



## Transfictionality in Barbara Pym's Novels

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**Abstract: Aims & Objectives:** Transfictionality is a recent narratological phenomenon that describes the hypertextual migration of an element from one text, such as a character, setting, or incident, migrates from one text to another, provided that the two texts remain distinct and easy to recognize by the reader. Transfictionality is used to destabilize notions of reality, constructedness, and closure. Theorists of transfictionality tend to see it as an exclusively postmodernist technique. This paper presents a counter-argument to this view by proving that transfictionality is not restricted to postmodernist experimental writings. The paper argues that transfictionality is an inherent condition of narrativity and can, therefore, be located in classic realist fiction as well, as instanced in the novels of the British novelist Barbara Pym (1913-1980). **Methodology:** The paper examines the narrative phenomenon of cross-over characters in the novels of Barbara Pym as instances of transfictionality by using the theory of transfictionality by Marie-Laure Ryan (2008). **Findings & Recommendations:** The paper finds that characters' crossovers in Pym's novels fulfill the four conditions Ryan set for transfictionality. The paper also finds that these characters' crossovers epitomize Ryan's five transfictional relations and, at times, extend them to include specimens of transmedial transfictionality that Ryan failed to incorporate in her theory of transfictionality. These findings are significant in extending the scope of transfictionality beyond postmodernist narratives. This has far-reaching implications for understanding the epistemological premises of the fictional world and its relation to the world of reality, especially in the context of Possible World theory.

**Keywords:** Transfictionality; Cross-Over Characters; Possible Worlds Theory; Barbara Pym, Marie-Laure Ryan.

### التجاوز السردى في روايات باربرا بيم

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**الملخص: أهداف الدراسة:** التجاوز السردى هو ظاهرة سردية حديثة تصف انتقال عناصر من نص إلى آخر، مثل شخصية، أو مكان، أو حادثة، بشرط أن يظل النصان متميزين ويسهل التعرف عليهما من قبل القارئ. يُستخدم التجاوز السردى لزعزعة مفاهيم الواقع والبناء النصي والإغلاق. يميل منظرو التجاوز السردى إلى اعتباره تقنية حصرية لما بعد الحداثة، أو كما يسميها لويومير دوليجيل "إعادة كتابة ما بعد حداثية"، لتسليط الضوء على ترسيخها في الأفكار التفسيرية لما بعد الحداثة المتعلقة بالنصية وكيونونة الواقع. تقدم هذه الدراسة رأياً معاكساً من خلال إثبات أن التجاوز السردى ليس مقصوراً على الكتابات التجريبية لما بعد الحداثة. تجادل الدراسة بأن التجاوز السردى هو حالة جوهرية للسرد ويمكن، بالتالي، العثور عليه في السرديات الواقعية أيضاً من خلال دراسة روايات الكاتبة البريطانية باربرا بيم (1913-1980). **منهجية الدراسة:** تستجلى الدراسة ظاهرة السرد المتعلقة بالشخصيات المشتركة في روايات باربرا بيم كأمثلة على التجاوز السردى في الرواية الواقعية باستخدام نظرية التجاوز السردى لماري-لور ريان (2008). **النتائج والتوصيات:** وجدت الدراسة أن الشخصيات المشتركة في روايات بيم تحقق الشروط الأربعة التي وضعتها ريان للتجاوز السردى. كما تكتشف الورقة أن هذه الشخصيات المشتركة تجسد العلاقات الخمس للتجاوز السردى التي حددتها ريان، وفي بعض الأحيان تتجاوزها لتشمل أمثلة على التجاوز السردى العابر للوسائط، الذي فشلت ريان في تضمينه في نظريتها عن التجاوز السردى. تعتبر هذه النتائج ذات أهمية كبيرة في توسيع نطاق التجاوز السردى ليشمل ما يتجاوز سرديات ما بعد الحداثة. ولها تأثيرات بعيدة المدى على فهم الأسس الإبستمولوجية للعالم المتخيل في النص السردى وعلاقته بعالم الواقع، خصوصاً في سياق نظرية العالم الممكن.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التجاوز السردى؛ الشخصيات المشتركة؛ نظرية العوالم الممكنة؛ باربرا بيم؛ ماري-لور ريان.

### Introduction

Transfictionality is a recent concept in narratological studies that gained its critical momentum in the early 21st century. It originated in cinema studies and was later applied to literary studies. Transfictionality is a narratological phenomenon occurring when a character or an imaginary setting crosses over from one text to another. It destabilizes textual boundaries, and it can happen in a transmedial context as well.

Transfictionality, therefore, can provide valuable insight into the nature of closure, autonomy, and possible worlds in literary fiction in particular.

Transfictionality may be considered a branch of intertextuality, but it usually conceals this intertextual link because it neither quotes nor acknowledges its sources. Instead, it uses the source text's setting and inhabitants as if they existed independently.

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Transfictionality describes a peculiar kind of relationship between literary texts. Richard Saint-Gilais (2005) states that two (or more) readers enter into a transitional relationship "when they share elements such as characters, imaginary locations, or fictional worlds" (p.612).

While intertextuality behaves according to the logic that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva, 1986a, p. 37), transfictionality does not cite another text as much as having a transgressive relation with it. Thus, in intertextuality, a literary work is essentially a complex web of textual citations and echoes that can be detected in the reading process, but in the case of transfictionality, an element of a text migrates into another text without ever disrupting the hermeneutic texture of the destined text.

Marie-Laure Ryan (2015) highlights this migration process when she defines transfictionality as "the migration of fictional entities across different texts" (p. 3). This posits the transfictionalized text in a spatial hypotextual relationship with the source text. This is not strictly related to the presence of one text in another as in the case of intertextuality (Prince, 2003, p. 46). It is instead a question of textual boundaries and spatial relocation across texts. This relocation is one-sided as it moves a character, a setting, or an incident from text A to text B, assuming that such relocation is possible and can logically happen without violating the text's credibility.

This textual relocation assumes the form of crossover of textual boundaries on the logical and semantic premises that the two reciprocal texts either ontologically belong to a shared universe or that the target text is phenomenologically a possible version of the world of the source text. In either case, the transfictional element behaves normally as its existence is rational and obeys the teleology of the fictional universe in the target text. This is not a textual citation or trace as it firmly retains its original belonging to its source text.

Unlike in intertextuality, transgressing textual boundaries is intentionally conducted to explore the notion of textual closure and constructedness. The world a text, presumably a fictional narrative,

constructs is supposed to be autonomous and unique as it exists on its own. Transfictional elements foreground the textual closure of this fictional world. This is similar to the working of metafictionality but on a different plane. Metafiction is self-reflexive in that it opens the text to reality to highlight its constructedness. Transfictionality does the same but in another way. It is self-reflexive because the text opens its borders to the onslaught of textuality. This requires destabilizing textual closure to replace text with discourse (Deliu, 2015, pp. 51-52).

Although common in films, transfictionality registers its finest moments in novels. Lubomir Dolezel (1998) suggests the term 'Postmodernist rewrites' to describe the novels that rely on transfictionality as their central textual strategy to rewrite classic literary works. As part of their aesthetic and textual politics, all postmodernist rewrites "redesign, relocate, reevaluate the classic protoword" (p. 206). Dolezel (1998) classifies postmodernist rewrites into three distinct types according to what they do to the fictional world of the rewritten world: (a) transposition, which preserves the design of the protoworld but locates it in a different spatial and temporal context; (b) expansion which fills the gaps of the protoworld to extend it further; and (c) displacement which subverts the protoworld and creates a different version. These three types of postmodernist rewrites boost parallel, complementary, and polemical relations to the protoworld respectively (pp. 206-207).

However, transfictionality antedates postmodernist rewrites, especially in the twentieth century. James Joyce's modernist novels offer strong transfictionality through the migration of the factual and fictional Dublin and its characters across almost all his fictional Storyworlds. Transfictionality might be a persistent feature of modernist and postmodernist novels, but it also had its bright moments in novels outside of these two schools. The social comedies of the British novelist Barbara Pym (1913-1980) might not be a candid place for such a highly experimental phenomenon. Nevertheless, Pym extensively used transfictionality to problematize how the reader experiences her fictional world. Characters used to

cross over the boundaries of her novels briefly but unexpectedly. The present study proposes to address these characters' cross-overs as instances of transfictionality by utilizing Marie-Laure Ryan's theory of transfictionality (as revised in 2015).

### **Marie-Laure Ryan's Theory of Transfictionality**

Marie-Laure Ryan (2008) proposes a set of conditions for transfictionality to happen:

1. "Transfictionality involves a relation between two distinct texts, and these texts must be works" (p. 388). Ryan specifies this 'relation' within two parameters: the two texts should show similarities and differences on the level of signifiers, and the two texts should be the works of the same author.
2. "The worlds projected by the two texts must be distinct, but related to each other" (p. 389). Ryan says that Dolezel's three categories of rewrites explain whether the fictional worlds of the two texts are related or not. As for the aspect of distinctness, Ryan proposes the following text: To decide whether or not two texts refer to different worlds, I propose the following test: (1) the fictional world of the two texts must contain logical and semantic discrepancies that prevent their fusion (this will be automatically the case for transposition and modification); or (2) the authors must be distinct—a condition which, in turn, presupposes the relevance of the notion of authorship. (p. 390)
3. "The reader is assumed to be familiar with the world of the transfictionalized text" (p. 391). Ryan introduces the "Principle of Minimal Departure" to define this familiarity which is "necessary to the operation of an interpretive mechanism" (391). Ryan, however, warns that this familiarity with the textual world should be cautiously used because "it cannot openly acknowledge the textual origin of this world for fear of blocking the reader's immersion" (p. 391).
4. "Fictionalized world, but on the contrary, tries to preserve its immersive power" (p. 392). Transfictionality utilizes the reader's previous immersion in a novel or a film. Its effects arise from this immersion, and it capitalizes on the

reader's or spectator's desire to continue this immersion in terms of curiosity and gratification. Ryan highlights that transfictionality capitalizes on the reader's fascination with the fictional world of a novel or film. This should account for the fact that classic or original works are the exclusive object of transfictionality (pp. 292-293).

Based on Dolezel's hypertextual topology (1998), Ryan (2019) identifies five hypertextual relations operative in transfictionality, which she calls 'transfictional operations' (p. 71). The first three operations are those that Dolezel proposed earlier:

1. Extension, which "adds new stories to the fictional world while respecting the facts established in the original" (p. 71).
2. Modification, which "changes the plot of the original narrative, for instance, by giving it a different ending" (p. 71).
3. Transposition, which "transports a plot into a different temporal or spatial setting" (p. 71).

Ryan adds two more transfictional operations:

1. Mash-up, or crossover, is "an operation that allows characters imported from different narratives to coexist within the same story world" (p. 71). This transfictional operation contaminates the configured story world with generic elements from other foreign stories.
2. Embedding is "an operation by which a storyworld exists in another storyworld as fiction rather than as part of reality" (p. 71). This happens when a novel's character reads or references another novel.

These five transfictional operations achieve their effect if, and only if:

1. A reality status is materialized for the migrated element.
2. Ontological contradiction is resolved by creating "compilations of facts known as Bibles that authors of tie-ins are asked to respect" (p. 72).
3. The storyworld of the target text is accepted as a possible version of the storyworld of the original text.

## Transfictionality in Barbara Pym's Novels

The novels of Barbara Pym were never linked before to transfictionality even though cross-over characters as a manifestation of this phenomenon are commonly recognized but, unfortunately, quite under-researched. The critical literature on Pym's novels boosts two items only. Allen W. Bellringer's 1996 essay "A Fistful of Pym's: Barbara Pym's Use of Cross-over Characters" is the first and most comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of cross-over characters in Pym's novels. Bellringer highlights that "the presence of cross-over characters" in her novels "confirms" that "there is a tendency towards conscious fictionality in these

novels" (p. 14). Arthur Louis Rankin's 2001 dissertation "investigates the use of crossover characters as a device for expanding the narrative boundaries of the novels," which problematizes, in turn, the notion of closure in her novels (p. iv).

Based on the work of Bellringer and Rankin, the following table lists all the instances of characters' cross-overs in the novels of Barbara Pym. The terminology suggested by Ryan (2015) shall be used here. The original novel where the character appears first is called 'transfictionalized text' whereas the novel the characters re-appear in is called 'transfictionalizing text':

No.	Character	Transfictionalized Text	Transfictionalizing Text
1	Wilf Bason	<i>A Glass of Blessings</i>	An Unsuitable Attachment and A Few Green Leaves
2	Prudence Bates	<i>Jane and Prudence</i>	<i>A Glass of Blessings</i>
3	Everard Bone	<i>Excellent Women</i>	<i>An Unsuitable Attachment, Less Than Angels, and Jane and Prudence</i>
4	Esther Clovis	<i>Less Than Angels</i>	<i>An Unsuitable Attachment. A Few Green Leaves and Excellent Women</i>
5	Wilmet Forsyth	<i>A Glass of Blessings</i>	<i>Jane &amp; Prudence and No Fond Return of Love</i>
6	Digby Fox	<i>Less Than Angels</i>	<i>A Few Green Leaves and An Unsuitable Attachment</i>
7	Mildred Lathbury	<i>Excellent Women</i>	<i>An Unsuitable Attachment, Less Than Angels, and Jane and Prudence</i>
8	Gertrude Lydgate	<i>Less Than Angels</i>	<i>A Few Green Leaves</i>
9	Julian Malory	<i>Excellent Women</i>	<i>A Glass of Blessings</i>
10	Winifred Malory	<i>Excellent Women</i>	<i>A Glass of Blessings</i>
11	Helena Napier	<i>Excellent Women</i>	<i>Less Than Angels</i>
12	Rocky Napier	<i>Excellent Women</i>	<i>A Glass of Blessings and Less Than Angels</i>
13	Deirdre Swan	<i>Less Than Angels</i>	<i>A Few Green Leaves</i>
14	Oswald Thames	<i>A Glass of Blessings</i>	<i>A Few Green Leaves</i>
15	Archdeacon Hoccleve	<i>Some Tame Gazelle</i>	<i>Excellent Women</i>
16	Wilmet and Keith	<i>A Glass of Blessings</i>	<i>No Fond Return of Love</i>

Viewed from Ryan's theory of transfictionality, almost all of these instances of cross-over characters meet the conditions that Ryan set for transfictionality to happen:

1. Each character's cross-over establishes a transfictional relationship between two or more of Pym's novels. This textual relationship is essentially hypertextual in nature. hypertextuality, according to Gerard Genette (1997), refers to "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (p. 5). However, transfictionality departs noticeably from hypertextuality in that the transfictionalized text should always be directly present in the transfictionalizing text. Hyperfictional transformation prefers indirection and

implication. Thus, once a character migrates from one novel to another, it is the touchstone for verifying whether this is the same character or remains one of referentiality. If this referentiality is to be located in another novel, it is possible to speak of transfictionality. However, this referentiality is not just a matter of name correspondence. It extends to other aspects of the narrative role, like physical appearance, social status, relational status, and so on. This cross-over is a form of transposition where a character migrates briefly from one novel to another. This transposition of characters remains outside the novel's main plot and occurs in the transfictionalizing novel's background. For instance, several characters from Pym's most famous novel, *Excellent Woman* (1952), pop unexpectedly on the margins of the fictional worlds of her other novels like *An Unsuitable*

*Attachment, Less Than Angels, and Jane and Prudence.*

2. The fictional worlds in these novels are distinct but related. Pym uses the generic conventions of social realism to create a possible version of her real world. This epistemological commonality relates the fictional worlds of her novels to each other. Nevertheless, each fictional world has its unique referential signature by the narrative's distinctiveness. In short, her fictional worlds operate by the same memetic logic but harbor differences through the particularity of the stories related in each novel. However, while this distinct-related textual relation lends itself easily to the first part of the text that Ryan proposes, it fails to satisfy her second touchstone of texts having different authors. This is no real impediment to the transfiction relation between the novels where characters cross over because the distinction is already established by the uniqueness of the story being enacted in each novel.
3. Ryan's principle of minimal departure is strongly present in all the character's cross-overs in Pym's novels. This principal postulates that "we reconstrue the world of a fiction and of a counterfactual as being the closest possible to the reality we know" (Ryan, 1980, p. 406). This means that readers and spectators use the truth value to "project upon the world of the statement everything we know about the real world and that we will make only those adjustments which we cannot avoid" (Ryan, 1980, p. 406). To spot such a cross-over, the reader must have read the original novel where the crossing character appears. This familiarity will guide the reader's interpretive perception of the transfictionalizing novel or at least account for why such a character transgresses textual boundaries between two or more novels. However, this familiarity is controlled because the reader's sense of immersion remains intact. The reader might be familiar with the crossing-over character, but he is kept in the shadow as to what will happen to him in the transfictionalizing novel.
4. All the incidents of cross-over characters in Pym's novels comply with Ryan's condition of

previous immersion. Ryan uses the term immersion in a radically different way. It does not connote intensely pleasurable experience or absorbing activity as much as "the experience through which a fictional world acquires the presence of an autonomous, language-independent reality populated with live human beings" (Ryan, 2001, p. 15). This kind of immersion occurs in the phenomenology of reading and "presupposes an imaginative relationship to a *textual world*" (Ryan, 2001, p. 15). The transfictionalizing novel capitalizes on the reader's after-immersion effect. This particular effect operates by re-channeling the reader's emotional response. The reader's immersion in the fictional world of the transfictionalized novel by Pym results in emotional engagement with the characters and the narrative. The reader promotes a deep desire to continue this immersion to satisfy his unquenchable emotional engagement. However, deciding whether immersion or familiarity plays a decisive role in engaging the reader with the crossing-over character is hard. Pym did not write sequels to any of her novels or at least continue the story of one novel into another. Each of her novels tells a distinct story with a unique set of characters. Thus, what makes the cross-over fascinating to the reader is the attending possibilities and scenarios of projecting an emotionally empathized character from one novel into the fictional world of another novel.

Having established that cross-over characters in Pym's novels are a transfictional phenomenon, it remains to identify the categories of transfictional relations operative in Pym's transfictionalizing novels. An analysis of the tabulated instances of transfictionality in Pym's novels shows that all five transfictional relations occur in these instances. Below are examples of these five transfictional relations:

#### **Extension**

Mildred Lathbury's marriage to Everard Bone hinted at in *Excellent Woman*, is confirmed in *Jane and Prudence* (1953): "'Oh, that reminds me,' said Miss Doggett. 'I had a letter from Mrs. Bonner who

works at the Aged Gentlewomen headquarters and she told me a piece of interesting news. That nice Miss Lathbury has got married — what do you think of that?’” (p. 108)

The reader is soon transported to the fictional world of *An Excellent Woman* but with the critical perspective of external characters’ commentary:

‘Well, I never knew her,’ said Jane. ‘Did she work for the gentlewomen? And ought one to feel surprised at her marrying?’

‘Yes,’ said Miss Doggett. ‘I was surprised. She seemed to have so much else in her life. Her work there and in the parish — it seems that she was the vicar’s right hand.’

‘Who has she married?’ asked Miss Morrow.

‘An *anthropophagist*,’ declared Miss Doggett in an authoritative tone.

‘He does some kind of scientific work, I believe.’

‘I thought it meant a cannibal — one who ate human flesh,’ said Jane in wonder. (p. 108)

This information is not functional in the plot of *Jane and Prudence*. Instead, its reference is to be located in the fictional world of *Excellent Woman*. Its belated occurrence suggests that the two novels share the same universe epistemologically grounded in Pym’s actual world. This belatedness functions to extend the fictional world of *Excellent Woman* and, at the same time, destabilizes the textual boundaries between the two novels.

### Modification

In *Less Than Angels* (1955), Mildred and Esther Clovis of *Excellent Woman* appear in their practical life in Africa. Mildred accompanies her husband on a missionary stay in Africa, whereas Esther does anthropological research there. However, these two women appear in reversed positions in *Less Than Angels*. In *Excellent Woman*, Mildred is the narrator, and Esther is a minor character whom Mildred dislikes. In *Less Than Angels*, the situation is reversed. Esther is the narrator, and Mildred is a minor character whom Esther dislikes. This reversal is a modification of the narrative situation in *Excellent Woman*. However, this modification can also be considered an extension since Esther’s interior narrative voice and corresponding

worldview were barred in *Excellent Woman*. *Less Than Angels* gives voice to Esther’s narratively silenced exteriority. This belated occurrence complements and extends the narrative situation in *Excellent Woman*. Thus, reading *Less Than Angels* is essentially a re-reading of that narrative situation in *An Excellent Woman* whereby the monologism of the earlier narrative situation is modified into dialogism. The two narrative situations enter into a dialogue that eventually reshapes the reading experience of *An Excellent Woman*.

### Transposition

Archdeacon Hoccleve delivers his famous Sunday sermon on Judgment Day in *Some Tame Gazelle* (1950). This sermon appears in chapter ten, a strange and lengthy literary sermon. This favorite scene is transported into *Excellent Woman*. Of course, the transposition is done in a contracted form since the chapter-length sermon scene in *Some Tame Gazelle* is reported by Mildred Lathbury: “It was altogether a most peculiar sermon, full of long quotations from the more obscure English poets, and although the subject may in itself have been a suitable one for Lent, its matter and the manner of its delivery occasioned dismay and bewilderment rather than any more suitable feelings” (p. 61). This is a condensation of Archdeacon’s Judgement Day sermon, as seen through the eyes of Belinda Bede. Chapter ten in *Some Tame Gazelle* reports the sermon with all its details and quotations as Belinda experiences it. However, Belinda’s immediate reflections on this sermon are reworked in *An Excellent Woman* by making other characters voice them. For instance, Mrs. Bonner’s disgust that this sermon has Roman Catholic sentiments echoes Belinda’s concerns about the Catholic sentiment in the sermon. The transposition and the parallels are meant to dialogize the hitherto monologized narrative of the sermon episode. However, locating the reference to this episode in the fictional world of another preceding novel puts the two novels in the scenario of possible world theory because it is not the sermon that matters as much as the responses to it and how a woman character is experiencing it. Thus, wherever such a sermon may occur, it would invoke identical responses, provided that the fictional worlds are epistemologically similar.

## Mash-up

Characters from more than one novel migrate to one novel. This locates the referentiality of the transfictionalizing novel in different distinct fictional worlds. For instance, in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, Pym resurrects characters from her other novels, like Wilf Bason from *A Glass of Blessings*, Everard Bone and Mildred Lathbury from *Excellent Woman*, and Esther Clovis and Digby Fox from *Less Than Angels*. Sometimes, several characters from one novel appear in another, as in the case of the characters from *Excellent Woman* who migrate to *A Glass of Blessings* and *Less Than Angels*. Here, the cross-over characters behave in two distinct ways: they either interact among themselves in such a way as to preserve their original microcosm, as in the case of the characters migrating from *Excellent Woman*, or appear separately, where extension and modification are the ultimate transfictional processes in action.

This might be understood as part of the authorial desire to tip the reader of the transfictionalized novels of what happened to his favorite characters after the end of these novels. In any case, Pym aims to establish and sustain a dialogue with her readers over the fate of her fictional characters. This is part of her strategy to immerse the reader in the fictional world of her novels, especially the more successful ones. Such sustained immersion positions the readers as “situated subjects” (Haraway 1988). As Haraway (1988) states, situating ourselves implies that we are aware that our interpretation will be partial and strongly dependent on our socio-historical context, and this turns us into responsible readers. This responsibility is a committal to the horizons of expectations of the fictional world into which we are ideologically situated as readers.

## Embedding

In *No Fond Return of Love* (1961), Dulcie’s lodger finds a copy of *Some Tame Gazelle* in her bathroom: “A shelf on the wall held a selection of books, their covers now faded and buckled by steam. Viola noticed *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Poems of Gray and Collins*, *Enquire Within*, *The Angel in the House*, and a few old Boots Library books, *A Voice Through a Cloud*, *Some Tame Gazelle*, and *The Boys from Sharon*” (58). The

presence of a copy of *Some Tame Gazelle* works on the levels of referentiality. The embedding of a fictional work in the fictional world of another work re-locates referentiality in another fictional world. This is essentially similar to intertextuality, except that fictionality is self-reflexive in another fictionality’s context. This re-location destabilizes the notion of textual closure between Pym’s novels to establish a shared universe model of reading.

However, not all instances of transfictional embedding in Pym’s novels re-locate referentiality with the exegeses of a shared universe. Some embeddings relocate referentiality within a possible world perspective. For instance, in *A Glass of Blessings* (1958), the narrator, Wilmet Forsyth, and her closest friend Rowena were reading a short story that reworks an episode from *Less Than Angels*: “*Sunday Evening*, by Catherine Oliphant,’ she read out. ‘It begins rather well with a young man and girl holding hands in a Greek restaurant, watched by the man’s former mistress—unknown to them, of course’” (p. 132). This was a re-writing of the episode in *Less Than Angels* when Miss Clovis spied on Tom and his beloved Deirdre, dining secretly in a Greek restaurant (p. 95). Interestingly, Wilmet and Rowena question the probability of such a fictional love scenario in actual life: “‘But what a far-fetched situation,’ I protested. ‘As if it would happen like that! Still, it must be dreadful to have to write fiction. Do you suppose Catherine Oliphant drew it from her own experience of life?’” (p. 132). Rowena’s answer adds a twist of irony to this self-reflexive fictionality by reflecting ironically on the actual Barbara Pym: “Rowena laughed. ‘I should hardly think so! She’s probably an elderly spinster living in a boarding-house in Eastbourne—or she may even be a man. One never knows’” (p. 132).

This triple re-focalization of the narrative situation in the transfictionalizing novel elucidates a possible worlds scenario. According to Marie-Laurie Ryan’s theory of possible Worlds (1991), the three worlds cited in *A Glass of Blessings* are experienced by the reader as modal systems. Ryan hypothesizes that when the reader experiences a fictional text, he “recenter” into a different modal system (p. 18). There are two such modal systems:

a system of reality and the textual universe. The former is the actual world of the reader and novelist as human subjects. It forms the referential center in the cognitive processing of the fictional text. The latter is a textual projection that mimics the actual system of reality. This universe is essentially a “sphere which the narrator presents as the actual world ... [and] a variety of APWs [alternative possible worlds] revolving around it” (Ryan 1991, p. 22). These APWs are created by the mental processes of the fictional characters. This means that the system of reality consists of an actual world and possible alternatives that “are created by imaginings, wishes, fears and dreams of inhabitants of the Actual World” (Bell 2010, p. 25). Similarly, the textual universe consists of a textual actual world and textual possible worlds that “represent alternatives to what is given as fact in the narrative. Textual Possible Worlds are generated by characters’ mental processes such as wishes, dreams or imaginings and therefore constitute possible alternatives to the actual course of events” (Bell 2010, [p. 25]). Viewed from this theoretical perspective, the transfictionalized elements in *A Glass of Blessings* are stratified as follows: The textual world of *A Glass of Blessing*, the textual possible World (*Less than Angels*), and the actual World (Pym’s actual world).

### Conclusion

The examination of the Pym’s cross-over characters as instances of transfictionality highlights the following conclusions:

1. The five transfictional relations tend frequently to occur in groups. Most of Pym’s transfictionalizing novels (notably, *A Few Green Leaves*, *less Than Angels*, and *An Unsuitable Attachment*) show more than one transfictional relations with the transfictionalized characters, episodes, and events re-appear unconnected to each other or interlinked as in the fictionalized novel. However, the largest frequency belongs to unconnectedness among the transfictionalized elements except in the case of embedding.
2. Transposition and embedding show that transfictionality in Pym’s novels is not limited to cross-over characters. In these two relations, the

focalized object of transfictionality is not the character per se but something associated with it. This highlights that transfictionality is a far more complicated textual phenomenon in Pym’s novels than the phenomenon of cross-over characters may suggest.

3. Ryan’s five transitional processes sometimes fail to categorize some of Pym’s transitional elements, as in the case of the death of Esther Clovis from *Less Than Angels*, which is announced in a newspaper in *A Few Green Leaves* (1985). It might be argued that this later mention of Miss Clovis is a sort of extension because it fills an information gap. Chapter twenty-three in *Less Than Angels* is vague on the death of Miss Clovis. This chapter does not end with a clear confirmation of her death. It is a deathbed scene with an open ending. Thus, the announcement of her death in public is a confirmation of her death. Nevertheless, the medium through which this announcement is made obliterates the transitional nature of hypertextual relations between these two novels. It would be more logical to categorize this transfictional process as transmedial transfictionality. Ryan (2013) was the first to call attention to the intersection of the transmedial storyworld and transfictionality. She defines the transmedia story world as “the creation of a story world through multiple documents belonging to various media” (361). Thus, *The Guardian* and *A Few Green Leaves* are distinct media forms brought into a hypertextual relation of transfictionality. The relation of expansion is much more world-preserving than modification and transposition “because it does not require changing any of the facts asserted in the original story” (Ryan 2013, 367). This would logically mean that “expansions refer to the same world as does the original, while modification and transposition refer to related but different worlds” (Ryan 2013, 367). This means that the transfictionalizing novel is a possible world of that of *A Few Green Leaves*.



## Disclosure Statement

- **Ethical approval and consent to participate:** The paper required no ethical approval since it is a theoretical literary study.
- **Availability of data and materials:** Raw data were generated at the Central Library of Anbar University. Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on request. Some of the data that support the findings of this study are available online on public domain. These data were derived from the following resources available in the public domain: google scholar, Researchgate, and Archive.org.
- **Author Contribution Statement:** I take public responsibility for the content of the work, "Transfictionality in Barbara Pym's Novels", submitted for review. I confirm contribution to the paper's study conception and design, analysis and interpretation of results; and draft manuscript preparation.
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