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 this era when sex and violence are a child's daily TV fare. In contrast to James, Adams, the first American historian to call himself a scientist, prided himself on having added nothing imaginative to the facts. This difference not only characterizes their major works but runs throughout the correspondence. While Adams's letters are forcefully direct, James's are hedged, circuitous, playful, metaphorical—the high Jamesian style of the novels transferred to daily life.

For both men, "the facts" of their world had become increasingly distasteful by their middle age, as their genteel, aristocratic world crumbled and the rowdy industrial democracy of the 20th century emerged. But their responses to the new age differed radically. Adams, as revealed in these letters, settled into a "monotonous disappointed pessimism" (James's phrase), while James was avid to observe and find the right metaphors and precise descriptions for the vulgar new little world. Returning to America on a visit in 1904, he rushed off to inspect the president—"Theodore I" he called him and found him "verily, a wonderful little machine... quite exciting to see"—while Adams declined Roosevelt's invitation and stayed at home. As the curtain comes down and this volume closes, the contrast between the two men is so stark that no dramatist could have heightened it. Adams's vision had become unmitigatedly bleak: After reading James's memoir, he sighed, "Why did we live? Was that all?" James could sympathize with Adams, and he almost apologized for still finding his consciousness in the presence of life so interesting. "It's, I suppose," he said, "because I am that queer monster the artist... an inexhaustible sensibility."

Henry Adams was the finest American historian of the 19th century and, quite possibly, the most farseeing intellectual in American history. But in reviewing the autobiographical *Education of Henry Adams* (1918), T. S. Eliot said that it was not Adams but James—inadequately educated as he was—who was "the most intelligent man of his generation." Eliot argued that it was "the sensuous contributor to the intelligence [in James] that made the difference," and then added that unforgettable phrase: James "had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it."

Contemporary Affairs

THE IDEA OF CIVIL SOCIETY. *By Adam Seligman. Free Press. 241 pp. $24.95*
NEW WORLD DISORDER: The Leninist Extinction. *By Ken Jowitt. Univ. of Calif. 342 pp. $30*

Remember when history ended? It was in 1989, when the collapse of communism led Francis Fukuyama, in a now-famous essay, to proclaim that history—or the ideological war that was its motor—was over. Henceforth, Fukuyama predicted, liberal democratic capitalism would reign everywhere, in vindication of the Western idea of civil society. In 1992, however, "history" resumed with a vengeance in Yugoslavia and other regions of the former Soviet empire. Eastern Europe today, writes Jowitt, a Berkeley political scientist, resembles less the end of history than the beginning of the book of Genesis, a world "without form and void."

For Seligman, an Israeli sociologist, as well as for Jowitt, the once-bright hopes of reformers like Vaclav Havel for a new birth of "civil society" in their countries now appear deflated. Seligman observes that civil society is not a universal ideal but one that grew out of unique historical circumstances. Elaborated by John Locke and the two Adams of the 18th-century Scottish Enlightenment (Ferguson and Smith), it depended on values derived from Christian individualism. According to its various theorists, civil society was a social order based on morally autonomous individuals—each one the bearer of universal human capacities—who would come together in churches, clubs, political parties, and other organizations.

In Western Europe, civil society was realized over the course of centuries through the creation of a national unity that liberated individuals from ethnic and religious identities. In Eastern Europe, however, under the empires of the Hapsburgs, Romanovs, Hohenzollerns, and finally the communists, modern nations—and modern individualism—never fully emerged. Ethnic and religious loyalties remained paramount, as the strife in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia makes painfully clear. Similar-sounding institutions can mean quite different things in Western and Eastern Europe. The Catholic Church in Eastern Europe for example,