

# The Original Material Girl

*How did a middle class girl from the British countryside become U.S. ambassador to France? According to a new biography, it took endless scheming and countless liaisons with rich and powerful men*

**BY SANDRA McELWAIN**

## **Life of the Party**

Christopher Ogden, *Little, Brown*, \$24.95

**T**rust me on this one: If you are a devotee of *Vanity Fair*, *W*, or the late, departed *Spy*, you will undoubtedly become hooked on *Life of the Party*, an unauthorized biography about the consummate 20th century adventuress, Pamela Digby Churchill Hayward Harriman.

If you wonder whether an obscure, well bred British country woman can find happiness in the beds of a slew of international power players, the answer is yes. But only if they are very rich, very social, and very, very, prominent.

The rise of the fair and notorious Pamela, born in 1920, begins more than 50 years ago in the promiscuous years of war-torn London with her brief, tempestuous marriage to Winston Churchill's son Randolph. A glamorous, single-minded, seductive 18-year-old, she quickly eschewed connubial bliss with her impecunious and volatile husband—whom she had married in 1939 just three weeks after meeting him—and set her sights on more celebrated game. Pamela then launched a dazzling career of sexual dalliances that terrified married women on both sides of the Atlantic and earned her the title “Courtesan of the Century.”

In an unusual disclaimer in the front of the book, the author, *Time* contributor Christopher Ogden, explains that he and Pamela set out to tell her titillating tale together, but she got cold feet when she realized that for Little, Brown's multi-million dollar advance, she would be expected to tell all. She subsequently backed out of the deal. Although Ogden had 40 hours of intimate tapes, he says he was happy to pull out, too, until the Queen Mother of the Clinton administration (as *New York* magazine calls her) imperiously refused to pay him a sou, not even expenses. So Ogden decided to press on without her, interviewing old lovers and their spiteful wives, former butlers and maids, disgruntled stepchildren, along with friends, unhappy relatives, and a raft of doting political allies.

The result is mirthless and heavy handed, but Ogden does dish, and he has allegedly enraged the multi-talented Pamela, who through guile and extensive political fundraising now resides in an opulent residence in Paris as U.S. ambassador to France.

How did this voluptuous young woman with a minimum of education propel herself from the drab countryside of wartime England to the lavish palaces of Europe to the pinnacle of power in the U.S.? To put it bluntly, through rat-like cunning and sex.

*Sandra McElwaine is a Washington writer.*

Her illustrious lovers are so numerous they boggle the mind, and Ogden entitles several chapters with their first names. (I find this hard to believe, but those in the know claim the names Ogden names are merely the tip of the iceberg. Several studs still remain stashed in the closet.)

After a few admirals and generals, her first major conquest, whom she was eventually to marry, was Averell Harriman, a then-married statesman 30 years her senior and heir to a vast railroad fortune. Despite a torrid affair, Harriman had no intention of divorcing his wife, but he did not love and leave Pamela. There was a stipend, supposedly \$20,000 a year, for many years to come.

After Harriman decamped, Pamela dallied with CBS mogul Bill Paley and wealthy socialite Jock Whitney before hooking up with CBS broadcaster Edward R. Murrow, who was married at the time. Murrow contemplated divorce and proposed marriage, but in the end, like so many of her beaux, he reneged and unceremoniously dumped her.

Divorced, with a five-year-old son, Winston, whom she had virtually ignored since birth, and with no prospective home to wreck, Pamela broadened her circle. For a little sport sex, she seduced Aly Khan, the exotic playboy, in the late forties.

"Race, creed or national origin was no impediment for Pamela," writes Ogden. "She was never a racist, never anti-Semitic, prejudiced only against boors and bores. If a man interested her, that was sufficient. Christians, Moslems, Jews, atheists, and agnostics: She was an equal opportunity playgirl and eventually sampled them all."

Religion did rear its head, however, in her next relationship, this one with Fiat giant Gianni Agnelli, a leading European bachelor who installed her in a stunning villa in the South of France. To corral the cocaine-sniffing Italian stallion, Pamela abandoned the

Church of England, converted to Catholicism—Agnelli's faith—and had her marriage to Randolph annulled. (But tellingly, she did not shed the prestigious Churchill surname.) All, alas, to no avail. Agnelli left his mistress of four years to marry a swan-necked Princess whom he had already impregnated.

On the prowl again, Pamela moved to Paris and set her sights on another married, wealthy patron, Elie de Rothchild, scion of one of Europe's most distinguished families. He showered her with gowns, jewels, and antiques for six years before trotting back to his wife and a much younger mistress.

Apparently Pamela, at this point in her European career, was considered soiled goods and not a good candidate for marriage.

Seeking more fertile, forgiving territory, Pamela chucked the old world for the new and set sail for Manhattan in the early sixties, where, on a blind date, she snagged theatrical producer Leland Hayward while his wife Slim was out of town. Hayward reported that Pamela was great in bed, could do sensational tricks with ice cubes, and asked her to marry him. Although Hayward did not meet her usual standards—he was not filthy rich or an international star—he was well connected and, most important, he was ready and willing to ditch his spouse. Without a moment's hesitation, Pamela sped toward the altar.

After Hayward's death in 1970, an ensuing



nasty family feud, and a fling with Frank Sinatra—she moved into his house and had to be kicked out—Pamela finally landed her wartime paramour, Averell Harriman, who was now a widower and available at last.

Katharine Graham, then the publisher of *The Washington Post*, provided the connection. She gave a dinner in her Georgetown house and at Pamela's direction sat the two former lovers at different tables, back to back. (Mrs. Graham denies being part of any conspiracy with Pamela, but acknowledges the meeting took place at her house.) They quickly rekindled the old flame and were married within six months.

## Party Girl

With the Harriman zillions now in her grasp, Pamela began to transform her image from trophy wife to woman of substance. She gave up her British citizenship, steeped herself in political and international issues, joined the Council on Foreign Relations, and became a

Democratic fundraiser par excellence, pulling in \$12 million for the party in the decade after its 1980 debacle. (Some of which paid for Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign and some of which helped elect the senators who would vote to confirm her as ambassador in 1993.)

After Harriman's death in 1986, she prepared for the future by slimming down, lifting her face, and revamping her coiffure. She then took up with her first boy toy, J. Carter Brown, chairman of the National Gallery of Art, 14 years her junior. Their liaison was brief, and at 72, with no man in sight, the merry widow called in her chits and wangled the plum post of ambassador to France.

You do not need a crystal ball to see the TV miniseries on the horizon: John Forsyth will play Averell Harriman; Omar Sharif, Aly Khan; Pierce Brosnan, Edward R. Murrow; Marcello Mastroianni, Gianni Agnelli. As for the Great Seductress, who else but Madonna? The quintessential Material Girl. □

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# Political Puzzle

**BY JOHN BARCLAY**

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.

## ACROSS

- 1 & 5. Now Aleuts pass a reorganization for Clinton target. (7,7)
9. Happening is twice nice spread around a difficult start. (9)
10. Go swimming in combat hero's wake. (5)
11. Mistakenly retire a part of Africa. (7)
12. Performance rating poorly retimed. (7)
13. Mysterious fever after five. (5)
14. Thin, yet still fat around the step. (6,3)
16. A small Soo developed for research site. (3,6)
20. Source of Spring sound we hear in addition. (5)
22. Theoretical part of venom in Alaska. (7)
24. Passed by, making no ridge. (7)
26. TV character staying in fifth block? (5)
27. Those with reach impediment are drunk a lot? (9)
28. Constitutional protection shaped Arab mother's grit. (5,2,4,4)

## DOWN

1. New ideas on the back burner. (5)
2. Half of anti-aircraft fire in rat leads to dismissal. (7)
3. Artificial lures lend market strategy instruction. (9)
4. Utensils mixing paints around middle of month. (3,4)
5. One exercising power led wire in new direction. (7)
6. Book showing graduate embracing good grade. (5)
7. Strange oration found near Detroit. (7)
8. Publication about Croat pets. (9)
13. Free love tuner performing. (9)
15. Convention figure composed New Mexico oration. (9)
17. Adding Greek letters back on dynasty. (7)
18. Creole shake (malt out). (7)
19. Haircut in English translation. (7)
21. Front puts first person in war damage. (4,3)
23. Obscurity is strange thing. (5)
25. Secretaries' responsibilities? (5)

*Answers to last month's puzzle:*

W	H	I	T	E	W	A	T	E	R	A	C	E	S
A	D	R	D	X	L	H	P						
T	H	E	O	R	E	M	P	R	O	V	I	D	E
E	A	O	I	E	C	A	L						
R	E	T	I	L	O	R	C	H	A	R	N	E	L
G	E			A	T	T							
A	S	S	E	M	B	L	E	S	I	D	I	U	M
T				E				O					I
E	X	I	S	T	R	E	P	S	O	N	A	T	E
N	E	E									H	T	
E	A	R	D	R	U	M	A	I	R	F	O	I	L
N	O	I	A					L	E	R	R	E	
A	G	A	I	N	S	T	E	M	I	N	E	N	T
C	D	G	C					S	C	A	O		
T	E	S	T					W	H	I	T	E	H