literature at Harvard, rejects Bettelheim's treatment of fairy tales as "Freudian Oedipal plots." Her own interpretation of fairy tales is more sociological. Adults, not children, write the fairy tales, and they intend them to be used, she argues, for "productive socialization." But to understand how such socialization works—and why it often does not—it is necessary to return the stories to the cultures and contexts from which they emerged. Many children's classics narrate ambiguous, even frightening situations because they began as bawdy tavern entertainments and only later (and only half-successfully) were transformed into moral instruction and entertainments for children. "Hansel and Gretel" came into being during a time when childbirth was a leading cause of death for biological mothers, and stories with stepmothers, Tatar points out, were familiar to listeners. In fact, the evil stepmother may have helped children deal with the tensions in the mixed early modern families.

For specific examples of fairy tales harnessed to an agenda, one can turn to *Forbidden Journeys*. During the 19th century, while men wrote the "real literature," it was left to women to compose stories for children. (Oddly, however, the most acclaimed Victorian children's fantasies—Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, George MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*, and James Barrie's *Peter Pan*—were composed by three quite eccentric gentlemen.) Auerbach and Knoepflmacher, English professors at the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton, respectively, have garnered selections from eight Victorian women writers who used the fairy-tale form to launch attacks on contemporary society. In her reworking of the familiar "Beauty and the Beast," Anne Thackeray Ritchie (the daughter of William Thackeray) depicted Belle's penurious family in a way that poked fun at English class consciousness. Christina Rosetti (poet Dante Gabriel Rosetti's sister) in "Nick" departed from Charles Dickens's *Christmas Carol*, in which Scrooge repents after seeing the evil of his ways. Rosetti's hero, in a satire on middle-class materialism, repents only because his evil ways do not gain him the ends that he desires.

Bettelheim interpreted fairy tales as a kind of psychotherapy by which children come to terms with their fantasies of desire and revenge. Both *Off With Their Heads!* and *Forbidden Journeys*—one by analysis, the other by example—challenge Bettelheim's ahistorical assumptions and replace them with actual examples of how parents of each age worked the children's literature into a form they found acceptable. On this matter, children themselves—in Ritchie's and Rosetti's view, latent rebels; in Tatar's, docile citizens-in-the-making—have yet to be heard from.

A LOT TO ASK: A Life of Barbara Pym. *By Hazel Holt. Dutton. 308 pp. $19.95*
BARBARA PYM: A Critical Biography. *By Anne M. Wyatt-Brown. Univ. of Mo. 209 pp. $29.95*

Mildred Lathbury is one of those cheerful, helpful women whom people invariably take for granted. An unmarried London churchwoman, she volunteers at a charitable agency that assists impoverished gentlewomen and otherwise comforts herself with a round of teas and church gatherings. At night, she reads herself to sleep with cookbooks. And while she hasn't

quite surrendered every hope of marriage, one male friend suggests, unhelpfully, "But my dear Mildred, *you* mustn't marry.... I always think of you as being so very balanced and sensible, such an excellent woman."

Miss Lathbury sounds like a character who would inhabit a very dull novel. In fact, she is the humorous heroine of Barbara Pym's *Excellent Women* (1952), which, with its ironic observations, deep feeling, high spirits, and compassion for the unfulfilled wish, is both lively and comforting. "Good books for a bad day," Pym called her novels, and her 12 books—bounded by church jumble sales, cozy neighborhood or office intrigues, and that vanishing breed of excellent women—have won Pym a wide, devoted readership. "As we cryptically say 'Proustian' or 'Jamesian,'" the novelist Shirley Hazzard has written, "we may now say 'Barbara Pym' and be understood instantly."

Most critics, like her close friend Hazel Holt, have made Barbara Pym (1913–80) resemble one of her own heroines, who, though she might joke about being an "old brown spinster," enjoyed a full and resourceful life in London and later near Oxford. All of her resourcefulness would be required, for in 1963, already the author of six praised novels, she was deemed too old-fashioned for England's new "mod" and swinging mood. Publishers would not even accept her work. Yet she reacted neither with sadness nor bitterness, Holt notes. "That is not my way," Pym said and heroically kept on writing. Finally, in a 1977 *Times Literary Supplement* survey, both Lord David Cecil and Philip Larkin named her the most underrated English writer of the century. Suddenly her books were back in demand, enjoying an acclaim that has steadily increased.

Wyatt-Brown, the coordinator of Scholarly Writing at the University of Florida, objects to critics such as Holt who dress Pym up as one of her own contented heroines. "Genteel, sanitized studies," Wyatt-Brown says, ignore the depression and dissatisfactions that gave Pym the insight *and* the necessity to create characters such as Mildred Lathbury. Pym wrestled throughout her life with intractable problems—loneliness, dependency upon (often unavailable) men, headaches, writer's block—and she worked hard to develop "her comic vision. Her humor was based on an acceptance of suffering and did not come easily to her." Wyatt-Brown's sharper, more nuanced interpretation shows how an artist's transformations of difficult experience may not necessarily bring relief from life's often painful toll.

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF HENRY JAMES AND HENRY ADAMS, 1877–1914.
Ed. by George Monteiro. LSU Press. 107 pp. $20

Never has letter-writing sparkled with more brilliance than when Henry wrote Henry. From a distance, the lives of the two correspondents, the historian Henry Adams (1838–1918) and the novelist Henry James (1843–1916), seem almost interchangeable. Both men grew up amid wealth and New England's intellectual aristocracy; both spent long years in Europe; both produced massive bodies of writing; both were elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters on the same day (January 15, 1905). Their 37-year correspondence recreates a lost world of charmed lives and ample leisure (for those of a certain class), where everyone knew everyone (of a certain class), and correspondence was like an elegant salon where the talk was always witty. With his notes and introduction, Monteiro, a professor of English at Brown, has shaped this correspondence into a story of a unique and curious friendship.

Ultimately, the Henrys' correspondence is fascinating because it furnishes a test case of whether, as James's brother William put it, "all intellectual work is the same"—that is, whether the critical and creative acts are basically akin. (William James believed they were, observing that "Kant's *Kritik* is just like a Strauss waltz.") About Henry James's work, Adams's wife Clover observed, "It's not that he [James] 'bites off more than he can chaw'... but he chaws more than he bites off." This viewpoint—which her husband shared—was, for all its cleverness, practically a denial of James's creative act, of the transforming manipulations accomplished by his imagination and hyperconscious style. What James bit off is by now dated, musty—in *The Awkward Age*, for example, the question of whether a teenage girl should listen to adult conversation—but James's dramatic and moral elaborations have kept the book alive, even in