

The Adventurous Four: Popular Fiction and Women Behaving Badly

The adventurous four are found not only in children's literature, where fictional children challenge the barriers real life adults seek to impose, but also in popular women's fiction. This description should not be read to suggest that fictional women's resistance to control is childlike; rather, it acknowledges the writers' desire for create fictional spaces where women can escape being treated as children. Such women can be labelled rebellious, or a term I like, badly behaved, as they venture beyond the boundaries set by society. However, the idea of adventurousness as a label to describe the women is even more appealing and this is how I see the women in the novels I discuss.

To go back to the late 1970s/early 1980s, Rona Jaffe wrote *Class Reunion* and *After the Reunion* about four women who studied at Radcliffe during the 1950s, returned to their class reunion, and eventually recognising the constraints imposed upon them, change their lives. Later, Marge Piercy and then Maeve Binchy, the latter possibly a surprise, also featured adventurous women. People do not have to skydive to meet this criterion!

Domestic dramas now give women in extreme social circumstances a voice. However, domestic drama has not always focussed on extremes. Barbara Pym, known for her nuanced portrayal of spinsters and vicars, subtly challenged societal norms in works from the 1930s to her final novel, *A Few Green Leaves* (1980).

To pull these ideas together - women adventurers of the past, writers, and their fictional women, while providing a rich history are often dismissed. They deserve recognition as the early adventurers who gave us a foundation for the stronger fare we have today.

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Her most recent publications are: *The Reality behind Barbara Pym's Excellent Women The Troublesome Woman Revealed* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023), and *Women and Property: An Early Literary Response* Robin R. Joyce in Jocelynne A. Scutt Editor *Women, Power and Autonomy Rights, Respect and Representation in Law and Society*.

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