THE TROUBLESOME WOMAN: A STUDY OF BARBARA PYM'S NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University.
DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at a University or other Tertiary Institution.

[Signature]

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the work of the women’s movement, of which I have been a member since the early 1970s. Although the debate has moved on from the binary feminism of that period into explorations of post-modern theory, I believe that feminist ideology from the past remains a valid tool for examining fiction. Women’s literature is a sustaining feature of many women’s lives and at times suffers from unrealistic demands to meet some ideal feminist criteria. The reprinting of Barbara Pym’s novels by Virago Press shows she has a place on a feminist book list.

The Barbara Pym Society sustains interest in Pym’s work through its annual conferences in Oxford and North America, meetings throughout the year in London and Boston, bi-annual production of the Society’s newsletter, Green Leaves and a web site. The Society’s members have been a constant source of encouragement throughout the writing of the thesis. In particular, Yvonne Cocking whom I met first in the Bodleian Library has been a wonderful friend and supporter. Jill Stevens, whom I met at a Pym Conference in Oxford, has been a true Pym friend with whom I have shared so much of the laughter associated with writing about Pym’s work. Alison Stratton’s sage advice was most helpful. Appreciation is also due to Hazel Holt who has placed the Barbara Pym papers in the Bodleian Library to make them available to a wide range of scholars with different views of Barbara Pym’s work.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers a revisionist account of Barbara Pym’s fiction written between 1935 and 1980. It is an analysis of Pym’s published work and unpublished manuscripts. The thesis contends that Pym’s writing has a significant feminist dimension in the way it represents women characters and challenges conventions about women’s role.

Pym was a consummate observer. It is argued that, consciously or unconsciously, she interpreted her observations from a feminist perspective. Unlike post-1970s writers, she was ill equipped to place her observations into a feminist framework. Their familiarity with a body of feminist theory gave their work recognisable markers through which to interpret their feminist understandings. Re-reading Pym’s work through some of those understandings demonstrates that, although she has no apparent feminist framework, many of the issues she raises and the way in which she approaches them, are feminist.

It is argued that Pym continues some of Jane Austen’s practices in her use of irony and mockery; confounding expectations of male and female behaviour; uttering truisms to highlight inconsistencies in behaviour; and using a conforming woman to contrast with a troublesome woman. This thesis argues that the arguments for a feminist re-reading of Austen’s work are legitimately applied to re-reading Pym’s texts. Until the 1970s, Pym also wrote subversive texts in inhospitable circumstances. The familiar conservative village setting or context for much of her fiction is a cover for the challenging exploration of the unequal nature of relationships between women and men. In the reception of Pym’s fiction, the village has often been mistaken for the whole interest of the work. This thesis contends that Pym’s techniques provided a cosy cover for representations of women and men that disturbed conventional pieties about marriage and women’s social role.

Pym would not describe herself as a feminist writer. However, Pym gives women’s stories credibility, supports the notion of spinsters who choose to remain unmarried and observes friendships between women and realises
them in her fiction. Pym’s work is examined against feminist criteria. She gives what I refer to as the “troublesome woman” a central place in her narratives; her work destabilises the argument that women have inherently different characteristics from men and that nurturing is central to women’s lives; binary feminist ideas are a recurring feature; and she features some aspects of the politics of difference. Pym’s work is also compared with Fay Weldon and Zoë Fairbairns’ acknowledged feminist work. Pym’s feminist approach culminates in her 1970s novels, *An Academic Question* and *Quartet in Autumn*. 
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ABBREVIATIONS

Barbara Pym’s novels are abbreviated throughout the text:

STG  Some Tame Gazelle
EW   Excellent Women
JP   Jane and Prudence
LTA  Less Than Angels
AGB  A Glass of Blessings
NFRL No Fond Return of Love
QA   Quartet in Autumn
AFGL A Few Green Leaves
AUA  An Unsuitable Attachment
CH   Crampton Hodnet
AAQ  An Academic Question
CS   Civil to Strangers

The following reference works are abbreviated in the footnotes:

ALTA A Lot to Ask: A Life of Barbara Pym
AVPE A Very Private Eye: An Autobiography in Diaries and Letters
ACB  Barbara Pym A Critical Biography
IW   Independent Women: The Function of Gender in the Novels of Barbara Pym
TWBP The World of Barbara Pym

The Journal of the Barbara Pym Society is abbreviated in the footnotes:

GL  Green Leaves
INTRODUCTION

This is a study of Barbara Pym's novels and short stories as feminist texts. It challenges a critical view that Pym’s work is conservative on gender issues: Pym consciously or unconsciously wrote from a feminist perspective. Pym’s social commentary on other social issues such as race and class reinforce the argument that Pym’s fiction is concerned with concepts of equality. In addition, her observations about anthropology question ethnocentricity and, in her last novel, she explores the essential nature of historical research. Her commentary on the relations between women and men is part of her oeuvre. In this thesis it is argued that the way Pym commentates on those relations is feminist. The way in which Pym uses observation to raise questions about ethnocentricity is a signal to the way in which she uses it as a tool in her exploration of other issues she then fictionalised.

I argue that in Pym’s case observation was integral to her work and replaced a dedication to theory and a feminist framework to produce feminist works. Her observation was particularly acute, unhampere by preconceptions, and enhanced by her unique perception of the world. Her work at the African Institute contributed to her understanding of observation as a valuable tool, leading her to comment that ‘this technique [studying in the field] can very well be applied to our own society to the things that go on in our everyday life’.¹ Pym’s overall theme, in which she explores the relative value of scientific and imaginary thought, identifies the status she gave to authorial observation. A persistent theme in Pym’s work is the conflict between the world of imagination and the world of scientific thought.

Each chapter will examine a group of texts organised chronologically in terms of date of composition. Chapter 4 is an exception. A Few Green

¹ MS Pym 115, fol.81.
Leaves,² Pym’s last novel, has particular relevance to the assessment of Pym’s success prior to the rejection of An Unsuitable Attachment ³ in 1961 and is discussed before the novels written in the 1960s and 70s.

While I argue that observation is a key to Pym’s feminist approach, relevant feminist theory is also applied to my examination of Pym’s novels and short stories. The underlying premise of Pym’s fiction is her belief that women and men are treated unequally, advancing men’s interests at the expense of women’s. However, Pym would not have suggested that she was a feminist, although at times her novels also suggest that she believed that men treated women badly. When asked about her attitude to men she claimed an approach based on dispassionate observation rather than dislike.⁴ However, her comment on men’s reaction to her books is enlightening: ‘Perhaps they (men) have a slight guilt feeling’⁵ Together with understanding how Pym came to her work, in this thesis it is recognised that to argue she produced feminist fiction it is essential to place Pym’s work in a feminist context.

Examination of Janet Radcliffe Richards’ contribution to feminist debate makes it apparent that feminist concepts provide the underlying foundation of Pym’s work. Richards distils the debate to the premise that feminism is the recognition that ‘women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex’.⁶ Pym’s fiction fits well into the ideas encompassed by Richards’ definition. Because Pym’s feminist statements are usually inferred it is possible to argue that her writing is not feminist. However, Richards’ definition discounts the idea that all feminist fiction must comply with every the feature apparent in the works of other feminist writers. Weldon’s trenchant debates and Fairbairns’ political approach are not essential to feminist writing. Their familiarity with feminist theory and use of a feminist framework in

⁴ MS Pym 96, fol. 104.
which to couch their fiction are valuable, but again not essential. In addition, this thesis demonstrates that some aspects Pym’s work shows a greater command of the important corollary to the challenge to marriage by feminist writers, the value of spinsterhood.

Pym’s fiction anticipates Richards’ understanding of women’s position and challenges the limitations imposed by the social injustice of women’s experience. Contrary to the idea that Pym’s fiction accepts women’s secondary position, with sad spinsters predominating, she places women, in particular spinsters, at the centre of her work. The nexus between women and domesticity is broken because women are central to Pym’s debate about fundamental issues. Pym also rebuts the assumption that there are inherently feminine qualities. Her narratives and characterisation question patriarchy. In particular, she anticipates the binary feminism of 1970s feminist fiction in many of her texts. Some aspects of the politics of difference, associated with 1980s fiction and non-fiction writing, are also detectable. In part, Pym’s work is part of a continuum on which her feminist ideas were adapted to suit the climate in which she wrote. There are numerous connections made between Jane Austen and Pym’s writing. It will be argued that Pym’s work is, in its subtlety, a continuation of a style perfected by Austen. However, while the style owes much to Austen, Pym’s ideas and the questions she raises also align her approach with later feminist writers, Fay Weldon and Zoe Fairbairns. Relevant examples from Austen, Weldon and Fairbairns’ texts are compared with Pym’s fiction.

Pym’s use of what I call the “the troublesome woman” motif, derived from the work of Judith Butler,7 Naomi Wolfe8 and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich,9 was essential to her delivery of feminist ideas. Although Pym did not use the term “Troublesome Woman” a quotation recorded in her Oxford diaries

demonstrates her concerns about conforming to social expectations. She writes 'If I had children I would let them run wild. People are too tame nowadays. That is why so few of them have charm [...] Why is everyone so much alike? Because we never follow our feelings'. Her further observation that 'Incidentally people may be very un-tame inwardly - one can seldom know' is relevant to my argument that Pym adopted an approach to her writing that, until the 1960s and 1970s, amounted to self-censorship.

Where Pym differs from Weldon and Fairbairns is in her typical concealment of the subversive nature of her observations. Two comments in her notes suggest that she was keen to present her material in a palatable manner. When she admonishes herself about 'laying it on too thick' or notes 'Don't let it become too much of a polemic! Prune and tone and reduce and refine' Pym is demonstrating her guardedness about what she has to say. She had her say, but did so within a cover of familiar village or pseudo-village features. The "village" novel is the vehicle for her feminist project. The camouflage is an important feature in the majority of Pym's novels written between 1929 and 1960. Many of the short stories demonstrate Pym's application to the issues that interested her, untempered by the continual polishing that influenced her novels. One novel from the early period stands alone, not necessarily because of re-polishing, but because of its premise. I argue that Pym modified the village imagery as a concealing device in Civil to Strangers because of the novel's conservatism on gender issues. In the 1960s, Pym adapted the village imagery in what appeared to be a more receptive climate. Her two 1970s novels, written in a climate sympathetic to feminist ideas, fully abandon the village device.

In this thesis, the following feminist theories are identified in Pym's work.

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10 MS Pym 101, fol. 175.
11 MS Pym 101, fol. 175.
12 MS Pym 98, fol. 120.
13 MS Pym 32, fol. v5.
The argument that there are inherently feminine qualities

The historical, but persistent background to feminist debate is the premise that women and men have inherently different, but complementary, qualities. An assumed hierarchy designates men's qualities as superior, the premise of patriarchy. A rebuttal can be found as early as the 1700s in Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. At their heart is recognition that women's inequality is unnatural rather than a legitimate consequence of men's (perceived) superiority.

Associated with the inherently feminine qualities argument is the assumption that nurturing is one of women's special aptitudes and should influence their domestic and public lives. Olive Schreiner mounts a challenge. She argues that women's nurturing role meets society's needs rather than being a thoughtful recognition of women's special qualities. Wollstonecraft also argues that, even if women recognise they are unsuited to expectations based on biology, the discriminatory challenges they encounter deter rebellion. The idea that a cohesive society depends on the unequal position of women and men, to women's detriment, survived Wollstonecraft and Schreiner's critical analysis. Where the nurture of society is not at issue in conditions such as war and economic downturn, the argument although muted remains intact. A general concern about the malaise of society or the family requires one group or member of the family to relinquish advantages to benefit the society or family. Inevitably, whatever the century, the group or individual assumed responsible for nurturing is female.

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17 Schreiner, p. 14.
Pym’s fiction refutes both accepted wisdoms that deny women equality. Her characters continually play with the notion of patriarchal power in the institutions with which she is familiar: the church, marriage, the university, and the professions. Although the Church of England was an integral part of Pym’s life, she makes it and its advocates part of her comic environment; the value of marriage to women is questioned; and the status of professional standing is undermined. Pym anticipates Weldon and Fairbairs’ fiction that also challenges patriarchal institutions.

Pym puts women’s traditional role under scrutiny, using expectations about women’s domestic function in two ways. Firstly, Pym’s narratives question domesticity as women’s natural province. Families are virtually childless and women disregard domestic tasks. Where women accept a nurturing role, they combine it with unconventional behaviour. When women appear to accept a gender-based role, their internal commentary undermines their appearance of conformity. On occasion men are observed enjoying domestic tasks. Their pleasure becomes a feminist point under Pym’s wry commentary that they would avoid such work if it suited them to do so. Pym’s depiction of some women’s domestic disinterest and incompetence undermines the certainty that domestic tasks are “women’s work”.

Pym reinforces her argument by reference to women who participate in work outside the domestic environment. The power of Pym’s rejection of the stereotypes that have influenced readings of her novels is demonstrated through the way in which she deals with women at work. Pym’s commitment to observation as a tool is relevant to understanding Pym’s feminist approach to her fiction. In particular, one assumed stereotype impinges on readings of her fictional spinsters. Their connection with performing unpaid work for men has been implicit, but I argue such a connection is suspect. While her early novels are set in the 1950s and early 1960s, Pym’s women characters are often in the part time and full time workforce. Pym takes three different observational

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18 For example, the characterisations of anthropologists in novels such as Less Than Angels (written 1953-54; first published 1955; London: Granada, 1980).
approaches to women and their work outside the home. Although she is consistently critical of anthropologists’ observations, the theme that runs through the novels is Pym’s reverence for the writer’s voice. I argue that Pym gives authorial observations validity and she uses them with purpose. Pym’s preoccupation with observation is integral to the way in which she writes about women and work. She gives some occupations greater significance because women are observed engaged in the tasks, giving the reader the opportunity to join with Pym’s observation of women working. When Pym shows women engaged in work she is rendering it “true”: there is evidence in the same way as she collects evidence for her writing. The writer, who is given status throughout Pym’s work, collects and presents the evidence. In the earlier novels, women are observed in conventional tasks. Later novels show women engaged in professional work. *Quartet in Autumn* reverts to depicting women in unidentified clerical work, but also observable in an office with work accoutrements of desks, papers and staff peripheral to the central characters.

Less identifiable as “true” is when women are only referred to in paid occupations. Reference, rather than observation, gives women at work less immediacy than when Pym, and the reader though her, observes them. Sometimes the work referred to becomes observable, and therefore authenticated, when women apply skills learnt from the past to current situations. For example, where Mildred recalls her work in censorship during the war and then uses her experience in dealing with the Napiers (*EW*) her role as a censor is authenticated. Edith Liversidge’s work during the war, initially only referred to, becomes observable and authenticated when she uses her past experience of sanitary services in making arranging for the facilities at the vicarage garden party (*STG*).

The only work that is not observed, and therefore unauthenticated, either in practice or by association, is the voluntary work it is assumed women will undertake to assist men in their careers. One of the few stereotypical features of Pym’s spinsters is the expectation that they will work on such an unpaid
basis. However, if observation is the key, and Pym’s utterances and fiction suggest that it is, it is essential to consider whether any voluntary work is actually observed.  

Pym’s commentary on women’s voluntary work for men is an instance of her use of the authorial dual voice. Although there is a lot of talk about it, there is no instance of a woman proofreading, making an index or typing for a man. Catherine is observed at her typewriter working on her own stories and magazine columns; Tom is also observed at his typewriter typing his thesis. Although Tom suggests that Deidre could replace Catherine as his typist there is no evidence that either woman does any typing for him (LTA). Miss Clovis assumes that Mildred will be assisting Everard Bone with his indexing (LTA). Mildred also wryly comments that she will be expected to do so (EW), her dual voice connecting with Pym’s authorial dual voice to reinforce the invisibility, and unlikelihood, of her undertaking any such tasks.

Pym undertook secretarial work for Henry Harvey in his preparation of his thesis and Hazel Holt, Pym’s Literary Executor, refers to this work as the basis of Pym’s fictional accounts. However, Pym was paid for her work. Although she found the payment inadequate, her work at the Africa Institute was also poorly paid. Throughout the novels, Pym’s ironic approach to voluntary work for men also ensures that its exploitative nature is understood.

Pym depicts women in familiar domestic environments, but her method also undermines the possibility that her work is anti-feminist. She conflates domestic behaviour and professional work, undercutting the disparity between women and men’s traditional roles. Less Than Angels provides particularly strong evidence of the technique Pym used to demonstrate the similarity in domestic and professional tasks. The novel includes domestic and professional

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19 Ironically, the only observed “voluntary” work undertaken by a woman to assist a man’s career is when Caro Grimstone steals the Stillingfleet Papers for her husband (AAQ).
20 Holt, ALTA, p.16.
21 Pym undertook similar work for Henry Harvey when she prepared his thesis in her 1936 summer vacation. She was unimpressed with her payment of 30 shillings a week for what she describes as ‘working all through the night’, MS Pym 103, fol.52. Nevertheless, she did not work in a voluntary capacity as so many of her characters suggest is what they have done, (VFRL, p.13, p. 90) or anticipate (EW, pp. 237-238).
22 Holt, ALTA4, p. 139.
observers. Pym equates anthropologists’ work with women’s domestic observations of neighbours. Reinforcing the similarity between the amateurs and professionals is speculation about the similarity of domestic behaviour and the subjects of fieldwork.

In addition, Pym is not alone in depicting a personal and domestic picture of women’s experience of discrimination. Weldon and Fairbairns are profoundly interested in women’s personal lives and they are considered openly feminist in intent and execution.

Centring women in the narrative

Centring women in narratives is common in romantic fiction. It is also a hallmark of feminist literature. Romantic novels focus on developing relationships which end in marriage for two central characters. Feminist writers question women’s lack of independence and highlight men’s economic and social advantages. In the 1970s, non-fiction writing assertively wrote women back into history. Two strands of thought influenced the work produced by feminist women historians and sociologists. They sometimes reworked old stories to give women a place; more frequently, studies gave women predominance or featured only women. The significance of the activity during and after the 1970s is that women’s stories showed their significant movement outside the social limitations presumed to be relevant to them and their expectations. Sheila Rowbotham’s work is typical of this aspect of feminist theory.23

In conjunction with rewriting history, feminist writers located women at the centre of their fictional narratives. Similarly, women and women’s concerns are pivotal to Pym’s novels and short stories. It has been suggested that Pym’s work is about women seeking marriage, who by remaining spinsters, are unfulfilled. However, like Weldon and Fairbairns, Pym rebuts the fairytale image of marriage. She consistently depicts women in narratives that challenge romantic

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ideas about women and men’s relationships. She portrays women who question the difference in power between women and men and aspire to control their environment. Pym challenges the essential aspects of a romantic novel. Ellen M. Tsargaris’ analysis supports the view that Pym created the opposite of romantic works. She argues that Pym subverts romance. Pym made the specific claim that her work was unromantic when she reacted to the publisher’s title for *No Fond Return of Love*, stating ‘My novels are not about love - not that kind of love.

Pym uses several anti-romantic techniques to challenge the claim of romanticism in her novels. Characters such as Wilmet (*AGB*), Prudence (*JP*) and Leonora (*TSDD*) who appear romantic in dress or behaviour incorporate negative characteristics that undermine their romantic image. Pym also rejects the romantic device in which marriage closes the narrative. Although *Some Tame Gazelle* ends with a marriage, its portrayal is unromantic. In the same novel, proposals are rejected in comic scenes and spinsterhood is valorised. Pym portrays marriage as practical rather than romantic in novels such as *Less Than Angels*, and uses it to destabilise gender expectations and class barriers in *An Unsuitable Attachment*. Unlike Weldon and Fairbairns Pym does not focus on strong images of marriage breakdown in her published work. However, in some of her work, published and unpublished, it is implied. *No Fond Return of Love* depends upon a divorce to accomplish the two main characters’ possible marriage; affairs are acknowledged in *Jane and Prudence* and assumed in *Excellent Women*. In other instances, divorce is excised from the published work, but is in the drafts. For example, the original draft of *An Unsuitable

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24 *The Subversion of Romance in the Novels of Barbara Pym* (Wisconsin: Popular Press, University of Wisconsin Press, 1988)
Attachment features three sisters, the older one “living in sin” and another divorced.30 Pym rarely depicts a happily married woman. As a result, the institution of marriage is constantly under challenge. While Pym’s married characters in the published works would not contemplate divorce or express profound grief they are depicted as dissatisfied. The muted nature of the women’s behaviour and inarticulate expression of their concerns are more compelling than the depictions in novels readily seen as feminist in that they so appositely reflect the theory in Friedan’s seminal work, The Feminine Mystique.31 Pym also shows the converse of the unhappy married woman; unmarried women appear in happy relationships with friends of both genders.

Also undermining the argument that Pym’s work is romantic is the way she draws upon the unromantic heroine. In doing so, Pym adopts Austen’s portrayal of Catherine Morland in Northanger Abbey,32 which established a sympathetic pattern for this figure. In Pym’s work, the unromantic heroine is one aspect of the troublesome woman motif, identified in characters such as Belinda Bede (STG), Mildred Lathbury (EW) and Dulcie Mainwaring (NFRL). Another recognisable Pym heroine whose image is unromantic is the attractive but mature spinster, such as Harriet Bede (STG) or Leonora Eyre (TSDD). The unromantic fiancé, such as Mary Beamish (AGB) or unpleasant fiancé such as Allegra Gray (EW) reaffirms Pym’s work as the antithesis to romance.

I argue that the women to whom Pym gives a central place are different from those in romance novels. Women in romances have a single, simplistic story. Pym tells women’s, predominantly spinsters’, stories in a range of narratives. She gives a significant place to the pedestrian rather than romantic aspects of marriage and confirms the value of spinsters’ lives, contrasting them positively with married women’s lives. The stories highlight married women’s questions about their position in marriage. When married women move

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outside their marriage it is an escape as suggested by Jane Cleveland’s enthusiasm for a trip to London ‘to buoy her up’ (JP, p.52). She even wants to leave her home to meet Prudence in pedestrian circumstances at a railway junction (JP, p.87).

The subtlety with which Pym treats her subject does not detract from the essential similarity of her concerns with those strikingly presented by Weldon and Fairbairns. Giving women and their stories a central role in unromantic novels, making them the “heroes” is a feminist approach. Further, Pym works with broad themes which are articulated by women characters, taking them out of a purely domestic role into interaction with a wider community. Pym’s attention to the social milieu in which she placed her narratives also suggests that at least by inference, women characters interact with the debates which were taking place in academic and popular journals. A specific instance of this phenomenon is Caro Grimstone’s reference to the reading which influences her (AAQ, p.4). Most powerfully, Pym devises narratives that deprive men of their familiar central role.33

**Binary feminism**

Binary feminist theory provided the major 1970s ideological background to Weldon and Fairbairns’ work and Pym’s *An Academic Question*,34 *Quartet in Autumn*35 and *A Few Green Leaves*.36 Binary feminism is most closely associated with the term “patriarchy” which directly links women’s inequality with men’s superior access to power, asserting that every feature of society supports a predetermined position based on gender. It is argued that as patriarchy benefits men they have no incentive for change, and some women are unwittingly (and others intentionally) implicated in supporting patriarchy.

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33 See Margery Hourihan, *Deconstructing The Hero* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). Hourihan analyses the dualism inherent in constructing a hero which necessarily places women on the inferior side of the construct (pp.15-16). I argue that Pym’s positive construction of women in this binary lends itself to a feminist interpretation.


36 Pym.
In the 1970s, feminist writers were enabled in their writing by the plethora of debate associated with binary feminism. They produced strong critiques of men and their behaviour without undermining their opportunities to publish. Pym did not have this advantage and her binary feminist approach is accomplished through comedy and irony. Pym’s most obvious response to binary feminism is the positive construction of women. She promotes their status while undermining men’s, a feature apparent in all her novels and short stories. By the 1970s, Pym was directly addressing contemporary concerns with women’s role in her novels.

Although Marxists, liberals and radicals were part of the thriving debate, they agreed that patriarchy was responsible for discrimination against women educationally, politically and economically. Patriarchy was the primary underpinning to fiction accepted as feminist throughout the seventies and remains the basis for many feminist novels today. Conversely, the binary approach to ideology, under which many of the more pessimistic views of women’s condition were developed, did not prevail everywhere. During the later 1970s and 1980s fiction and non-fiction writers were concerned with the influence of race, ethnicity and class. Sometimes Pym located elements of binary feminism together with post-binary feminist ideas. As a result, while gender is the motivating force in An Unsuitable Attachment, Pym also observes and comments on class and cultural differences, which anticipated the politics of difference.

Friedan established the environment in which women were encouraged to articulate their dissatisfaction with being housewives and mothers. Underlying their dissatisfaction was the emphasis on emotional rather than economic remuneration for their nurturing role. Women were gratified to find that, instead of being alone with their concerns, other women had similar feelings. Although working-class women had always been in paid work, married middle class women began to consider paid work as an option to the ennui and, at times hardship, they experienced because their lack of economic independence. Pym consistently makes it clear that economic independence is an essential part of spinsters’ ability to reject marriage proposals. She also illustrates the negative aspects of domestic life for some women. In part, Pym’s familiar
depictions of women who dislike domestic responsibilities suggest awareness of the questions raised by Friedan. Pym’s characters such as Jane Cleveland (JP) demonstrated her understanding of the issues before they were articulated as part of the ideology of the organised women’s movement. The short story, “The Funeral”, 37 and An Academic Question, which Pym wrote in the 1970s, suggest that she was fully cognisant of the underpinnings of the theory, gained from observance and personal analysis, if not theory.

The Politics of Difference

By the 1980s, post-modernist theorists’ new ideas moved the debate away from patriarchy as a prime focus. Post-modern feminist readings recognised the value of women’s experiences, rather than diminishing women to a single experience of woman based on a relationship to man. Such recognition represents a major challenge to the feminist theory that relies on establishing the importance of patriarchy, in which women’s interests are seen as necessarily the same and therefore opposed to those of men. There was a blurring of differences based on gender alone so that debate on the contribution of race, ethnicity and class and their influence on the relations between women and women as well as relations between women and men became accepted practice. As well, feminist writers began producing negative portrayals of some women characters. At the same time, they ensured that they did not impair the overall feminist nature of their fiction.

An Academic Question breaks new ground for Pym in her open declaration of feminist ideas. The major story line and characters grapple with 1970s feminism. However, the portrayal of one character in particular suggests that Pym was aware of the complexities of the way in which some women experience the economics of traditional marriage. Unlike most of Pym’s women characters who work in some capacity, Kitty Jeffreys (AAQ) is conspicuous in doing none. The context, a 1970s novel in which the central

37 MS Pym 92, fols 200-218. See Chapter 5 for a discussion of this short story.
character debates the value of paid work, suggests that Pym was depicting the type of woman contemporaneously described by Morgan who argues that:

The ideal model [in a male dominated society] for a woman is to be surrounded by hypocritical homage and estranged from all real work, spending idle hours primping and preening, obsessed with conspicuous consumption, and limiting life’s functions to simply a sex role [...] A woman who stays at home, caring for children and the house leads an extremely sterile existence. She must lead her entire life as a satellite to her mate. He goes out into society and brings back a little piece of the world for her. His interests and his understandings of the world become her own and she cannot develop herself as an individual, having been reduced to only a biological function. This kind of woman leads a parasitic existence that can aptly be described as “legalized prostitution.”

*An Academic Question* in which this strand of feminism appears is discussed in Chapter 6.

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The Troublesome Woman

Pym’s early work was circumscribed by the conservative context in which she wrote, from 1930 to the late 1950s. In the early 1960s she changed her approach and this is discussed in Chapter 5. In writing her 1970s novels Pym was able to take advantage of the possibilities offered through the burgeoning of feminist ideas. From her earliest to latest work Pym used the troublesome woman to raise difficult questions about women’s position in a patriarchal society. Women who flout convention appear in all Pym’s novels, from her first full-length publication, *Some Tame Gazelle*, to those most likely to

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endorse the troublesome woman, the post-1970s work. Pym’s central protagonists overtly or covertly defy convention when they question established ideas; create situations that discomfort their companions, society and/or readers; and take up space in the narrative usually given to men in narratives other than romantic works. Their depiction is in keeping with the troublesome woman described by Judith Butler as creating ‘a sense of trouble’.

Miss Doggett articulates Butler’s description of the troublesome woman when she ponders the effect of Jessie Morrow on her audience. Miss Doggett’s thoughts in “So, Some Tempestuous Morn” (CS, pp.353-367) illuminates the unease conventional women feel about troublesome women:

> It wasn’t that she was unsatisfactory, exactly; there was nothing one could put one’s finger on. It was these remarks she let fall, these unsuitabilities. Were they perhaps clues to what went on in her thoughts, her mind? It was a relief to turn from the darkness of her companion’s mind.’ (CS, p.357).

Butler’s statement that ‘The very same behaviours (whether they are masculine or feminine) have quite different personal and social significances when acted out by the male subject on the one hand and the female subject on the other’ is also relevant to Pym’s approach. Her women characters function in strictly defined social circles and patriarchal institutions such as the church, community, workplaces and the family. In these environments, in the period in which she wrote and taking into account gender differences, Pym’s women are as troublesome as those in novels that are readily acknowledged as feminist.

Ulrich’s title, Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History, suggests that women must refuse to follow social convention if they want to be recognised. She refers to the re-reading of Austen’s texts as feminist and describes Virginia Woolf’s literary contribution to the badly behaved woman, the troublesome

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39 Butler, p.vii.
40 Butler, p.145.
woman who is also a subject of this thesis. Naomi Wolf\textsuperscript{41} similarly reflects upon women designated troublesome, when she refers to "The dragons of niceness". She suggests that rules about what it is to be feminine infect women's ability to make their demands heard and respected. She also acknowledges that some women are also complicit in women's secondary position. She says:

Though its struggles have gone mostly illuminated, the developing female psyche […] follows a quest towards full womanhood. One passage involves learning how to steal one's own female power from under the gaze of the monsters of femininity. We call these, half-ironically, the Dragons of Niceness.

Under the more direct, fire-breathing monsters of men's tales, these behemoths are soft-spoken and passive aggressive. As they manicure their sharp claws and groom their glistening scales, they breathe, \textit{sotto voce}, an ongoing commentary at the woman who tries to journey past them to reach the treasure stores of her authority, 'Pushing hard, aren't we? Maybe a little too hard? Not nice,' they mutter. No-one will like you.'

'Don't ask for the moon.'
'Treasure? You want your treasure?'
'All that treasure?'
'She says it's hers.'
'She should offer it around to others first.'
'How selfish!'
'How rude!'
'Thinks she's awfully special doesn't she?\textsuperscript{42}

Wolf's quote reflects a commonly held view "that women are their own worst enemy". There are women who are complicit in women's inequality and

\textsuperscript{41} Wolf, pp.250-251.
\textsuperscript{42} Wolf, pp.250-251.
Daphne Watson argues that Pym’s writing is as guilty of propounding anti-feminist ideas as fairytales.\(^{43}\) She believes that Pym’s women characters are ‘diminished by a sense of hollowness’.\(^{44}\) Watson suggests that Pym’s novels reinforce gender roles, in which women are encouraged to accept patriarchy because ‘alternative modes of being [are] rarely if ever held up to scrutiny’.\(^{45}\) She argues that the comfort in Pym’s work is endemic.\(^{46}\) However, I argue that the “comfort” Ulrich sees in the novels can be explained by the re-reading of Pym’s work undertaken in this thesis. I contend that the “comfort” in the novels is a facade. It can also be argued that Pym’s women characters, rather than being “hollow” have a strong sense of play in relation to the patriarchal institutions they confront and that their internal lives, as well as their observable non-conformity, provide visions and examples of alternative models of living.

Fairbairns has questioned my use of the term troublesome woman. She says:

> For me feminism is a response to patriarchy […] a structure that is in some cases quite deliberately constructed to disadvantage women. Men can gain advantage of women at women’s expense and that is troublesome to women. Although I see what you’re saying in regard to the troublesome woman, there is a limit to the extent to which I want to go down that road of suggesting that it’s just about men as the mainstream and women fighting against it. Sometimes it’s just about women wanting reasonable human rights and men, quite rightly seeing that as a threat.\(^{47}\)

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\(^{44}\) Watson, p. 54.
\(^{45}\) Watson, p. 11.
\(^{46}\) Watson, p. 12.
Fairbairns’ statement illuminates the difficulties in addressing women’s refusal to conform and negative interpretations of their behaviour. Fairbairns correctly suggests that patriarchy disadvantages women and their reaction to the conventions it upholds is understandable. It is also difficult to deny that patriarchy relies on the understanding that men and the conventions that support them are the mainstream. Their cause is valid but women’s challenge to convention draws them necessarily into a fight against the mainstream as dictated by patriarchy. Women’s refusal to accept patriarchal constraints on their freedom in their efforts to develop their world to their liking is not a particularly dramatic or violent demand. Pym’s women’s behaviour is also neither dramatic nor violent. Nevertheless, they are “troublesome women” who raise difficult questions about sexual inequality and its consequences. They are troublesome in a patriarchal society in which inequality is not only acceptable but also reinforced by institutions that are considered a bulwark. Men’s status relies on women accepting a subservient role in institutions such as marriage, professions and the church – the institutions that Pym’s central women characters question. Feminist writers, in giving a voice to women’s rebellion, validate their demands and concerns. Pym, in particular, writes spinster and women in conventional occupations and roles into the mainstream, while questioning its values. It is the “threat” experienced by men, and women who believe that patriarchy serves them well, that creates an impression of women’s rebellion as troublesome.

The trouble that arises when women’s traditional roles are questioned provides a valuable framework for examining Pym’s work because, wherever women move outside the boundaries considered appropriate in the historical context in which they operate, they are seen as troublesome. One of the boundaries Pym has her women push against is marriage, which like trouble, is a constant in women’s lives. Whether they are seeking it, avoiding it, involved in it or deprived of it, marriage is used as a way to define women’s status.
Method

Manifestly, Pym addressed the crux of the feminist issue: relationships between women and men. Further probing of her material demonstrates that Pym’s emphasis is on the inequality of these relationships. Particular attention is given to the role Pym gives spinsters. In particular, their questioning the value of marriage defied the dominant beliefs about marriage that informed the environment in which Pym wrote until the 1970s.

Pym’s negative or comic portrayals of men, which undermine their assumed superiority in a patriarchal binary, are explored. In addition, the visibly positive depiction of women (except Allegra Gray and Leonora Eyre to whom Pym’s approach has a different feminist explanation) provides an uncomplicated argument that Pym’s writing is feminist. More importantly, in the context of developing a feminist analysis of Pym’s work a close textual analysis of the novels and short stories against the feminist criteria established against feminist theory proves a useful tool in establishing the substance rather than appearance of Pym’s ideas.

The novels are discussed in the chronological order in which they were written.\textsuperscript{48} An exception is \textit{A Few Green Leaves}, Pym’s last novel. This novel explores the overarching theme of the village images Pym uses to conceal her subversive ideas. Because of its relevance to Pym’s work before 1961, the village theme in \textit{A Few Green Leaves} is treated in Chapter 4.

Liddell considered that Pym’s novels fell into two categories, with \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment} serving as an inferior last novel of the Canon.\textsuperscript{49} Larkin, as discussed in Chapter 5, supports this view.\textsuperscript{50} Grouping of the novels in this thesis demonstrates an alternative way of viewing Pym’s work. Although it is

\textsuperscript{48} The novels were published in a different order from that in which they were written after \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment} was rejected in 1963.
\textsuperscript{49} Robert Liddell, \textit{A Mind at Ease: Barbara Pym and Her Novels} (London: Peter Owen, 1989), p. 106.
\textsuperscript{50} Philip Larkin, Foreword, \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment}, p.7.
possible to divide the novels chronologically between two styles, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, rather than being the end of one era in Pym’s work, is in reality the beginning of her less subtle approach.\(^{51}\) It is argued that *No Fond Return of Love* comes at the end of Pym’s early novels, is inferior to the others in this group and provides the last work in which Pym used the village cover to its full capacity. The argument that the publisher’s negative response to the first novel in Pym’s new style could in part be related to disappointment with *No Fond Return of Love* and to the changing nature of her work is discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

Pym’s novels are discussed in groupings that carry a particular argument and these fall naturally into the chapters described below.

Chapter 1 sets the biographical context of Pym’s work. It provides a brief overview of her family and Oxford lives, with attention to how, in the terms of this thesis, they impact on Pym’s writing. Also referred to is the literary context in which she wrote. Particular mention is made of the influences of some writers, including Jane Austen.

Pym’s attention to spinsters, apparent from her first novels, is considered in Chapter 2. Pym’s validation of the troublesome woman as spinster in *Some Tame Gazelle; Jane and Prudence*; and the more sophisticated *Excellent Women* is examined. *Civil to Strangers*\(^{52}\) is referred to briefly in comparison with the other novels of this period. *Crampton Hodnet*\(^{53}\) although chronologically relevant to Chapter 2, is more usefully discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to *An Academic Question*, Pym’s 1970s university novel.

Chapter 3 follows Pym’s continuing success after the publication of *Some Tame Gazelle* and the feminist ideology associated with her most “churchy”

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\(^{51}\) Annette Weld also associates *An Unsuitable Attachment* with Pym’s later works. She categorises the novels as: the comedies (*Crampton Hodnet* to *Excellent Women*), the self-confident novels (*Jane and Prudence* to *No Fond Return of Love*) and the “problematical”, beginning with *An Unsuitable Attachment* Annette Weld, *Pym and the Novel of Manners* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992) p. 47.


novel – *A Glass of Blessings*.\(^{54}\) It is compared with the feminism exposed though her most anthropological novel, *Less Than Angels* and the domestication of anthropological method in *No Fond Return of Love*. The broader issues related to imagination and science (including the conflation of professional and domestic activity) that Pym covers in her seemingly small canvas works are also a focus of Chapter 3.

In Chapter 5 Pym’s most difficult works, *An Unsuitable Attachment* “the rejected novel” and *The Sweet Dove Died*, \(^{55}\) which were not published until after her rehabilitation, are discussed together with unpublished short stories, “A Letter From My Love”, \(^{56}\) “A Vicar Floating By”, \(^{57}\) “The Funeral” and “The Rich Man in His Castle”.\(^{58}\)

Chapter 6 covers Pym’s new success with her two strongest social commentaries, *An Academic Question* and *Quartet in Autumn*.\(^{59}\) *An Academic Question* is briefly compared with *Crampton Hodnet* to demonstrate Pym’s stronger approach to a feminist discovery of academic life, infidelity and women’s position in an acknowledged patriarchal society.

### The main critical approaches to Pym

Pym’s writing has been associated with over thirty writers.\(^{60}\) Of these, the most relevant claim she is following precedents established by writers such as Jane Austen, Anthony Trollope\(^{61}\) and Charlotte M. Yonge.\(^{62}\) She is coupled with

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\(^{56}\) MS Pym 92-94, fols 262-77.

\(^{57}\) MS Pym 92-94, fols 24-38.

\(^{58}\) MS Pym 92-94, fols 76-117, 121 – 131.


\(^{61}\) Kate Browder Heberlein’s comparison of Pym and Anthony Trollope’s work recognises Pym’s
her contemporaries such as E.F. Benson, Angela Thirkell and E.M. DelafIELD; and compared with modern writers, such as Salley Vickers, Elizabeth Jolley, and Jane GardAM. George Soule compares Pym with Anita Brookner, Margaret Drabble and Iris Murdoch, saying that the novels ‘have taught me about art, about how people live, about the range of ideas people can entertain, and about what possibilities life holds or it does not hold. I think these authors are great artists.’

The author against whom Pym has been evaluated as part of Pym’s critical reception from the start of her career is Jane Austen. Reviewers of Excellent Women referred to the novel revealing ‘flashes of insight into female character worthy of Jane Austen’ and the News Chronicle reported ‘We needn’t bring Jane Austen into it, but Miss Pym is writing in a great tradition, and she knows it’. Published novels refer to Pym with repetitions of the Hibernia quote: ‘her sense of brilliance is a direct inheritance from Jane Austen’ and Rowse’s remark that Pym is ‘The Jane Austen de nos jours’. The connections between Austen and Pym’s writing are developed in Chapter 1.

Material related to Pym and her novels burgeoned post-1984 when it was noted that ‘no book-length work of criticism had been published about her […] and fewer than five scholarly articles […] had been published in scholarly

unique treatment of women in her fiction, ‘Barbara Pym and Anthony Trollope: Communities of Active Participation’, Pacific Coast Philology, 19 1/2 November, 1984 (95-100).
62 Barbara J. Dunlap ‘Reading Charlotte M. Yonge into the Novels of Barbara Pym’ in eds. Frauke Elisabeth Lenckos and Ellen. J. Miller All This Reading The Literary World of Barbara Pym (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickson University Press, 2003).
66 Soule, pp.xii – xiii.
68 Holt, ALTA, p.160.
journals'. By 1992, there were no fewer than sixteen books and more than seventy articles as well as dissertations and numerous reviews of her novels in existence. Pym's work and biography were variously analysed. Now, a large number of books and articles has been published and theses written. The most recent full-length study, of the six early novels, is Orna Raz's *Social Dimensions in the Novels of Barbara Pym 1949-1963: The Writer as Hidden Observer.* Harrison Solow's *Felicity and Barbara Pym,* argues that Pym's work is a valuable literary source. Solow's method is similar to Weldon's approach to Austen and her value to literary endeavour in *Letters to Alice On First Reading Jane Austen.* The improvement in Pym's literary standing was not universally welcomed. A.S. Byatt continued her early criticism of Pym, finding the 'revival of interest in Pym not just pretentious but unhealthy'. She asserted that Pym 'should not be considered against such authors as Iris Murdoch or Muriel Spark or even Fay Weldon'.

One body of work mounts the conventional argument that that 'readers find the goodness in the novels comforting' or as Joan Gordon argues, Pym's work 'values humility, community and even a kind of modest miracle'. Pym's attention to the church and its personnel, from the clergy to the "excellent women" who do the flowers encourages familiarity and comfort. Isabel Stanley concentrates on 'The Anglican Clergy in the Novels of Barbara

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72 Wyatt-Brown, *ACB*, p.132.
74 Harrison Solow, *Felicity and Barbara Pym* (Gwynedd: Cinnamon Press, 2010).
76 A.S. Byatt's public role as a critic of Pym began when she asked: 'Why, therefore this sudden blossoming of critical attention to Pym's œuvre? [...] why the PhD dissertations, the academic conferences, the narrative di Barbara Pym, "Text and Subtext in the Novels of Barbara Pym," etc?'.
77 Byatt, p. 268.
78 Byatt, p. 269.
Pym’, likening them to Austen’s clergy.\textsuperscript{81} Pym’s religious ideas expressed through her work have been seen variously as social commentary by Raz and old fashioned by Diane Benet.\textsuperscript{82}

Pym is also seen as a comic writer, Holt reporting that readers have laughed aloud in the Bodleian while reading \textit{Crampton Hodnet}.\textsuperscript{83} Mason links Pym’s writing with that of Molière and Beckett,\textsuperscript{84} and Bruce Jacobs sees her as a satirist.\textsuperscript{85} Annette Weld links Pym and Austen as typical of the comedy of manners oeuvre ‘aligned in this traditional form with a unique group of novelists – masters like Austen, Trollope, and Waugh, as well as lesser lights E.F. Benson, Elizabeth Taylor and Kingsley Amis’.\textsuperscript{86} Jacobs suggests that there is an ‘anti-intellectual strain in Pym’s satire’,\textsuperscript{87} basing his criticism on Pym’s fictional accounts of libraries. I suggest that Pym’s approach to libraries was part of her strategy to conflate the professional workplace to a domestic equivalent as part of her feminist method.

Nardin also commends the quality of Pym’s humour.\textsuperscript{88} Judy Little\textsuperscript{89} recognises that Pym’s irony subverts patriarchal language and Orphia Jane Allen sees Pym’s ‘deflation of feminine myths at the heart of her comedy’.\textsuperscript{90} Glynn Fisichelli\textsuperscript{91} suggests that Pym used comedy to deal with her own experiences as well as those of her fictional characters when she notes that ‘In Pym’s early

\textsuperscript{81} Isabel B. Stanley (unpublished doctoral dissertation University of Tennessee, Ann Arbor:UMI, 1990)
\textsuperscript{85} Bruce Jacobs, \textit{Elements of Satire in the Novels of Barbara Pym} (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1988) p. 43.
\textsuperscript{86} Weld, p.6.
\textsuperscript{87} Jacobs, \textit{Elements of Satire}, p.81.
\textsuperscript{88} Jane Nardin, \textit{Barbara Pym}, (Boston: Twayne, 1985).
\textsuperscript{90} Orphia Jane Allen, \textit{Barbara Pym: A Writing Life} (New Jersey: Metuchen; London: Scarecrow) p. 224.
notebooks there are traces of morbidity turned to comic effect'. Rather than morbidity, Rhoda Sherwood suggests that Pym’s work not only ‘contemplates the benefits of sisterhood through Some Tame Gazelle’ but also ‘transforms some conventions of romantic comedy in order to make her point that a woman may be happier with her sister than with a man’. Like Fischelli, she concludes that ‘Pym uses romantic conventions [...] Pym’s is a vision of warm, satisfying sisterhood, a vision that acts as an antidote to the treatment of sisterhood by Godwin, Trollope, Drabble, and West’. Both approaches to the romantic nature of Pym’s work contrasts with my interpretation of Pym’s use of romantic conventions to challenge them. As discussed, Tsagaris also approaches the supposed romance in Pym’s work as the opposite of romantic in her exposure of the way in which Pym subverts romance in her work, in a feminist approach to the romantic novel.

There has been some debate on the feminist nature of Pym’s work. Margaret J.M. Edgell’s ‘What Shall We Do With Our Old maids? Pym and The Woman Question’ deals with Pym’s novels as a protest on behalf of spinsters. An oblique reference to feminism is made by Everett when she describes Pym’s novels as ‘romantic anti-romances’. Doreen Alvarez Saar suggests that Pym’s novels have a hidden message ‘underneath their charming surface [...] a strong criticism of how society treats women’. In her review of An Unsuitable Attachment Penelope Lively wondered ‘that the feminists have never claimed Barbara Pym’.

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92 Fischelli, p. 122.
94 Sherwood, p. 23.
96 Tsagaris.
98 Barbara Everett, ‘The Pleasures of Poverty’ in IW, p. 18.
99 ‘Ironic from a Female perspective: A Study of the Early Novels of Barbara Pym’ West Virginia University of Philological Papers 33 1987 (68-75).
100 Quoted in Allen, p. 52.
Janice Rossen’s *Independent Women* was designed to include feminist work\(^1\) and Barbara Bowman recognises the subversive nature of Pym’s women characters’ questioning ‘conventional notions of sexual roles’.* She argues that although ‘they are hardly radicals who protest loudly against the dominant culture’s expectations’*\(^2\) ‘on the scale of the miniaturized novel of manners’*\(^3\) Pym’s characters challenge expectations. Other commentators who see some aspects of feminist writing in Pym’s work are Robert J. Graham, Joseph Epstein, Barbara Brothers and Kristina G. Kelly. Graham makes a crucial feminist point when he recognises that Pym’s novels question the value of marriage to women and acknowledges that ‘Pym’s married women do not fare well: marriage gives them no intellectual stimulation and their husbands patronize them’.*\(^4\) Epstein states: ‘Pym is not the usual feminist, but she implies that women are superior to men, who appear in her novels as bumbling and selfish, but amusing’.*\(^5\) Brothers *assumes* Pym’s feminism when she comments ‘Like others, Pym attacks the myths that have imprisoned women and the novelists who have perpetuated these myths’.*\(^6\) She recognises the subversive nature of Pym’s rejection of romantic love as necessary to women’s fulfilment.*\(^7\) Kelly’s paper ‘Don’t Get Too Comfortable: The Pain of Idleness under Cover of Sleek Wealth’,*\(^8\) is a study of *A Glass of Blessings* which raises feminist issues.

Other commentators discuss whether Pym’s writing can be feminist when women appear to define themselves in terms of their relationships with men.

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\(^1\) Rossen, *IW*, p. xi.

\(^2\) Barbara Bowman, ‘Pym’s Subversive Subtext: Private Irony and Shared Detachment’ in Rossen, *IW* p. 82.

\(^3\) Bowman, in Rossen, *IW*, p. 84.

\(^4\) Bowman, in Rossen, *IW*, p. 84.


\(^6\) Joseph Epstein, ‘Miss Pym and Mr Larkin’ *Commentary* July 1986 (38-46).

\(^7\) Thomas F. Stanley, ed., *Women Victimised by Fiction: Living and Loving in the Novels of Barbara Pym Twentieth Century Women novelists* (Ottawa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books, 1982), pp. 61-80, [n.p.].

\(^8\) Quoted in Soule, p. 427.

Katherine Anne Ackley suggests that marriage is an important aspect of women’s lives in Pym’s novels as ‘most have accepted the prevailing social belief that a woman is not fulfilled until she is married’.110 However, her counter-point that women who are not “desperate” do not accept marriage on any terms111 recognises feminist aspects of Pym’s work. Margaret C. Broadbent suggests that ‘The Pym woman [is] a middle aged spinster leading an unexciting life, usually as an “excellent woman” about a church, as a minor professional, or as an office worker. Although open to possibilities, they are ‘unfulfilled and lonely even if they are actually married’.112 She recognises that unmarried women are seen as inferior to married women, but suggests this is the result of their being ‘perhaps too self-centred’.113 Carol Wilkinson Witney114 suggests that fear rather than feminism is a crucial element in Pym’s portrayal of conflict between women and men. She refers to Pym’s women as either formidable, as like Esther Clovis (LTA) they are not looking for a man; or others as terrifying as they act forcefully to secure one!115 In her comparison of Pym, Jean Rhys and Anita Brookner116 Rajini Walia states that Pym (together with the other writers) has no ‘consciously formulated feminist commitment’.117 She is concerned that the novels include no ‘career minded women’.118 However, she acknowledges that ‘the novels […] mirror the process of the emerging empowerment within women, through their growing awareness and ability for appraising and re-envisioning the concept of the self and personal identity’.119 Liddell acknowledges that Pym’s treatment of weddings is casual, but does not consider its implications. He goes on to suggest

111 Ackley, The Novels of Barbara Pym, p. 38.
113 Broadbent.
114 ‘Women Are So terrifying These days: Fear between The Sexes’ in The World of Barbara Pym, p.427.
115 Witney, p. 450
117 Walia, viii.
118 Walia, p. 77.
119 Walia, p. viii.
that women are “huntresses”; they are ‘over eager emotionally for love, but on the whole they seem not to like sex’.

Some work concentrates on Pym’s characterisation of men in the novels. Laura L. Doan highlights Pym’s positive portrayal of unmarried women, and some aspects of her work have been useful in relation to my assessment of Pym’s feminist approach throughout this thesis. Her ‘Text and the Single Man: The Bachelor in Pym’s Dual-Voiced Narrative’ and Charles Burkhart’s ‘Glamorous Acolytes: Homosexuality in Pym’s World’ and ‘Barbara Pym and the Africans’ make the argument that Pym largely limits men’s world to bachelor activities and the world of work, both of which are depicted as empty. Burkhart, writing about the homosexuality Pym introduces in her novels, points out that Pym’s treatment of straight men is harsher than that of the homosexuals she depicts. However, these writers do not associate Pym’s cutting critique of men with binary feminism.

Contemporary feminist publishers separate on Pym’s work. Virago is reprinting Pym’s novels; Nicola Beauman from Persephone Publishers says she ‘is not a Barbara Pym fan’. Mainstream feminist critics have ignored Pym’s novels. Although some commentators have addressed aspects of Pym’s work as feminist, or possibly feminist, their arguments have been subsumed or limited in their application. The closest recognition given to the possibility that Pym is writing feminist work is Janice Rossen’s Independent Women: The

120 Liddell, pp. 31-32.
122 Doan, ‘Text and the Single Man’ in JW.
123 Charles Burkhart argues that homosexual men in Pym’s novels apart from Ned in The Sweet Dove Died are ‘welcome solaces’ [from the negative images of most of Pym’s male characters] in JW, pp. 95-105.
125 Burkhart in JW, p. 105
126 Persephone Books Fortnightly Letter, 15 December 2007, www.persephonebooks.co.uk. Beauman’s opinion was reiterated in a response to my inquiry about her contact with Barbara Pym. She replied that she ‘does not like her work’, email, July 10, 2009.
Function of Gender in the Novels of Barbara Pym\textsuperscript{127} in which some feminist articles appear. However, Barbara Sevens Housel expresses the hope that the work will encourage someone else to produce a full-length feminist critique.\textsuperscript{128}

Pym is the subject of several full length biographical accounts, *Barbara Pym*,\textsuperscript{129} *Barbara Pym: Literature and Life*,\textsuperscript{130} *The World of Barbara Pym*,\textsuperscript{131} *The Life and Work of Barbara Pym*,\textsuperscript{132} *A Mind at Ease: Barbara Pym and Her Novels*,\textsuperscript{133} *Barbara Pym*,\textsuperscript{134} *A Lot to Ask: A Life of Barbara Pym*,\textsuperscript{135} *Barbara Pym: A Critical Biography*\textsuperscript{136} *Barbara Pym: Writing a Life*\textsuperscript{137} and an edited "autobiography" *A Very Private Eye: An Autobiography in Dairies and Letters*.\textsuperscript{138}

Nardin studies Pym through her novels. She acknowledges the familiar theme of Pym's debate about the relationship between women and men. However, her conclusion that Pym's novels suggest that 'men [...] who have internalized [Pym's] society's view of their own inferiority, are its victims'\textsuperscript{139} is opposed to the argument made in this thesis. On the other hand, she also locates Pym's work in a broader context\textsuperscript{140} recognising Pym's interest in the 'opposition between religious or literary and scientific or social scientific modes of viewing the world'\textsuperscript{141} which is a valuable recognition of Pym as a writer of ideas. Halperin\textsuperscript{142} suggests that Pym depicts men as well as women as victims. He likens Pym to Henry James in her portraying 'virtually no relationship between the sexes which is entirely satisfactory [...] as we see men

\textsuperscript{127} Rossen.
\textsuperscript{128} Review of *Independent Women* in *Essays in Literature*, 16 Spring 1989 (71-84).
\textsuperscript{129} Nardin, (Boston:Twayne, 1985).
\textsuperscript{130} Robert Emmet Long (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1986).
\textsuperscript{131} Rossen, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987).
\textsuperscript{133} Liddell.
\textsuperscript{134} Michael Cotsell, (New York, St Martin's Press, 1989).
\textsuperscript{135} Holt.
\textsuperscript{136} Wyatt-Brown.
\textsuperscript{137} Allen.
\textsuperscript{139} Nardin, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{140} Nardin, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{141} Nardin, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{142} John Halperin 'Barbara Pym and the War of the sexes' in Salwak. Halperin is also the author of *The Life of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984).
victimised or taken advantage of by women, and women victimised or taken advantage of by men'.

* A Lot To Ask * was written by Pym's literary executor and co-worker for over thirty years, Holt. It brings together her insights with extracts from the correspondence Pym conducted with Harvey, Robert Liddell, Bob Smith, Richard Roberts, Honor Ellidge (Wyatt), Philip Larkin, and Rupert Gleadow, material from Pym’s novels and short stories which illuminate the commentary and Hilary Pym’s reminiscences and 'almost total recall' of the past. * A Lot to Ask * concentrates on Pym’s experiences, in particular those with men, as the foundation for her fiction. The concentration on these matters, almost to the exclusion of any other aspects of Pym’s writing accomplishes two divergent outcomes. As a biography * A Lot To Ask * produces a detailed and poignant picture of Pym, commendable for its insights into her character and the experiences that provided some of the material for her characterisations and narratives. However, the biography also neglects Pym’s achievement in using her experiences for a wider purpose. She told others’ stories as well as her own, applied her observations to the wider world and had a strongly developed consciousness of the broader issues that were part of her milieu.

Holt, together with Walton, also assembled * A Very Private Eye * selecting material from letters to and from friends, as well as notes from the diaries and notebooks. Although * A Very Private Eye * is an uncensored account of Pym’s life it concentrates heavily on Pym’s 'early life and loves' and an abundance of material remains in the Bodleian Library. The unpublished notebooks, letters and short stories, in particular, suggest Pym had a stronger posture towards the complexities, as she saw them, of relationships between

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143 Halperin, p. 88.
144 Hilary Pym is Pym's younger sister. Walton is her married name, and this is the name she uses in the books she owned e.g. the flyleaf of her copy of * A Lot To Ask *. However, Pym is used for her publication, * A Very Private Eye * which she edited with Hazel Holt. She is referred to by both names in publications. Walton is the name used by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, for the uncatalogued collection of her papers.
145 Holt * ALTA * p. viii.
146 Pym and Holt, * AVPE *.
147 Heberlein, quoted in Allen, p. 58.
women and men than is readily perceptible through her published works. Anne M. Wyatt-Brown criticised the edited biography as an inaccurate reflection of Pym’s life and the sources of her fiction.\(^{148}\) Her psychological biography suggests that Pym remained focused on ‘domesticity and human relationships rather than action’\(^{149}\) from her youth to mature works. Wyatt-Brown is sympathetic to Pym in what she sees as an unfair reaction to ‘her conservative views and extremely accessible style [which] made her an outsider in literary circles’\(^{150}\) and defends her work against the ‘mistaken condescension’\(^{151}\) which she blames on ‘Pym’s emphasis on the personal, rather than on, psychological, and philosophical issues.’\(^{152}\)

Lawrence Garner’s account,\(^{153}\) although modest in its length and scope, addresses the gender implications of the perception of Pym as middle-aged and middle class which hampers analysis of her as a writer.\(^{154}\) He describes as ‘all sadly patronising [that] early commentators on her work seldom looked beyond that superficial image, treating the books as cosy products of a cosmic literary life’.\(^{155}\) His belief that Pym conformed to the image later in life\(^{156}\) is supported by Yvonne Cocking who worked at the Africa Institute and finds it difficult to equate the woman she knew with her knowledge of Pym through the archives.\(^{157}\) Garner dismisses commentary that saw Pym as ‘A rather prim spinster, bemused by her unexpected success’.\(^{158}\) He is also critical of descriptions in articles entitled ‘How Pleasant to know Miss Pym’\(^{159}\) or the

\(^{148}\) Wyatt-Brown, p. xiii.
\(^{149}\) Wyatt-Brown, p. 12.
\(^{150}\) Wyatt-Brown, p. 1.
\(^{151}\) Wyatt-Brown, p. 1.
\(^{152}\) Wyatt-Brown, p. 1.
\(^{154}\) Garner, p. 21.
\(^{155}\) Garner, p. 21-22.
\(^{156}\) Garner, p. 22.
\(^{157}\) Yvonne Cocking, Archivist, Barbara Pym Society, Oxford Barbara Pym Conference, personal communication.
\(^{158}\) Garner, p. 20.
\(^{159}\) Robert Smith, *Ariel* 2 1971 (63-68).
television documentary ‘Tea with Miss Pym’, suggesting that they are products of a media ‘determined to make her the prim Miss Pym’. 160

An array of supplementary material, Pym’s papers and some original manuscripts, is available in the Barbara Mary Crampton Pym Collection in the Oxford University Bodleian Library. Pym’s correspondence with people such as Elizabeth Taylor, Gleadow, Harvey, Robert and Don Liddell and Larkin, diaries and notebooks provide some understanding of the woman who, while often being seen as the conventional author of cosy non-confronting novels, in reality laid bare the hypocrisies associated with revered institutions.

The impression Pym chose to give of herself is in the full account from her diaries kept from 1931 and in 1948 and the working notebooks. 161 She anticipated their becoming public and to preserve her privacy she removed pages about particular love affairs. What remains is entrancingly revealing. In contrast with this view, Rosemary Dinnage suggests that Pym chooses to ‘conceal as well as reveal’. 162 Her opinion is based on her reading of A Very Private Eye which she sees as creating a story of Pym that ‘ostensibly is the quiet progress of an unmarried lady novelist who produced ten books, very gently satiric ones, very English, much concerned with the provision of cups of tea in adversity and the workaday aspects of the Church of England’. 163 Liddell disagrees and his reflection on the diaries is referred to later in this chapter, together with Hilary Pym’s defence of the material. The conflict suggests that Pym’s work and her character lead to a range of readings, revealing her complexities as well as assumptions about her work that bear examination.

A selection of the correspondence between Philip Larkin and Pym is assembled in A Very Private Eye, in the BBC Radio Program, ‘The Resurrection

163 Dinnage.
of Miss Pym and in Anthony Thwaite’s edition of the *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin, 1914-1985*. Larkin also comments on Pym in letters to Monica Jones. Letters from Larkin to Pym are held at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. An interview, ‘Finding a Voice’, is included in *Civil to Strangers* and Pym’s contribution to Desert Island Discs was aired on the BBC in 1978. ‘Miss Pym’s Day Out’, a Drama Documentary including actors, Hilary Pym and Harvey, was produced by the BBC and aired in 1991. Readings of Pym’s work, such as ‘Something to Remember’ based on a short story, was broadcast by the BBC in 1950; and even during the hiatus in her publication, *No Fond Return of Love* was serialised on The Women’s Hour on BBC Radio. *So Very Secret* was dramatised for radio in 1983. *Some Tame Gazelle* appeared in the BBC Radio Collection in May 1996, *Jane and Prudence* was played on Women’s Drama Hour on BBC Radio 4 on 27 May 2008. Penguin Classics on Air included *Excellent Women* on its reading list on the newly formed Sirius XM Radio Show.

Continuing interest in Pym is acknowledged through her role as the topic of university literary courses and, more broadly, as the subject of numerous literary blogs. A newsletter, *Green Leaves*, is produced. Originating with the UK Barbara Pym Society as the *Barbara Pym Newsletter* from 1986 to 1992 and as *Green Leaves* from 1994, the newsletter was edited by the North American Barbara Pym Society from November 2005 to 2009 and jointly thereafter. An Official Internet site was established and updated in 2010. Contemporary recognition of Pym’s enduring relevance and appreciation of her fiction and the mores it reflected is recognised in a wide array of fiction, “gleanings” from this material being recorded in *Green Leaves*.

In addition, annual conferences of the Barbara Pym Society are held at St Hilda’s, Pym’s former college, in Oxford and at various locations at Harvard, Cambridge. Participants come from a variety of backgrounds, and while many

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164 BBC Radio 4, March 2011 (Producer, Jenny Howarth)
168 Pym and Holt, *AVPE*, p. 213.
are academic, others are people who read Pym’s work only for pleasure. Papers presented at Barbara Pym Conferences reflect the diversity in membership and are wide ranging, from academic debate\textsuperscript{169} to information from the Bodleian papers to dramatised versions of Pym’s work. In their concerns with Pym’s motivation, detailed studies of particular texts and subjects of conference papers and debate largely reflect published commentary on her work.

**Conclusion**

This thesis argues that Pym’s feminist approach, conscious or unconscious, is apparent when measured against relevant feminist ideology and compared with the work of acknowledged feminist writers. Pym’s concern with social commentary is also apparent in her novels and short stories. They are vehicles for her expression of ideas about class, race, ethnocentricity and the relative value of scientific and imaginary thought. In the following chapters a close reading of Pym’s texts offers a feminist case for her work. It contends that her use of the troublesome woman motif further demonstrates her adoption of feminist themes and narratives. Pym’s adoption of feminist ideas in an unpromising environment has a template in Austen’s work. Pym, like Austen, presents subversive ideas ironically and obliquely. The contention of the following discussion is that if it is accepted that Austen’s work concealed some feminist ideas and Weldon and Fairbairns write feminist novels then Pym is also a feminist writer.

\textsuperscript{169}Prior to my presentation in 2001, ‘Barbara, Fay and Zoe: from the drawing room to the frontiers’, Katherine Anne Ackley’s paper, ‘Proving One’s Worth: Women and Marriage in Excellent Women’ (North American Conference, 1998) created animated discussion. However, it appears that no previous conference paper had adopted a focussed feminist approach to Pym’s work. My paper provoked critical discussion largely denying the feminist nature of Pym’s work. In 2009 I revisited similar ideas in a paper about *An Academic Question* which was well received, suggesting that there is a growing appreciation of wider readings of Pym’s work.
CHAPTER 1

PYM’S WRITING AND ITS BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXTS

As we cryptically say ‘Proustian’ or ‘Jamesian’ we may now say ‘Barbara Pym’ and be understood instantly. This world, bounded by English literature, the Anglican Church and the dustier fringes of Academe, was one that Barbara Pym herself inhabited and upon which she turned a gaze at once ironic and compassionate.

Shirley Hazzard 170

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Pym was born on 2 June 1913 in Oswestry, Shropshire in modest circumstances. The family later moved to Morda Lodge, a large Edwardian house with stables. Pym is described as being ‘surrounded by a cheerful and loving family’ 171 which included her younger sister Hilary with whom she was to live most of her life. Their grandmother and two unmarried aunts were neighbours, presenting Pym with possible role models for the numerous spinsters in her novels. Irena and Frederic Pym were ‘affectionate and relaxed parents, loving and humorous’. 172 The sisters were close to their parents, frequently visiting Frederic Pym’s law office. 173 Together with his return home for lunch each day 174 the family relationships combined the traditional role of a father around whom family life revolved with the less traditional approach apparent in much of Irena Pym’s behaviour. She usually drove the family car and ‘owned a motor bike which she rode with great panache, wearing a workmanlike leather

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171 Holt, ALTA, p. 6.
172 Holt, ALTA, p. 10.
173 Holt, ALTA, p. 10.
174 Pym and Holt, AVPE, p. 2.
motoring coat'. She had a keen eye for eccentricities and was a splendid mimic [...] a subtle ironic sense of humour [...] and a gift for fantasy, inventing stories about people, and it was Irena who was the instigator of special little phrases and family jokes'. In such an environment Pym’s use of comedy and satire in her fiction could be expected. Hilary’s recall of the sisters’ childhood experiences is ‘happily informal [...] where everyone was expected to take their share of the chores [...] in a sociable house’. Pym’s parents were enlightened, encouraged their daughters to be comfortable in adult company and to be creative and academic. Pym’s diaries refer to meeting with members of her family while she was at Oxford and later, when she was working in London.

Pym departed from her observation of family closeness and their conventional practices in her fiction. Traditional families are markedly absent. Where Pym uses her experiences is in depicting and exaggerating the nonconformity she also observed in her parents’ domestic arrangements. Pym’s interest in asking questions about women’s place in marriage is enjoined from the first marriage depicted in her published work. Pym’s depiction of the marriage of Archdeacon and Agatha Hoccleve, in Some Tame Gazelle, demonstrates her earliest criticism of the institution. Excellent Women, Pym’s second published novel, also features an inharmonious marriage. Although the example from Some Tame Gazelle might be interpreted as “wishful thinking” because of Pym’s personal interest in Harvey, for whom Hoccleve was an alter ego, her concerns have a wider application. Pym also scrutinised the romantic notions and women’s sense of duty associated with marrying during wartime. Pym depicts such problematic marriages in Excellent Women and A Glass of Blessings.

Pym’s portrayal of marriage rebuts the claim that characteristics are determined on gender. Her work undermines the anti-feminist argument that

175 Holt, ALTA, p. 8.
176 Holt, ALTA, p. 10.
177 Garner, p. 2.
178 Pym and Holt, AVPE, pp. 3-4.
179 See Chapter 3 for reference to Wilmet’s marriage problems and their association with war marriages.
women and men have inherent characteristics that should establish their behaviour and access to particular benefits. Her fictional families often cut across traditional roles. Traditional domestic responsibilities associated with women and nurturing are challenged in families central to Pym’s narratives. The Forsyths in A Glass of Blessings and the Aingers in An Unsuitable Attachment are childless or have only one child as do the Cleveland in Jane and Prudence and, although less remarkably in the 1970s, the Grimstones in An Academic Question. The anticipated family unit comprising Ianthe Broome and John Challow (AUA) has little in common with the culture of the 1950s, which fostered the traditional family. Where such a family appears, for example, the Lovells (LTA), they are in secondary roles.

Irena Pym also served as a model for one type of troublesome women in Pym’s fiction. A recurring character is the woman who lacks domestic talent or interest in domesticity. Jane Cleveland (JP) like Irena is ‘slim, with sharp, lively features and masses of curly brown hair.180 As well as the physical similarity, Jane reflects Irena Pym’s disregard for domesticity. Her home is far from being her predominant interest. Instead, she is epitomised by her creativity, expressed as flights of fancy in pedestrian circumstances (JP, p.164), and disregard for the conformity expected from a clergy wife. Pym refers to Jane reminding her of Irena181 and she shares a name with Pym’s favourite aunt.182 The feminist theme, in which the nexus between women and domesticity is broken, is sustained in characters such as Helena Napier (EW) and Jessie Morrow (CH). Helena shares Jane Cleveland’s insouciance about housework, and Jessie Morrow is a paid companion who finds time away from her domestic duties for listening to Radio Luxembourg, outings with the curate (CH) and manœuvreing the marriage between herself and an eligible widower (JP).

180 Holt, ALTA, p. 11.
181 MS Pym 98, fol. 117.
182 Holt, ALTA, p. 10. Aunt Jane, the livelier of the aunts who lived next door, like Irena drove a car, was athletic and a person of ideas and flair.
Ironically, the characters other than those employed to do so, who happily undertake domestic chores are Belinda and Harriet (STG) and Flora Cleveland (JP). In both cases, the characters are linked to Irena, as a fictionalised version of her real daughters (STG) or the daughter of a fictional character with Irena’s disposition (JP). The juxtaposition of her domesticated daughter with herself highlights Jane’s unconventionality in Jane and Prudence. However, although Pym does not make a statement, Flora’s domestic commitment is to be short-lived as she is about to follow her mother’s example and study at Oxford. Pym’s portrayal of domesticity emphasises that choice, rather than nature, is the key to satisfaction in the role. Belinda and Harriet have the financial freedom to employ a maid and a seamstress. However, they enjoy cooking and choose to do it on occasion. There are enough women in the novels who, like Jane, reject culinary activities to challenge the anti-feminist idea that women’s inherent characteristics make them naturally suited to domestic tasks.

The place of the clergy in the Pyms’ lives, with curates regularly at Sunday supper, is reflected in Pym’s fiction.183 Her upbringing, her continuing interest in church affairs184 and observation made religious observance, framed by a comic touch and sardonic eye an integral aspect of her work. She portrayed the church and its practices, debates and personnel as part of a narrative of life in England from the 1930s through the fifties and sixties continuation of the Oxford Movement concerns with “high” and “low” church practices. In the later novels, the partial substitution of clergy and church charitable activities by social workers and the welfare system occurs and is fully realised in Quartet in Autumn. The introduction of a social worker and the rise of the “heroic” surgeon in Mr Strong replace clerical intercession. In

183 Confirmed by Hilary Walton, Presentation, Barbara Pym Conference, Oxford, 2003. Walton is Hilary Pym’s married name, and this is the name she uses in the books she owned e.g. the fly leaf of her copy of A Lot To Ask. However, Pym is used for her publication, A Very Private Eye which she edited with Hazel Holt. She is referred to by both names in publications. Walton is the name used by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, for the uncatalogued collection of her papers.
184 Interview with Susan Tirbutt, Yorkshire Post 21/11/77, Walton Collection, Box 1, Scrapbook, fol. 10; Holt says that ‘Apart from her fundamental faith, her attitude to things religious had been predominantly literary’ (ALTA, p.150).
this novel, the clergy are demoted to a role with one of the bachelors who, in a further ironic gesture by Pym, is described as going on a “church crawl” (QA, p.34). *A Few Green Leaves* continues the theme with rivalry between the medical and religious professions. Neither is glorified, despite Pym’s statement that ‘the Anglican church and English literature are the two most important things in my life’. Hilary Pym suggests that Pym was attracted to High-Church practise but left the question open. In keeping with her open minded fictionalisation of religion is Pym’s speculation: ‘In that play *The Making of Mao* it is pointed out how violent and bloody the beginning of religion is and then it all peters out and deteriorates, is watered down, to tea and cakes in a church hall – and yet what would you have – martinis and caviar perhaps? Impossible to keep it all up at the same high level, like when a love affair settles down into a cosier less exciting level.’

In 1925 Pym left home to be educated at Liverpool College, Huyton. Although not unique, Pym’s education was special in that the boarding school was for the ‘highly intelligent, academically inclined whose sights were already set on Oxford’. Hilary described Barbara at this time as ‘observant and rarely forgetting a foible’. Like the note taking and diaries she kept through her adult life and which afforded ideas for her novels, Pym’s observations doubtless provided material for the parodies and poetry she wrote for the school magazine. Holt records that the school inspired ‘in Barbara a profound and abiding love of “our greater English poets” quotations from which appear in most of her novels’. The expectations intrinsic to her

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185 Letter, Hilary Pym to Professor Baldwin, 10/4/1983, Walton Collection, uncatalogued.
186 MS Pym 18, Box 2, fol. 3.
189 Garner, p.4.
190 Pym and Holt, *AVPE*, p.15.
192 Ironically, Jeremy Treglown’s mostly negative review of *Quartet in Autumn* celebrated that ‘One of the good things about *Quartet in Autumn* is that for once Barbara Pym’s characters don’t spend much time casting about for appropriate literary quotations’, *New Statesman* 23 September 1977, Walton Collection, Box 8, uncatalogued.
treatment as an especially able student would have given Pym the self-confidence she exhibits in some of her behaviour at Oxford.

Pym’s maturation during the late 1920s brought her into contact with the feminist concept of the “New Woman”. A direct reference to this phase of feminism appears in *Jane and Prudence* when Jane Cleveland speculates that her former tutor might have forsaken her lover as ‘a new woman enthusiastic for learning, [and] had rejected him in favour of Donne, Marvell and Carew’ (*JP*, p.10). Less directly, the sexual freedom observed in the characterisation of Catherine Oliphant (*LTA*) and Prudence Bates (*JP*) has more in common with this feminist idea of empowerment than the conservative moral values of the 1950s in which the novels are set. Viola Dace’s slash of ‘brilliant coral coloured’ lipstick (*NFRL*, p.7) relates to the suffragist’s penchant for red lipstick as a form of defiance and empowerment adopted by women in the 1920s. Similarly, Mildred Lathbury’s purchase of “Hawaiian Fire” lipstick and amusement at its unsuitability is her defiant gesture against being classified as an “excellent woman” (*EW*, pp.121-122). Young female anthropologists ‘with flowing hair and scarlet nails’ (*EW*, pp.88-89) depict Pym’s support for a defiant posture. Her own red lipstick and rouge193 and smoking and drinking are typical of the New Woman. Kitty Jeffreys (*AAQ*) and secondary characters adopt the physical distinctiveness and behaviour of this phase of feminism.

Pym’s only novel that may have been expected to portray the New Woman, ‘Young Men in Fancy Dress”, was written in 1928. It is a ‘period detail of the 1920s […] set in Chelsea, nightclubs, [with] cocktails, cubist pictures, young men in silk pyjamas – aspirations rather than reality as the hero was living in the country wanting to be a novelist’.194 However, like her model, Aldous Huxley, she concentrated on a male central character.

After what appears to have been a pleasant childhood and academically and personally satisfactory early education Pym’s complexities become

193 MS Pym 101, Diaries January 1932 - September 1933, fol. 162.
apparent through the diaries she kept at Oxford. Pym started writing them when she started her degree in English Literature at St Hilda’s in 1931. The diaries include simple events such as outings with women friends; commentary on her university classes and work; visits from her parents and activities when she returned to Oswestry for holidays; the food she enjoyed, films and plays she attended; scenes and events. Her relationships with various male friends and lovers, including poetry dedicated to “Lorenzo” (Harvey)\(^{195}\) reveal Pym’s complexities. Pym was also remarkably candid about tracking down and observing young men who excited her interest.\(^ {196}\) Holt refers to this activity as detection and research, reminiscent of anthropologists’ methodology.\(^ {197}\)

Pym also noted the books she read, often two a day. She records that:

As well as English Literature I was also continuing to read modern novelists, and particularly enjoyed the works of ‘Elizabeth’, the author of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*. Such novels as *The Enchanted April* and *The Pastor’s Wife* were a revelation in their wit and delicate irony, and the dry, unsentimental treatment of the relationship between men and women which touched some echoing chord in me at that time [...]. These novels seemed more appropriate to use as models than *Crome Yellow* – perhaps even the kind of thing I might try to write myself.\(^ {198}\)

Holt’s comments on the diaries, that they ‘were written – and certainly preserved – to be read, and are, especially those written in 1943, finished pieces of writing’\(^ {199}\) supports the idea that Pym saw herself becoming a public figure. Pym’s reference to her letters is explicit and prescient when she wrote ‘How immensely valuable our correspondence ought to be to the Department

\(^{195}\) MS Pym 101, fol s 114-115.

\(^{196}\) *No Fond Return of Love* portrays woman intent on finding out everything she can about a man she meets at a conference. Although there are some romantic elements, the novel describes what she refers to as “research” in much broader terms, including the fascination of looking for information and speculating about it. This novel is discussed in Chapter 4.

\(^{197}\) Pym and Holt, *AVPE*, p. xv.

\(^{198}\) MS Pym 96, fol. 99.

\(^{199}\) Pym and Holt, *AVPE*, p. xii.
of Western manuscripts [...] and 'All my love letters [...] Could I deposit them in the Bodley and order them when I felt inclined to reread them?' In relation to her diaries, she at times refers to the 'reader' and ponders whether her biographer or Harvey's will be disappointed in the end of their relationship. The diaries also replaced Pym's fiction writing: 'Perhaps I was too busy forming relationships, getting to know young men as well as studying English literature.' The notebooks, which replaced the diaries, included ideas for stories and detailed storylines and continued her commentary on her reading. Until she graduated in 1934 Pym led a 'relentless social life', with its 'endless round of dinners, teaparties, sherry parties (a newly fashionable form of entertainment) theatres and, above all, the cinema, to which she went several times a week, including Christmas day'. According to Holt, Pym was 'naive by today's standards [...] Girls were more romantic then, and with a kind of enthusiastic innocence that would be impossible today'. She adds 'her gaiety and spontaneity must have been refreshingly different from the manner of some of the more carefully formal girls up at Oxford then'. Pym's interest and positive approach to fictional spinsterhood does not arise from lack of popularity or opportunity to marry.

Pym's complexities may have been a consequence of her relationships at Oxford, in particular her preoccupation with being a part of the Harvey and Liddell circle. Hilary Pym, in defending *A Very Private Eye* to Liddell in the 1980s confirms that Pym was indeed complex. At Oxford she presented racy images of herself simultaneously with trying to appear conventional. In turn, she resented having to conform, writing 'it is much more important to be

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200 Holt, *ALTA*, p. 56.
201 Holt, *ALTA*, p. 57.
202 MS Pym 146, Reflections, 20 February, n.f.
203 MS Pym, 103, fol. 27.
204 MS Pym 96, fol. 98.
205 Garner, p. 4.
210 See Chapter 1, p.87.
oneself than anything else'. Her adoption of an alter ego, "Sandra" contrasts vividly with the apparent realisation of aspects of her character in Barbara Bird (CH). The "wild streak" Pym adopted, was exemplified by "Sandra’s" example when she chose to wear a "scarlet satin blouse and black skirt". Pym’s choice of red nail varnish was also a form of rebellion against the academic appearance of Oxford students. She delighted in her tutors’ response as they were ‘almost paralysed with horror’.

In contrast, she writes about an outing with Harvey and Liddell during which she felt:

Intellectually inferior to them all, especially Harvey, who always makes me feel it more than the others do. I felt they were all against me and I made things worse by my obstinacy. But I felt resentful of being dominated by them and not being allowed to be myself at all. I was also conscious of being much better on paper than in speech!

Although she felt inferior to Harvey and Liddell, she also delighted in deliberately exaggerating her interest in modern music, films and dance, interests that have their fictional expression in Jessie Morrow’s character (JP). The conflict Pym experienced is reflected in her writing, where she hides women’s rebellious thoughts and characteristics from the observation of other characters.

Pym’s romantic relationships with men at Oxford are dealt with in detail in A Very Private Eye and A Lot to Ask. Only a few points need to be made.

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211 MS Pym 109, fol. v85.
212 Stephanie Kay, ‘Is Leonora Happy?’, rejects the notion that the Barbara Bird of Crampton Hodnet becomes the middle aged novelist who appears in Jane and Prudence on the grounds that Pym could well have been ‘recycling an amusing name from Crampton Hodnet which was then an unpublished novel’, GL, November 2007 (5).
213 MS Pym 101, fol. 163.
214 MS Pym 102, fol. 74.
215 MS Pym 102, Diaries October 1933-June 1934 [incorrectly marked 1931-8 on the cover], fol. 75.
216 MS Pym 103, fol. 55.
217 Pym and Holt, AVPE.
218 Jessica was also portrayed as a person who enjoyed eating chips with tomato sauce. In an early draft of An Academic Question Alan criticises Caro for using her fingers when eating chips, MS Pym 35/1, fol. 1.
here. Pym’s behaviour belies the stereotype of the suppressed spinster as attested by the incomplete diary entry related to an afternoon tea with Rupert Gleadow:

    Today I must always remember I suppose. I went to tea with Rupert (and ate a pretty colossal one) – and he with all his charm, eloquence and masculine wiles, persuaded [...] 219

Gleadow’s letters, written in multiple coloured pens, confirm his affection. 220 He mentioned marriage but his further remarks contribute to an image of Pym which belies some of her diary outpourings. He referred to them both as ‘hard headed moderns’. 221 Pym did not reciprocate Gleadow’s romantic feelings. However, in keeping with her pattern of retaining friendships with her former romantic interests, she kept him in her life when she met Harvey and Liddell.

Pym’s feelings about Liddell were mixed. She wanted his friendship 222 but was well aware of his sporadic antipathy towards her relationship with Harvey. 223 Liddell’s attitude towards Pym’s feelings for Harvey is enlightening. Although originally opposed to their relationship, he suggests that Henry’s pursuit of Alice West-Watson in the same period is a mistake. 224 Later he writes that he ‘does not like change, and hope that you are not really in love with anyone but poor Henry’ 225 and in 1936 is disappointed that her interest in Harvey has lessened. 226 Liddell’s response to a sombre letter from Pym suggests a variety of courses she could adopt: ‘You might be happy in so many ways – as a comfort to your mother, or a good wife to a good man, or a female novelist in South Kensington like Compton-Burnett. I do not see what

219 MS Pym 101, fol. 84 (several pages are torn out of the diary after fol. 84).
220 Letters from Rupert Gleadow, MS Pym 149, fol. 1-139, May-Sept. 1932 and Ms Pym 150, fol. 1-121.
221 MS Pym 149, fol. 82.
222 Pym and Holt, AVPE, p. 29.
223 MS Pym 102, fol. 73.
224 Letter from Robert Liddell to Barbara Pym 15/3/1934, MS Pym 153, fol. 25.
225 Letter from Liddell to Pym 22/12/1935, MS Pym 153, fol. 74.
226 Letter from Liddell to 19/1/1936, MS Pym 153, fol. 94.
is to stop you. You might even marry Henry – which would be more comfort to Mr B. and me than either of you, but you could derive some unselfish pleasure from that."²²⁷ Pym accepted Liddell’s role in smoothing her relationship with Harvey²²⁸ and it was Liddell who advised Pym, through Hilary Pym, of Harvey’s plan to marry another woman.²²⁹

In her diaries Pym records situations through which a direct comparison can be made between her relationships with Gleadow and later, with Harvey. Gleadow’s appreciation of her character, demonstrated through his casting a horoscope that makes the best of her natural characteristics²³⁰ and constant, loving correspondence compares well with Harvey’s behaviour. Pym’s distress about his intermittent correspondence is apparent.²³¹ A more complex comparison relates to their physical relationships. In her 1933 diaries Pym records ‘what a strange thing life, and one’s sex-feelings are – commonplace observation though it is – because I really so think it’.²³² In her 1934 diaries Pym refers to missing Henry but acknowledges that ‘Of course, leading an entirely sexless life here may be responsible for much and I do believe that absence makes the heart even fonder and lends [...] glamour to the beloved person’.²³³

The contrast between the sexual nature of her relationship with Gleadow and then Harvey, and Liddell’s part in the friendship between Pym and Harvey, raises questions. The account of Pym’s self-abnegation, charged with defiance in their company, is paralleled in her characterisation of women’s duality in her writing. It is possible that Harvey and Liddell’s influence on Pym’s natural bent contributed to the facade she adopted later in her polished fiction.

²²⁷ Letter from Liddell to Pym 10/10/1936, MS Pym 153, fol. 136.
²²⁸ Pym and Holt, AVPE, p. 36.
²²⁹ Holt, ALTA, p. 66.
²³⁰ MS Pym 149, fols113-116.
²³¹ MS Pym 103, Diaries 1934, October 9, fols 9 and 104.
²³² MS Pym 101, fol. 122.
²³³ MS Pym 103, Diaries 1934, fol. 12.
Pym’s comment in her diary that Gleadow ‘made the suggestion that we should go to bed – we had much fun and a lovely fight over that’\(^2\) suggests that although he was sexually motivated, Gleadow was also respectful of her wishes. She had earlier maintained to him that ‘girls have more right to philander than men’.\(^3\) There is no explanation given for this comment. However, it is possible that Pym was suggesting that women were more likely to suffer in relationships because of the unequal importance they place on them. Gleadow articulated the essential nature of their friendship when he wrote that they are both ‘charmingly innocent’.\(^4\) He also refers to her ‘complete lack of passion’. He accepted her decision on the way in which the relationship should develop.\(^5\)

Two examples of Harvey’s behaviour and Pym’s responses suggest that although Pym was complicit in his influence on her in public, Harvey also controlled their personal life. Harvey disregarded Pym’s distress when Liddell and John Barnicot found them grappling in his rooms.\(^6\) Her distraught response to this incident contrasts with her earlier amusement at Liddell finding her naked with Harvey, reading *Samson Agonistes*.\(^7\) To her the encounters were entirely different. She earlier records having been ‘teased a lot about my appalling reputation!’\(^8\) to which her response was an amused ‘Poor Sandra!’\(^9\) However, Harvey’s comment ‘Oh you’re common property’\(^10\) suggests that the “teasing” was at times an attack.\(^11\)

Holt’s observation that ‘One is reminded of the description of the young Jane Austen as the ‘prettiest, silliest, most affected, husband-hunting

\(^2\) MS Pym 101, fol. 79.
\(^3\) Letter from Gleadow to Pym, n.d., MS Pym 149, fol. 97.
\(^4\) Letter from Gleadow to Pym, 22 Sept. 1932, MS Pym 149, fol. v131.
\(^5\) MS Pym 150, fols 13- fol. v13.
\(^6\) MS Pym 102, fol. 105.
\(^7\) MS Pym 102, fol. 78. Another incident of this nature is recorded at MS Pym 102, fol.111 (48 old numbering). (Note this folio is a cut page between fols 110 and 115). Rupert Gleadow also refers to ‘those nakedish times by the Cher’, MS Pym 149, fol. 47.
\(^8\) MS Pym 101, fol. 141(loose leaf between fols 140 and 147).
\(^9\) Ms Pym, 101 fol. 141.
\(^10\) MS Pym 102, fol. 72 and recorded in Pym and Holt, *AVPE*, p. 38.
\(^11\) MS Pym 102, fol. 72.
butterfly\textsuperscript{244} misses the enormity of the Harvey comment. Pym’s resilience was remarkable. Her recorded distress at Harvey’s attitude appears to have had little long term effect on her behaviour at Oxford. She continued to be independent, while encouraging male friendships, behaving as a woman enjoying life rather than one chasing a husband.\textsuperscript{245} However, she had received a blow to her self-image and her continued desire to remain in the circle of friends around Harvey, Barnicot, Count Roberto Weiss and Liddell\textsuperscript{246} led her into a lengthy period of personal self-censorship and devising a relationship with Liddell based on their mutual interest in writing. Liddell’s \textit{A Mind at Ease: Barbara Pym and Her Novels} provides some insights into that period, his attitude toward her and her writing which is described later in this chapter.

Pym tempered her romantic notions of Harvey with her recognition that he was better in her imagination than in reality.\textsuperscript{247} She also noted that her life would be empty without a “consuming passion”.\textsuperscript{248} The title of her first novel \textit{Some Tame Gazelle} resonates with Pym’s comment in its reference to the need to love rather than necessarily to be loved. The difference between romantic imagination and reality also appears in novels such as \textit{Jane and Prudence} (p.68). Despite the problems in their relationship, Henry became one of Pym’s lifetime friendships. She later corresponded with him and his first wife, and he visited her in the hospice two days before she died.

Pym’s relating romance and intellectual work is a feature of both her real and fictional lives. A poor academic result led to speculation in her diary about the male moderator rather than concern about an academic reverse;\textsuperscript{249} the Bodleian Library was both a place of study and pursuit of her current male interest;\textsuperscript{250} and, in \textit{Crampton Hodnet}, the British Library is a site for a

\textsuperscript{244} Holt, \textit{ALTA}, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{245} Holt, \textit{ALTA}, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{246} Holt, \textit{ALTA}, p.42.
\textsuperscript{247} MS Pym 102, Diary Oct. – June, fol. 77.
\textsuperscript{248} MS Pym 102, fol. 57.
\textsuperscript{249} MS Pym 101, fols 11-12.
declaration of love as well as intellectual endeavour (CH, p.91). After she graduated, Pym continued integrating the romantic and academic during her period in the Censorship Office. She improved her German language skills with references to her notebook of German translations and grammatical points, phrases from ‘books by serious contemporary writers’ and romantic German script references to Amery. She also began developing the detached approach typical of her novels when she decided that the poetical thoughts she would have liked to tell Henry ‘would be better [kept] for my next novel’.

Her novels, all of which reveal her intense interest and concern with her study of English Literature, counteract the “social butterfly” façade Pym adopted in relation to her academic dedication at Oxford. The syllabus comprised written papers on Old and Middle English ‘studied largely from a philological and historical’ rather than literary angle and compulsory vivas ‘made it prudent to learn as much literature as possible by heart’. Her results also belie Pym’s lack of dedication as explained by Duncan-Jones in her clarification of the Oxford academic process at the time:

Barbara’s recorded relief at receiving only a five-minute viva, and being placed in class 2, should be put in context. No St Hilda’s candidate had received a First since 1929, when Helen Gardener, later to become Merton Professor of English Language and Literature, had


251 The writers included Christa Winsloe, Das Madchen Manuela and Der letzte Sommer, by Ricarda Huch and ‘sections with words from the works of Schiller, Goethe and Rilke’, GL, May 2006 (8).

252 At this time a romantic interest, Amery became a Conservative Member of Parliament and the genesis of characters in the unfinished “The Lumber Room” (also known as “Beatrice Wyatt”) and the short story “Goodbye Balkan Capital”. He was also a character in the published novels So Very Secret, Home Front, Crampton Hodnet and Jane and Prudence, in which his mother also featured, Holt, ALTA, pp. 76-79.

253 MS Pym 103, Diary, November 26th 1935, fol. 15.

254 Pym’s interest in the fundamentals of historical research and delight in language, leading to her interest in the tension of the worldly and the spiritual, probably had its genesis in this aspect of her education.


256 Duncan-Jones, (9).

done so. It was quite usual for St Hilda’s students of Eng., Lang. and Lit. to fall short of Class 2. In 1930 one 3rd and two 4ths were awarded to St Hilda’s candidates; in 1931 two 3rds and one 4th, in 1932, one 3rd and two 4ths, and in 1933 three 3rds. There was one First in Barbara Pym’s year.\textsuperscript{258}

In keeping with her results and contrasting with her attitude towards Harvey, established in \textit{A Very Private Eye} and \textit{A Lot To Ask}, is Pym’s admonition to herself that she should not let him spoil her schools.\textsuperscript{259} Her instinct for self-preservation, although seemingly missing from so many of her love affairs, in relation to her education was intact.

\section*{III}

After she graduated Pym returned home and, apart from a short period in Poland teaching English,\textsuperscript{260} concentrated on her writing. Initially she was philosophical about her situation, commenting that it was her ‘first day on the dole’.\textsuperscript{261} She could not find a publisher for \textit{Some Tame Gazelle}, but continued writing, beginning “Beatrice Wyatt” (also named “The Lumber Room”) in 1938\textsuperscript{262} and, leaving that draft aside, \textit{Crampton Hodnet} in 1939.

Pym joined the local war effort, becoming a fire warden, helping at a baby clinic, working in the Food Office, a First Aid Post and YMCA Canteen at Park Hill Camp and caring for Birkenhead evacuees. Her letters confirm her desperation to leave Oswestry, to become more actively involved in the war and to be financially independent.\textsuperscript{263} In 1941, she became a Censorship Officer in Bristol. Her censorship work became an experience for Mildred Lathbury (\textit{EW}, p.26) and contributed to her exploration of marriages arising from the romanticism and desperation of wartime relationships in \textit{Excellent Women} and \textit{A

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\textsuperscript{258} Duncan-Jones, (8).
\textsuperscript{259} MS Pym 101, fol. 26.
\textsuperscript{260} MS Pym 104, Diary 1939, fols 131–v139.
\textsuperscript{261} MS Pym 103, Diaries June 1934- August 1938, fol. 1.
\textsuperscript{262} MS Pym 6/1-3, Notebooks, Draft of “Beatrice Wyatt”, fols i-252.
\textsuperscript{263} MS Pym 105, fol. v149.
\end{flushright}
Glass of Blessings. Pym’s perspicacity about the romances she observed though her censorship work had little influence on her own romance in that period. She shared a house with Honor Wyatt. The proximity of Wyatt’s estranged husband, Gordon Glover, resulted in Pym’s unhappy love affair with him264 and influenced her decision to join the WRNS.265

Privations after the war feature in many of Pym’s novels which refer to housing problems, shortages and bombed church sites. However, her two Second World War novellas, ‘Home Front Novel’ and ‘So Very Secret’ are minor. Her short story ‘Goodbye Balkan Capital’ (CS) is a stronger work, with its combination of wartime experience, contrasting personalities and challenge to romanticism.266 She also wrote notes for war novels.267 At the end of the war, Pym returned home to care for Irena Pym who had terminal cancer. She also continued writing, editing and polishing Some Tame Gazelle. On her mother’s death in September, Pym joined Hilary in London and her father later remarried.

Pym worked at the International African Institute from the late 1940s for twenty-eight years. Anthropologists first appear as major characters in Pym’s fiction268 in Less Than Angels, adding characterisation to the anthropologically precise observations she made from early in her writing career. While acting editor of the Institute journal, Africa, Pym continued to write and attempt to publish short stories. She had mixed success and numerous short stories remain unpublished in the Bodleian. Pym asserted that the short story was not her forte.269 However, they provide an insight into Pym’s thinking as some robustly expose the concerns that she dealt with more subtly in the novels, discussed in Chapter 5.

264 Pym and Holt, AVPE, p. 97.
265 Hilary Walton Collection, Post card, 18/7/45, American Scrapbook Sept/Oct. 1984, uncatalogued.
266 Continuing interest in even Pym’s shorter works is evidenced by publication of “Goodbye Balkan Capital” in Anne Boston and Jenny Hartley, eds. Wave me Goodbye and Hearts Undefeated Omnibus (London: Virago, 2003), pp. 92-102.
267 MS Pym 99, fol.7 and MS Pym 105, fol. 149.
268 Anthropology is mentioned in Some Tame Gazelle, p. 162 and questioned on p. 178.
269 GL, 8, No 2, 2002 (4).
Despite being modest and undemanding, her strenuous fight to be published\textsuperscript{270} gives potency to the argument that Pym’s strongest motivation was her lifelong belief in herself as a writer.\textsuperscript{271} She also saw herself as professional as revealed by her membership of the Society of Authors from 1947.\textsuperscript{272} Holt’s comment in the 1960s that ‘Her books had replaced her love affairs as the chief preoccupation of her life, and in [the rejection of An Unsuitable Attachment] she felt all the cumulative pain of her early unhappiness’\textsuperscript{273} is one perspective of the hierarchy on which Pym placed her interest in men and her dedication to her writing. As distressing as Pym had found the end of her serious romances, it is as likely that her enduring heartbreak lay unambiguously in the rejection of her novel. Her own feelings about the seriousness with which she regarded the two alternatives are revealing. She wrote to Liddell ‘Would one rather be loved by Henry or have a novel accepted?’\textsuperscript{274} Her subsequent behaviour suggests that publication was her prime goal.\textsuperscript{275}

The rejection of An Unsuitable Attachment by her usual publisher, Cape, was particularly disappointing. Not only was it her seventh novel but she was accustomed to her role as a published writer. Her sense of the publishing scene, or perhaps her natural caution, is revealed in a letter to Philip Larkin: ‘I feel it [An Unsuitable Attachment] can hardly come up to Catch 22 or The Passion Flower Hotel.’\textsuperscript{276} Under the new senior editorship of Tom Maschler\textsuperscript{277}

\textsuperscript{270} Holt, \textit{ALTA}, p.x.
\textsuperscript{271} Holt, \textit{ALTA}, pp. 17-20.
\textsuperscript{272} MS Pym 167, fols 47-48, Invitation and completed membership form and a receipt from the Society of Authors.
\textsuperscript{273} Holt, \textit{ALTA}, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{274} Holt, \textit{ALTA}, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{275} As early as December 1934 Pym noted in her diary: ‘I want liebe but I would be satisfied if my novel could be published’, MS Pym 103, fols 48 and v48.
\textsuperscript{276} Letters to Philip Larkin, 1963, quoted in \textit{ALTA}. It needs to be noted that the readership for these novels would have been quite different from that of Pym’s work. It is a mark of Pym’s, possibly over-sensitive, concern about Cape that she suggested she could be replaced by such different writers on their book list.
\textsuperscript{277} Critics Crowner, \textit{The Bookseller} January 29 1977, Walton Collection, confirmed the role of Maschler in rejecting Pym, taking him to task. He/she suggests that Pym should be reprinted and now would be the time for her to appear in paperback.
several authors were dropped.\textsuperscript{278} When the manuscript was returned Pym wrote ‘Now I feel as if I shall never write again though perhaps I will’.\textsuperscript{279} She did, beginning \textit{The Sweet Dove Died} in 1963. In his introduction to the 1982 edition of \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment} Philip Larkin expresses the view that the novel did not suit the times.\textsuperscript{280} However, there is an alternative explanation. Pym’s subversive voice is more overt in \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment} than in the previous works published by Cape. This aspect of \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment} is discussed in Chapter 5.

In keeping with her determination to write her kind of novels, Pym defended her delight in the detail in her work:

In the restaurant all those clergymen helping themselves from the cold table, it seems endlessly. But you mustn’t notice things like that if you’re going to be a novelist in 1960 and the 70s. The posters on Oxford Circus station advertising Confidential Pregnancy Tests would be more suitable. What is wrong with being obsessed with trivia? Some have criticised \textit{The Sweet Dove} for this. What are the minds of my critics filled with? What nobler and more worthwhile things? Mr C in the library – he is having his lunch, eating a sandwich with a knife and fork, a glass of milk near at hand. Oh why can’t I write about things like that anymore – why is this kind of thing no longer acceptable?\textsuperscript{281}

Pym’s lament neglects to acknowledge the way in which she addressed issues, typical of social commentary. In particular, her comment that \textit{The Sweet Dove Died} was criticised as full of trivia is disingenuous. Although at

\textsuperscript{278} The rejected writers included M.J. Farrell, another female writer of seemingly pleasant social novels into which she wove a scathing attack on class. Unlike Pym who felt she could not write again, but did so almost immediately, M.J. Farrell did not write for years. In 1981, as Molly Keane, she replicated Pym’s success with her first novel since the rejection. \textit{Good Behaviour} (London: Virago Press 2006) like \textit{Quartet in Autumn} was short listed for the Booker Prize.

\textsuperscript{279} MS Pym 60, fol. 5.

\textsuperscript{280} Note Larkin’s observation that Pym’s world ‘is not a world likely to have held its own in the beginning of the Sixties, and indeed it did not’, \textit{Required Writing Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982} (Boston, Faber and Faber 1983) pp. 243-244.

\textsuperscript{281} Quoted from Pym’s diaries in Dinnage, p.33.
the time she could not have known the types of reviews it would receive, Pym’s miscalculation of Leonora Eyre’s effect on a reader is unlikely. Leonora’s treatment of an elderly woman cannot be seen as anything other than cruel (TSDD, pp.45 and 99-101) and, its converse, the remorseless development of Leonora’s immensely sad recognition of her ageing (TSDD, pp.63, 131, 74-75, 133, 165 and 182) presents a devastating portrait of pathos. The Sweet Dove Died is not renowned for its trivial, but for its portrayal of a woman who, while obsessed with trivial concerns such as appearance and status, is a well-developed character with many unpleasant attributes. Clare Hanson’s argument that Pym adopts serious debates in her work, rendering it innocent of the charge of triviality supports the view that Pym’s work is anything but trivial. 282 The Sweet Dove Died is discussed in Chapter 5.

In addition, while Pym’s initial observations recorded in her diaries are trivial, experience shows that they become a telling reflection on her society. Her note: ‘Television – the curiously shaped aerial on top of the house. A contrast with the church which has a cross’ 283 suggests that she would have connected the two simple symbols in a completed novel; her negative experience of an unneutered male cat becomes a metaphor for a weak man in a short story plot; 284 and notes 285 for An Unsuitable Attachment refer to a clergyman buying fish and chips. The idea becomes an effective vignette which raises class issues in the completed work (AUA, p.15). It is unlikely that the observations made about the clergy in the passage she relates, if translated to a novel, would have remained innocuous. As Pym’s novels that dwell on the clergy confirm, observations about them often become commentary on the church, its representatives and its practices.

Larkin’s relationship with Pym began when she was a well-known writer and the form and subject matter of her work was established. He refers to the

285 MS Pym 54, Diaries, May 1960, fol. v2.
beginning of their relationship as ‘[arising from] a fan letter I wrote her and went on for ten years before we actually met. I hope she enjoyed getting my letters; I certainly liked hers.’ Pym and Larkin continued corresponding when *An Unsuitable Attachment* was rejected. He was one of her sympathisers, finding her novel ‘continuously interesting and amusing’. He provided a full assessment, including his attempt to deduce the reasons for the publishers’ decision. Although the correspondence continued throughout her lifetime, it was two years before Pym and Larkin established a relationship based on a first name basis and they met for the first time in person fourteen years after they began corresponding.

They later discussed the rejection of *An Unsuitable Attachment* and Larkin sought explanations for the rejection. Holt records that ‘Philip Larkin’s friendship came at a very important time for Barbara. From that letter analysing *An Unsuitable Attachment*, right on, through the darker years, he was constant in his encouragement and appreciation’. Writing was the foundation of Pym and Larkin’s relationship. The letters they exchanged have none of the negative features of those Larkin wrote to other contemporaries. Pym and Larkin’s exchanges often included commentary on matters as mundane as Larkin’s move to a new house and its furnishings. The photo of the extension to the library at Hull University was of great amusement to Pym.

Publishers reconsidered Pym’s work when in 1977 Larkin and Lord David Cecil independently named Pym in a list of the most underrated writers of the century published in the *Times Literary Supplement*. She was the only writer to be so nominated. Her novels were reprinted; *The Sweet Dove Died* was

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286 Larkin, in *Required Writing*, p.65.
289 Larkin refers to their meeting after ten years, erroneously, in *Required Writing*, pp. 64-65.
290 Letters from Philip Larkin to Pym 1961 -79, MS Pym 151, fols 1-120.
293 MS Pym 65, fol. 15.
published ‘to great critical acclaim’, and *Quartet in Autumn* was short listed for the Booker prize in 1977 and referred to in the speech congratulating the winner. A BBC reading of *Quartet in Autumn*; the broadcast of *Finding a Voice* (CS, pp.408-416) and her appearance on “Desert Island Discs” followed. In 1978, Pym became a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. She was taught in American universities and invited to lecture in America but by this time was too ill to travel.

*Quartet in Autumn* was the outcome of Pym’s nearing retirement and notes from her first hospitalisation. After her retirement in 1974, in happier circumstances than Letty and Marjorie from *Quartet in Autumn*, she and Hilary shared Barn Cottage in Finstock. The village, close to Oxford, served as an ‘imaginary village’ (*AFGL*, Frontispiece) in Pym’s last novel, *A Few Green Leaves*. Pym describes the cottage as being in a ‘rustic not “chi chi” village’. On the walls of the Church of the Holy Trinity at which she worshipped are plaques commemorating both her and T.S. Eliot’s connections with the church. A plaque for “Hilary Walton” has joined them. Before she died, Hilary Pym (Walton) continued the sisters’ close relationship with the parish and fundraising, very much in the manner of Pym’s fictional excellent women. Indeed, *The Church Newsletter*, 133 July/August 2007 includes many of the topics in Pym’s novels with its fundraising activities, reports on school and church activities and list of church services. Now, economic concerns have replaced the philosophical debates over the appeal of Catholicism to Anglicans that were an important part of Pym’s life and novels. Pym’s characters, whose speculation upon women’s role in the church (*STG*, p.7 and *JP*, p.31), surely echo Pym’s own concerns would be gratified to see that the vicar is a woman.

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296 Pym ‘noted that she wanted Paul Scott to win (then Paul Bailey and then B.P.)’, Holt, *ALTA*, p. 260.
299 MS Pym 80, fol. 4.
300 Letter from Pym to Robert Smith, 19/5/72, MS Pym 162/2, fol. 87.
301 The dedication of a plaque to Hilary Walton in the church was undertaken by the vicar, the Reverend Jane Knowles in October 2008. Visit to Finstock in September, 2009.
Holt describes the period before Pym was diagnosed with a recurrence of cancer as positive:

The strands of her life were coming together. She had always kept up an affectionate correspondence with Jock Liddell and, indeed, kept all her friendships in good repair. She still saw many friends from the WRNS and from the Institute as well as others like Honor Wyatt, Bob Smith (now home from Africa), John and Elizabeth Barnicot (living quite near at Henley) and, of course, Henry Harvey. 302

Pym had begun writing A Few Green Leaves and was commissioned to write short stories for The New Yorker and The Church Times. Typically, she began plotting a new novel:

two women starting with their college lives (not earlier). One from a privileged background, the other from a more ordinary one (but not working class) 303 and the subsequent course of their lives. This would be a chance to bring in World War 11. 304

The ideas did not come to fruition. A Few Green Leaves was sent to Macmillan (although Pym was not fully satisfied) and published posthumously. Holt, who at Pym’s invitation saw the novel through the press, records that Pym’s popularity increased, her work is studied in universities and ‘All her novels were published in the United States and they have now been translated into French, Italian, German, Dutch, Portuguese, Hungarian, and Russian. 305

IV

302 Holt, ALTA, p. 270.
303 Pym kept to her own milieu in her central themes and characterisation. However, she also dealt with class. The description of different groups of housing and residents in An Unsuitable Attachment (pp.16-19) is an example of her approach in the novels. In her short stories she was more direct, as in “The Rich Man in His Castle”, discussed in Chapter 5.
304 MS Pym 97, fol. 10.
305 Holt, ALTA, p. 279.
Commentators have speculated about the degree to which Pym’s fiction is autobiographical. She acknowledges the influence of her experiences, some of which she provoked to produce events for her fiction. More significantly, she said:

I might use Christopher Isherwood’s phrase ‘I am a camera’ to describe the process by which the novelist records his impression of life. But the novelist’s camera is a selective one, picking and choosing, recording some things clearly, rejecting others altogether. And it is obvious that the camera of one novelist may record quite different things from that of another.

Pym’s acknowledgement of her selection and interpretation is important. Her comment, together with the evidence from her work, raises the matter of “truth” in autobiography. She says one ‘can learn a great deal about a writer from their fiction, not necessarily from autobiography’. Pym gives the reader the imprimatur to speculate upon her beliefs and understandings of the world through her fiction. This thesis is designed to undertake that task. Pym’s collection of newspaper clippings for story ideas and copious notes about her observations suggest that she was open to writing well beyond the minutia of her own life. In keeping with the idea underlying the politics of difference, Pym fictionalised women’s, not a particular woman’s, experiences. She gives voice to middle-aged as well as young women, to those referred to as ‘mousy women’, including mousy spinsters, as well as conventionally attractive women such as Prudence (JP) and Wilmet (AGB). Her characters usually attend church, but some do not. Some women are depicted as having careers; others are in part-time or charitable work. Other women are wives and

306 MS Pym 94, fol. 79.
307 MS Pym 98, fol. 62.
309 MS Pym 98, fol. 62.
310 MS Pym 98, fols 24-36.
311 Solow, pp. 70-81.
mothers. By inference Pym deals with moral issues flexibly, her later works reflecting her comment ‘By the way, ones attitude to ‘morality’ seems less relevant in one’s sixties and perhaps as life goes on?’ Integral to her work is her explanation about two of its enduring features:

I suppose I criticise and mock at the clergy and the Church of England because I’m fond of them, and the same might be said about my attitude to men [...] I have always liked them very much (even though I haven’t been married) but I have been able to look at them with detachment, a quality I admire and try to bring to all my writing, the way I look at all my characters'.

Publishers did not share Pym’s satisfaction with detachment as an authorial advantage. Chatto & Windus criticised her objectivity when they rejected Some Tame Gazelle. A similar criticism was made of some of her short stories in 1949. “The Rich man in His Castle” and “The Day the Music Came” were rejected as ‘unsuitable for an audience which was young romantics, anxious to be caught up in the life of the stories’.

Because of the presence of former co-workers or friends, the debate over the autobiographical nature of Pym’s work is most dramatically reflected in the scholarly and popular papers and discussions at the Barbara Pym Conferences held in Oxford and North America. Presenters who see the sadness of Pym’s life reflected in her work include Susan Lumenello, Peter Lloyd and Hilary Spurling. In contrast, James Runcie sees hope in the novels. Such observations conflict with Pym’s diary entry ‘I’m beginning to enjoy my pose

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312 MS Pym 94, fol. 84.
313 MS Pym 94, fol. 84.
315 MS Pym163/1, fol. 43.
316 MS Pym 163/1, fol. 10.
317 MS Pym 163/1, fols 10-11.
318 ‘Barbara Pym’s Lessons for the Fiction Writer’ MS Pym 94, fol. 84.
of romantically unrequited love, and Liddell’s assertion that ‘She had sometimes reproached me for not taking her loves seriously enough; at other times – when they had ended in tears – she found some comfort in regarding them (as I did) as a kind of game’. 

Rossen supports Liddell’s opinion that love was not Pym’s only imperative. She argues that No Fond Return of Love shows love and work as interchangeable. Rossen asserts that Pym’s Oxford experiences led her to reflect upon what it meant to be a woman academic, leading her to ‘integrate feminist, academic and romantic problems in her writing’.

Garner’s commentary on the autobiographical nature of the spinsters in Some Tame Gazelle reflects upon Pym’s adoption of the positive features of being, and remaining, a spinster. He avers that Pym was ‘brought up to be useful and she fulfilled this duty, as did many of her characters – the excellent women, there was no irony in the phrase; she knew (as we know) that without women like this a society that is still basically decent and ordered would collapse into apathy, selfishness and nastiness’. Garner’s assumptions about the excellent woman and Pym’s attitudes towards her are questioned in this thesis. In particular, Belinda Bede, Pym’s alter ego in Some Tame Gazelle, challenges Garner’s conjecture (STG, p.9).

Holt’s A Lot To Ask is replete with incidents and observations Pym makes in her diaries which then appear in her novels. Holt commends her ‘observant eye and, somewhere, although submerged, the stirrings of the spirit of irony’. She believes that the novels are ‘moulded by her life, as well as the other way around’. Orphia Jane Allen supports Holt’s analysis.

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322 MS Pym 102, fol.5.
323 Liddell, p. 17.
325 Rossen in TWBP, p. 21.
326 Garner’s belief that Pym was not ironic about the excellent woman is challenged by some of her uses of the term.
327 Garner, p. 21.
328 Holt, ALTA, p. ix.
329 Holt, ALTA, p. 39.
330 Holt, ALTA, p. ix.
Larkin also draws a picture of Pym writing through a personal prism. He refers to Pym’s “distinctive approach”, as he sees it, arising from her personal understandings of the world around her.\textsuperscript{332}

Commentators such as Nardin see more complexities in Pym’s motivation than do Holt, Allen and Larkin. Nardin proposes that Pym is an intellectual who saw her experiences through a philosophical framework, concerning herself with broader issues, most importantly, the conflict between literature and science.\textsuperscript{333} Less than Angels provides the prime example of Pym’s technique of posing questions about broad issues through personal relationships. Less Than Angels is discussed in Chapter 3.

Wyatt-Brown takes a different approach through her psychological work about Pym\textsuperscript{334} and her subsequent article based on Karen Horney’s feminine psychology.\textsuperscript{335} In keeping with Horney’s theory, Wyatt-Brown assumes the major influence on Pym’s work was her family life. She maintains Pym’s childhood was hurtful and disappointing, thus establishing a pattern that undermined her adult relationships with lovers and friends. Wyatt-Brown concludes that anxiety about marriage formed the basis of much of Pym’s work. She speculates about the negative effect Pym’s father’s illegitimacy may have had on the family\textsuperscript{336} However, such speculation conflicts with Hilary Pym’s interest in the story and regret that Barbara was unaware of her father’s history.\textsuperscript{337} Wyatt-Brown also suggests that Irena Pym’s strong role in the family and lack of interest in “feminine” activities such as fashion damaged Pym.\textsuperscript{338} As a result, she claims that ‘Pym wrote perceptively about inhibited, conforming but acutely sensitive women [because] she was one herself’.\textsuperscript{339} In

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{331} Allen, p. 64.
\item \textsuperscript{332} Holt ALT4, p. ix.
\item \textsuperscript{333} Nardin, p.47.
\item \textsuperscript{334} Wyatt-Brown, ACB.
\item \textsuperscript{335} Wyatt-Brown, ‘Ellipsis, Eccentricity and Evasion in the Diaries of Barbara Pym’ in IW.
\item \textsuperscript{336} Wyatt-Brown, ACB, p. 13.
\item \textsuperscript{337} Pym and Holt, AVPE, pp. 1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{338} Wyatt-Brown, ACB, p. 15.
\item \textsuperscript{339} Wyatt-Brown, ‘Ellipsis’ in IW, p. 35.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
this thesis, Wyatt-Brown’s assertion is rejected. Instead, it is argued that
Pym’s central women characters rebelled against convention.

Wyatt-Brown cites the theme of Pym’s “The Magic Diamond”, in support
of her claim that Pym’s attitude to life was established in her earliest fiction. Nine-year-old Pym’s work revolves around resolution of a problem set for two
young protagonists, a prince and a princess. They are of equal status. The
prince is unable to reach a solution and asks the princess to assist him.
Bemused by the enormity of their task both are rescued by the king. Wyatt-
Brown finds a solution in which Pym gives power to age, status and
masculinity evidence of her inability to embrace independence. However,
Pym’s use of a technique with which she was familiar through her parents’
love of Gilbert and Sullivan is not particularly instructive about her
psychological state. Wyatt-Brown suggests that Pym’s inability to recall
details of her childhood, a “shortcoming”, and replicated by Hilary Pym.
However, Holt’s account counteracts the assertion. There are alternative
explanations for what Wyatt-Brown sees as Pym’s negative attitude towards
children. Chris Ward applies the psychoanalytic framework of the 1980s
feminist, Julia Kristeva, to Some Tame Gazelle, Crampton Hodnet and Less
Than Angels to argue with Wyatt-Brown’s speculation about the deleterious
effect of Pym’s childhood.

In this thesis, it is argued that Pym’s feminist approach to her work partly
arose from Pym’s childhood and her observation of her family. She would
have been well aware of her mother’s central place her own and her sister’s
narrative and its positive consequences. Irena’s unorthodox role in the family
and community as well as Pym’s spinster aunts’ presence, encouraged Pym to
see women as central to events. Her observations challenged women’s
supposed natural domesticity. The contrast made by the gentle role her father

340 Wyatt-Brown, ACB, p. 11.
341 Wyatt-Brown, ACB, p. 12.
342 Holt’s reference to Hilary Walton’s ‘almost total recall’ ALTA, p. viii conflicts with Wyatt-
Brown’s statement.
adopted in the family contributed to Pym’s recognition that gender did not control behaviour. Pym’s constant questioning of the institutions of marriage, religion and work, could well have arisen from her early experience of alternative behaviours within marriage. As a keen observer of human relationships, it is possible that Pym recognised that conventional marriages were not necessarily happier than that of her parents. She questions conventional expectations of marriage through fictional accounts such as *A Glass of Blessings* and *An Academic Question*. At their core, they depict wives who, by seeking fulfilment, challenge their traditional role. *A Glass of Blessings* is discussed in Chapter 3 and *An Academic Question* in Chapter 6. Pym’s is a self-confident approach to women and men’s relationships.

Speculation that Pym’s response to marriage was a product of her unhappy spinsterhood raises the question: why did it matter? P.D. James’ assessment is noteworthy in the context of so many commentators’ concern with Pym’s unmarried state. Her comment ‘That the question [of marriage] would not come so readily to mind about a contemporary novelist’\(^{344}\) is pertinent. Marriage, or her lack of it, has remained a focus that has impinged upon analysis of Pym’s work. James’ point raises issues about the contexts in which Pym’s work is read and analysed. James comments on Pym’s spinsterhood as follows:

for a woman born in 1913, marriage was regarded as a natural state for a woman, and a girl who, like Barbara, was clever, attractive, sociable and kind, would attract comment if she had not achieved matrimony by the age of 30. There is evidence that Barbara would have liked to have been married, but I wonder if at some unconscious level she realised that marriage would be inimical to her art. In this, too, I feel she resembles Jane Austen [...] Perhaps, too, men were a little frightened of that all-

seeing eye.\footnote{James, \textit{GL}, May 2005 (11).}

Pym’s positive depiction of spinsterhood in so many of her novels illustrates her belief in the value of women’s independence won through \textit{not} marrying. She rejected romance novel techniques when she gave credibility to the enduring interest in life expressed by single women and rejected marriage as a natural ending to her fiction. The novels in which the positive depiction of spinsters was established are discussed in Chapter 2.

\textbf{V}

Claudia Johnson’s work on the way in which Austen promoted feminist ideas in an inhospitable landscape\footnote{Claudia Johnson, \textit{Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) p. 19.} is a useful pointer to Pym’s similar methods of writing subversive fiction. Both use irony and mockery; draw upon expectations of male and female behaviour and transpose them to confound expectations; or use a conforming woman to contrast with a troublesome woman. Bowman describes how Pym adopted Austen’s template to produce her own subversive works. She links the authors through their common use of the first person narrative to make subversive commentary and Pym’s use of ‘some of the assumptions behind Austen’s irony, where what poses as a maxim becomes an obvious “untruth”.’\footnote{Barbara Bowman, ‘Barbara Pym’s Subversive Subtext: Private Irony and Shared Detachment’ in \textit{I\textasciitilde W}, pp. 83-94.} Pym’s irony, like Austen’s, touches all aspects of the lives she depicts: romance, the church, professional and domestic life, academic and cultural understandings as well as the relationship between women and men. Johnson’s suggestion that as a woman writer Austen entered the western canon on sufferance is as true for Pym whose work has been described negatively as “women’s fiction” and “cosy”.\footnote{MS Pym162, fol. 59, Diary entry 2/4/1968 refers to accusations that her work is cosy.}

Pym manoeuvred between producing writing that asked difficult questions about discrimination against women and devising strategies to make her
writing and ideas palatable. She replaced Austen’s enclosed society with its
drawing rooms and convention with techniques that drew on the prejudices of
her own audience. Pym’s village or pseudo village, literary quotations, overtly
stock characters and the reappearance of familiar characters from previous
novels also represent an enclosed community as discussed in Chapter 4.
Within its cover, she demolished revered institutions in satire, first person
examination of personal and public failings and compassion toward
egregiously flawed characters. It is argued that the hiatus in publication Pym
experienced between 1961 and 1971 was a consequence of her relinquishing
many of the familiar techniques with which she cloaked her ideas.

Pym’s attention to Austen’s work was comprehensive. Her library
included Austen’s novels and her diaries refer to her reaction to them and their
author. Pym asked ‘what novelist of today would dare to claim that she was
influenced by such masters [Trollope and Austen] of our craft?’ She denied
that her work was ‘Jane Austenish themes in a modern setting’ but used her
work for inspiration on how to ‘manage[s] all the loose ends’. Contrary to
her assessment, commentators have made abundant connections between
Austen and Pym’s novels and their execution.

Marriage is a constant in debate about their work. A.L. Rowse,
biographer of both Austen and Pym, sees similarities in their attitudes to
marriage, Anglicanism and their similar scrutiny of society. In his view neither
was a prude, nor had no illusions about life. Rowse contends that while
Austen dwells on marriage, Pym’s focus is on love. Walia’s work assumes that
both authors are interested in marriage and concludes that Austen’s women are
successful as they achieve their aim to marry while Pym’s women ‘do not

349 Pym directly noted the influence of Austen in a draft of An Unsuitable Attachment which
includes the idea that she should give Ianthe’s aunt a Jane Austen environment, MS Pym 20,
Notebook, fol. 22.
351 MS Pym 98, fol. 80.
353 ‘Miss Pym and Miss Austen’ in Salwak, pp. 64-71.
354 Rowse, p. 68.
355 Rowse, p. 69.
usually get the men they desire and she takes up aging protagonists’
endeavours to cope with their disappointment in love’.\footnote{Walid, p. 74.}

Commentators have made direct comparisons between Austen and Pym’s
work. According to Isobel Stanley, Pym includes ‘clerical types […]
descended from Jane Austen, the Brontes and Anthony Trollope’.\footnote{‘The
Anglican Clergy in the Novels of Barbara Pym’ (unpublished doctoral
dissertation, University of Ann Arbor, 1990.)} David
Kubal reflects on the way in which both writers connect particular women
characters, such as Wilmet (AGB) and Austen’s Emma.\footnote{‘A Glass of
Jan Fergus also
links Emma and A Glass of Blessings, concluding that Mary Beamish (AGB) is
‘whose excellence makes the heroine feel uneasy and
spiteful, whose good qualities she acknowledges only reluctantly’.\footnote{Jan
Fergus in IW, p. 111.} Peter W.
Graham in ‘Emma’s Three Sisters’ also compares Austen and Pym’s novels in
his discussion of Some Tame Gazelle.\footnote{Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American
Literature, Culture and Theory 43 Spring, 1987 (39-52).}

Other commentators refer to similarities in form or motivation between
Austen and Pym. Wyatt-Brown’s psychoanalytic assessment of Pym’s work
mirrors Gilbert and Gubar’s suggestion that Austen used her characters’
dilemmas to explore her own problems.\footnote{Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar The
Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 1979) pp.154-155.} Both interpretations use the writers’
spinsterhood to identify their fiction as a particular type. As noted by James,
fixation on marital status sits uneasily with feminist investigation. Marilyn
Butler in the London Review of Books ‘notes parallels between Austen and
Pym themes and characters’.\footnote{Allen, p. 52.} Fergus claims that ‘Most of Pym’s novels after
Some Tame Gazelle and Excellent Women allude overtly to Austen’s works’.\footnote{Gilbert and Gubar.}
She elaborates ‘Covert allusions to plot, characterization and social comedy in
Emma do not exhaust Pym’s interest in obtaining effects typical of that novel.
Like Austen, for instance, she creates ironies of character and structure. Fischelli notes similarities in Pym’s short stories and Austen’s Juvenilia. She also links Pym, Eliot and Austen in their similar use of ‘domestic settings and provincial circles as a backdrop for their examinations of women’s place in society’.  

VI

Pym’s traditional education in English Literature with the classics at its core gave her a wide literary heritage. Rossen refers to her ‘extensive use of literary allusion [...] which is remarkable for its breadth and variety’. Both add symbolic complexity to enhance the narrative. Pym’s general reading was also extensive. Aldous Huxley’s Crome Yellow and Ivy Compton-Burnett and Charlotte M. Yonge’s work is featured in much of the commentary about her tastes. She records some of her reading in her diaries. She found The Pillars of the House ‘very rich’. She refers to feminist authors such as Elizabeth von Arnim (Elizabeth’s German Garden, The Pastor’s Wife), Virginia Woolf (To The Lighthouse) and Elizabeth Jenkins (The Tortoise and the Hare) whose

365 Rossen in IW, p. 115.
367 Fischelli, p. 2.
368 Rossen in IW, p. 107.
369 There are few quotations in An Academic Question and Quartet in Autumn, Pym’s novels which deal most directly with contemporary social concerns. The omission is discussed in relation to the village cover in Chapter 4.
370 Pym’s use of Crome Yellow as a source was short-lived ‘Reading the manuscript again (Crome Yellow), I detect almost nothing in it of my mature style of writing, except that the Bohemian young men are not taken entirely seriously, and that there is a lot of detail—clothes, makes of cars, golf, and the drinks (especially cocktails which I had certainly never tasted)’, CS, p. 409.
371 Holt, ALTA, p. 114.
372 MS Pym 162/1, fol. 61.
373 Pym was sufficiently interested in Elizabeth to read her biography, MS Pym 52, Diaries Dec 1958 – Oct 1959, fol. v1.
374 During the war Pym refers to reading ‘lovely Virginia Woolf extracts’ (MS Pym 109, fol. v82) and A Room of one’s Own, MS Pym 109, fol. v3 and folv84 - v85.
work she admired. Her desire to combine the creativity of von Arnim and Huxley in her work, together with her belief that her parents found Huxley "unsuitable" suggests that she aspired to writing the reverse of cosy novels.

Pym’s knowledge and ability to quote extensively is shown by reference to more obscure poets and quotes from the great poet/hymn writers like Herbert and Addison which combined her affection for the church with her literary education. She made use of the economy of language and expression of complex ideas in poetic form in titles such as *Some Tame Gazelle*, *The Sweet Dove Died* and *A Glass of Blessings*. Pym’s reading was wider than the classical literature that she quoted in her novels, lending verisimilitude to the notion of her as a person who read widely for enjoyment and, at least privately, escaped the boundaries she imposed upon herself. A catalogue of Pym’s library made by Hilary Pym includes contemporaries and friends such as Robert Liddell, Elizabeth Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Taylor, Philip Larkin, Rupert Gleadow, Penelope Lively and Honor Wyatt. Writers relevant to her work also appear: John Donne, Rev. S.H.J. Henry (*The Oxford Movement*), John Browne (*Religio medici*); John Kebel (*The Christian year: thoughts in verse for the Sundays and Holydays throughout the year 1914*); George Herbert, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, Christina Rosetti, John Wilmot Rochester, Coventry Patmore, John Milton, John Henry Newman (*Cardinal Apologia Pro Vita Sua*), Charlotte M.Yonge, Anthony a’ Wood and Margaret Watt (*The History of the Parson's Wife*) together with writers whose work she

375 MS Pym 98, fol. 56-73, fol. 58 and also in MS Pym 45, fol. 23 in a list of favourite books read in 1954. Also referred to in Chapter 3 in relation to Pym’s characterisation of Wilmet Forsyth in *A Glass of Blessings*.
377 “Some tame gazelle, or some gentle dove: Something to love, oh, something to love’ Thomas Haynes Bayley. (Songs, Ballads, and Other Poems 1844).
particularly admired, as noted above, and disparate choices such Graham Green, Maxim Gorky, Rumer Godden, Elizabeth Gaskell, Thomas Hardy, Daniel Defoe, George Eliot, Truman Capote, Emily and Charlotte Bronte, Angela Thirkell, Anton Tchekov, Stephen Spender, Frederick Stephen Raphael, Tillie Olsen and Nancy Mitford.\textsuperscript{381}

During the war, Pym found time to read and comment on some of her reading. Some unique titles are a crime novel written in 1936, \textit{Murder Mars the Tour} by Mary Fitt, which Pym found ‘quite short, but excellent’ — thoroughly enjoyed it’; Ann Bridge’s \textit{Illyrian Spring}, ‘about a woman in her forties, wrestling with the problems of life’; \textit{Don’t Mr Disraeli}, which was resplendent with the detail Pym enjoyed; \textit{Howard’s End}, ‘about class struggle’; T.H. White’s \textit{The Ill-Made Knight} ‘good, modern idiom’; and \textit{Rampling Cat} ‘a modern novel about the time of Henry VIII — with cars and phones’.\textsuperscript{382}

In the small diaries she kept between 1969 and 1978 Pym recorded the authors she read each year. Pym’s interest in women authors who gave women central places in their narratives, often with special attention to women’s issues, is apparent in her records that include Edna O’Brien, Rosemary Manning (\textit{The Chinese Garden}, first published in 1962 was reprinted by the Feminist Press in 2000), Iris Murdoch, Elizabeth Jenkins, Margaret Drabble, Elizabeth Jane Howard, Antonia White, A.S. Byatt, Janice Elliott (\textit{The Godmother} is amongst Elliott’s novels that address the anomalies in marriages that appear pleasant but have an unpleasant reality), Alison Lurie, Jane Austen, Margaret Forster, Elizabeth Taylor, Jean Rhys, Rosamund Lehmann, Olivia Manning, Charlotte Bronte, Mary Hocking, Rachel Ferguson (\textit{The Brontes Went to Woolworths}, first published 1931 was reprinted in Virago Classics in 1988); Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bowen, Penelope Mortimer, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Shirley Hazzard, Doris Lessing, Gail Godwin, Winifred Holtby, Vera

\textsuperscript{381} Card Catalogue of Barbara Pym’s Library compiled by Hilary Pym, MS Pym 175, 1981.
\textsuperscript{382} MS Pym 107, Diary, 1941, referred to throughout.
Brittain, Caroline Blackwood, Penelope Lively, Beryl Bainbridge, Fay Weldon, Penelope Fitzgerald, and Katherine Mansfield.\textsuperscript{383}

III

Pym’s gender politics are an essential part of her novels. Although she omits any reference to extension of the vote to women over 21, it is worth noting that it was won just before she went to Oxford. There is evidence that Pym was aware of issues particular to women during the war when she refers to the Register of Women for War Work in her diary\textsuperscript{384} and, later mentions the removal of women from voluntary occupations.\textsuperscript{385} It would support the argument that Pym’s novels were feminist if they included direct references to women’s attitudes to voting, similarly to the way in which Belinda (\textit{STG}) and Jane (\textit{JP}) refer to women’s role in the church. However, apart from \textit{Some Tame Gazelle} Pym sets her novels in the present and by the time she wrote \textit{Excellent Women} women’s voting rights were established. She adopts her usual ironic authorial approach when, in \textit{A Glass of Blessings}, she dismisses the notion that a woman should be influenced by her husband’s vote (\textit{AGB}, p.37).

Pym’s political loyalties have been a source of disquiet because of her apparent interest in Nazi display and her German friends. During the 1930s, Pym visited Germany, first on a National Union of Students tour, and four times after that. Cocking speculates that Pym’s relationship with Harvey being at a standstill, she accepted the National Union of Students trip as an opportunity to leave Oxford.\textsuperscript{386} Pym’s comment about Friedbert Gluck that ‘the Germans and Belgians appreciate me even if the English don’t’\textsuperscript{387} has led to the speculation by her friends and commentators that even Pym’s travel in her university years is associated with her romantic relationships.\textsuperscript{388} Pym comments that her attraction

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{383} MS Pym 128-145, 1969 – 1978 Diaries, listings on the last pages of the dairy for each year.
\bibitem{384} MS Pym 107, fol. 16.
\bibitem{385} MS Pym 107, Diary 1941, fol. 9.
\bibitem{386} Cocking, ‘Barbara Pym in Germany’ \textit{GL}, May 2006 (3).
\bibitem{387} MS Pym 102, fol. 85.
\bibitem{388} Cocking, (3).
\end{thebibliography}
to Gluck was ‘probably glamour. His being a foreigner – the little Americanisms in his speech’.  

Pym fictionalised the German men she met in *Some Tame Gazelle*. An early draft sent to Cape and Gollanz includes them. Liddell was uneasy about the inclusion, suggesting it would be better to ‘harden your heart and omit them’. Gleadow’s reaction was stronger: ‘Oh but please don’t admire those filthy Nazis in the beautiful (sic) uniforms: you won’t get a chance much longer, because 1936 will just about see the end of Hitler’. As it transpired, Pym had little commitment to the German passages, agreeing readily to Liddell ‘I shall certainly leave out the Nazis because lately I’ve been thinking the story would be better without them and I don’t think I was ever very keen on them’. In retrospect, Pym was ‘ashamed of having been fond of a German’.  

Holt believes that Pym’s German episode arose from her personal relationship with Friedbert, and states that she was politically naive. Holt’s view of Pym is at odds with Pym’s own statements. She wrote that she should ‘take an interest in Hitler, Nazis and German Politics’ and commented that ‘events in Germany political and personal – were much in my mind’. Most significantly, in her dairy she records that she thought about Friedbert’s politics, and early in their relationship told him that she could not agree with his National Socialist ideas. Pym’s early and continuing reading of German literature suggests that her great interest in Germany was initially cultural, in keeping with the mode at the time in which young English women visited Germany for a type of “finishing school” effect. Her diaries and notebooks contain references to reading

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389 MS Pym 103, fol. 27.  
390 The omitted passages are referred to in Appendix 2.  
392 Letter from Gleadow to Pym, 3rd August, 1936, MS Pym 150, fol. 93.  
393 Letter from Pym to Liddell, 27 January, 1936, MS 153, fol. 158.  
394 MS Pym 104-107, Diary 1941, fol. 97.  
395 MS Pym 102, fol. 66.  
396 MS Pym 103, fol. 2.  
397 MS Pym 103, fol. 27.  
398 Other ill-informed young women visited Germany during the 1930s as part of their cultural education. One of them refers to a sign on a swimming pool that forbade Jews from entering and wondered what it meant. She says that she did not know anything about Jews [...] Some
Goethe's *Letters* and *Berliner Diary* and later, R.C. Hutchinson's *The Fire and the Wood*. Although initially enamoured of Hitler, Pym’s comment about Hutchinson’s novel as ‘concentration camp scenes and listening to Beethoven’s Emperor Concerts. Oh Germany!’\(^{399}\) displays her commiseration with a Germany of the past. When the Germans went into Holland and Belgium, she noted ‘Not all the Hitler’s and the Stalin’s in the world can stop the spring coming’.\(^{400}\) Such a comment is that of a writer. See Appendix 2 for further discussion of the Pym Society’s research on this period of Pym’s life and the gist of the passages omitted from *Some Tame Gazelle*.

Apart from the question of Pym’s attitude to German politics, Holt says that Pym was ‘quite uninterested in politics of any kind. Her father was the sort of professional, middle-class man who would naturally vote Conservative’.\(^{401}\) In contrast to the assertion that she was disinterested in politics is Pym’s comment on Chamberlain’s resignation: ‘no more courageous man in the government or indeed anywhere [...] but Winston Churchill will be better for this war– as Hilary said, he is such an old beast’.\(^{402}\) She also attended some Labour party meetings, in Holt’s view only to meet men.\(^{403}\) Pym’s own record suggests that her feelings were more complicated. Although she made a complimentary reference to a male attendee, she also wrote that the meeting was ‘Rather above me’.\(^{404}\) In 1945, Pym voted for Labour, but was unsure about her decision.\(^{405}\) She noted, ‘Election Day’ in a 1954 literary notebook.\(^{406}\) In May 1979, she records ‘Election. Voted Liberal’,\(^{407}\) an event

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\(^{399}\) MS Pym 107, Diary 1940, fol. v21.
\(^{400}\) MS Pym 146, Reflections by Barbara Pym, 1940, n.f.
\(^{401}\) Holt, *ALTA*, p. 68.
\(^{402}\) MS Pym 146, Reflections, 1940, n.f.
\(^{403}\) Holt, *ALTA*, p. 68.
\(^{404}\) MS Pym 101, fol. 29.
\(^{405}\) MS Pym 111, fol. 53.
\(^{406}\) MS Pym 45, fol. v18.
\(^{407}\) MS Pym 145, Diaries, March 1979 – Sept. 1979, fol. 3.
that is significant.\textsuperscript{408} It is also hard to agree that Pym was entirely uninterested in party politics. Political references are included in her fictional observation of her society in novels such as \textit{Crampton Hodnet},\textsuperscript{409} \textit{Some Tame Gazelle},\textsuperscript{410} \textit{Jane and Prudence},\textsuperscript{411} \textit{A Few Green Leaves},\textsuperscript{412} the draft of \textit{Quartet in Autumn},\textsuperscript{413} and notes for a wartime novel\textsuperscript{414} notes in a 1955 notebook,\textsuperscript{415} and notes in her \textquotedblleft Commonplace Notebook\textquotedblright\textsuperscript{416} for future novels and short stories.\textsuperscript{417}

Assumptions about Pym’s close friendship with Philip Larkin and his political conservatism have encouraged commentators to draw the conclusion that she, too, was a Conservative. The assertion raises two questions. What was the nature of Larkin’s conservatism and did Pym follow the political interests of her friends. According to long-term friend and co-worker at Hull University, Philip Bacon, Larkin’s political stance has been misconstrued.\textsuperscript{418}

\textsuperscript{408} This election brought Margaret Thatcher to power and Labour voters were encouraged, and did, vote Conservative. The swing to the Conservatives was over 5%. The turnout was 76% of the voting population. Although this only places Pym amongst the majority who voted, it has to be acknowledged that she made a conscious decision to vote. She did not vote Conservative under what were fortuitous circumstances for them and, because of the Jeremy Thorpe scandal, negative ones for the Liberals. Pym was aware of the scandal as shown by Larkin’s correspondence with her, MS Pym 152, fol. v22.

\textsuperscript{409} Miss Doggett is shocked at a the political leanings of a student visitor to her afternoon tea as he is said to be a “Bolshevik”, p. 5; the same student is said to be more welcome at the professor’s home, p. 213.

\textsuperscript{410} Lady Boulding’s opening of the church fête is said to include ‘rather too much of her late husband’s meaningless parliamentary phraseology’, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{411} The local member is expected at the bridge night and is a source of conversation, pp. 96-103.

\textsuperscript{412} A politician from ‘one of the new African republics’ (AFGL, p.15) is interviewed on television.

\textsuperscript{413} MS Pym 72, fol. v9. Oct 73 - April 74, a ‘Political candidate (doesn’t matter what party) who visits Marcia at the time of the election’.

\textsuperscript{414} MS Pym 99, fol. 7.

\textsuperscript{415} MS Pym 84, fol.5, notes for a novel include: ‘This morning we had leaflets from the Communist candidate for the local elections- a fresh faced boy he seems to be (nice line for poem) I can imagine and elderly down trodden woman “rebelling” going in to the booth and putting against the Communist and then coming trembling out into the March dark so full of the promise of spring.’; fol.8 ‘January 1940 After the Hon. Belivah’s resignation. The MP setting a good example to his constituents by walking to his house and the station’; fol.10 ‘Hitler couldn’t stand a long war they all said Lord Wootton has the food situation well in hand’.

\textsuperscript{416} MS Pym 83, fol. 1-96 ‘The Love of a Good Woman – Parliamentary – disappointed as he ends up with ’nine screaming children and an extravagant wife’ instead of becoming a PM.’

\textsuperscript{417} Ms Pym 11, fol. 22 - 47, Notes for ‘Something to Remember’ (including another title, ‘The stuffed birds’) includes a woman who is to be a companion secretary to a politician’s wife.

\textsuperscript{418} Philip Bacon, Personal Communication, April 2008.
on the other hand, Larkin said he had ‘always been right wing. It’s difficult to say why, not being a political thinker I suppose I identify the Right with certain virtues and the Left with certain vices. All very unfair no doubt’.\textsuperscript{419} In contrast to his self-assessment, when interviewed for “Desert Island Discs” Larkin nominated the complete plays of Bernard Shaw as his one book, saying ‘Shaw is such a sane and light-hearted writer and above all so free from self-pity. I think he’d be the ideal companion for a desert island’.\textsuperscript{420}

If Pym’s political sympathies are to be judged by those of her friends, it is as valid to note that Honor Wyatt was a communist sympathiser.\textsuperscript{421} Elizabeth Taylor, like Wyatt, was an early communist and then a dedicated Labour supporter. Taylor was also one of Pym’s enduring friends. The friendship had a political dimension in their membership of P.E.N.\textsuperscript{422} Their literary interests in common are discussed below. Pym marched behind the October Club banner in support of the workers in the 1930s. Although there is no doubt that she found her involvement in the march incongruous, her criticism of communism was modest.\textsuperscript{423} Amongst Pym’s wide ranging reading was peace movement literature such as the Pilgrim and the Phoenix by Marjorie Scott Johnson, and The Aerodrome by Rex Warner.\textsuperscript{424} She also records attending a Pacifist meeting\textsuperscript{425} although she admits to not being ‘entirely converted’.\textsuperscript{426} At the authorial level, her suggestion in December 1967 that Compton-Burnett’s influence on the Art Council Awards was ‘too strong’\textsuperscript{427} was a political appraisal.

The strongest clues to Pym’s politics, most importantly her gender politics, are in her novels.

\textsuperscript{419} Larkin, Required Writing. p.52.
\textsuperscript{420} Larkin, Desert Island Discs in Required Writing, p.110. BBC Radio 4 17 July 1976.
\textsuperscript{421} Liddell to Pym: ‘Honor is not a very devout communist now’, 26/12/1936, MS Pym 153, fol. 29.
\textsuperscript{422} MS Pym 162/3, fol. 9 and fols 16-17.
\textsuperscript{423} MS Pym 102, fol. 105.
\textsuperscript{424} MS Pym 107, Diary 1941, 29\textsuperscript{th} June, fol. 29.
\textsuperscript{425} MS Pym 103, fol.69.
\textsuperscript{426} MS Pym 103, fol.70.
\textsuperscript{427} Pym and Holt, AVPE, p. 244.
VIII

The context in which Pym wrote was bounded by her contemporaries’ publications, discussions with authors and reviews of her work. Friends whose opinions she sought, or who offered to read her manuscripts, included other writers such as Liddell, Robert Smith, Larkin, Taylor, Jill Neville and Penelope Lively.

The milieu in which Pym published spanned the early 1950s to the rejection of *An Unsuitable Attachment* in 1963 and then 1975 to 1980. In the first period, her contemporaries included writers such as Elizabeth Bowen whom she met in 1952 after *Some Tame Gazelle* was published. She commented ‘for almost the only time […] life I moved, just a little, in literary society’.428 Bowen’s first novel was published in 1927. Her short story collection, *Encounters*, published in 1949, appears on Pym’s reading list. It concentrates largely on women and men’s relationships. Bowen’s “All Saints” exemplifies their similar interest in religious observance, but different approach. Pym treats Mrs Beltane’s belief that God can be worshipped anywhere with comic irony (*NFRL*, pp.157-159). When Mrs Morris confirms Mildred’s fear that she feels close to God in a garden (*EW*, p.50) the situation is comical. In contrast, Bowen’s ‘emotional- looking lady in black’429 questioning traditional theology is a person of fear and horror. At end of the story, the vicar ‘turned on his heel and fled through the darkness’.430 *A World of Love* (1955) was published during Pym’s successful period and Bowen continued to publish during the hiatus in Pym’s work, with *The Little Girls* (1964) *The Good Tiger* (1965), *Changing Seasons* (1968) and *Eva Trout* (1968).

Three of Taylor’s novels coincided with Pym’s early work. Her *A Game of Hide and Seek* (1951), published between Pym’s *Some Tame Gazelle* and

430 Bowen, p. 64.
Excellent Women, exposes a dissimilarity that could lead to the conclusion that Taylor was a feminist writer while Pym was not. Taylor’s express references to feminism contrasts with Pym’s indirect treatment in the same period. In A Game of Hide and Seek two early suffragists, imprisoned for their beliefs are the protagonists. In turn, feminism becomes an embarrassment for the daughter of one. Later the older woman’s feminism is a source of short-term inspiration to her granddaughter. Despite the references to feminism, the novel is essentially an unrealised love story. In contrast, Pym’s novels are unromantic. Where Taylor’s work includes feminism as an important part of her characters’ lives she then sublimates the strength of her idea. Most significantly, she associates feminism with the past when she limits it to women’s suffrage. In comparison, while Pym does not ever use the word “feminism” the principles permeate her work. Unlike Pym, Taylor remained in publication during the 1960s and early seventies with novels such as In a Summer Season (1961), The Soul of Kindness (1964), The Wedding Group (1968) and Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont (1971).

Correspondence between Pym and Taylor is meagre, but what there is suggests that their relationship was close. Most intimately, Pym and Taylor shared jokes and general discussions on clothing, friends and fellow writers and Taylor ended her letters “Love Elizabeth”. In comparison with the endearments with which they ended their correspondence, they found Compton-Burnett’s lapse into ‘jaunty, matery’ strange. They had a running joke about Taylor’s hats and Robert Smith’s dislike of them. With a different purpose, they shared detailed commentary on Jane and Prudence. Taylor was unreligious but it had no impact on their friendship. Taylor wrote that Jane and Prudence was ‘doubly interesting to me because it gave a glimpse of church life, if that is what it is called, and I have wondered what

431 Letter from Elizabeth Taylor to Barbara Pym, MS Pym 162/3, fols 1-21.
432 Letter from Taylor to Pym, MS Pym 162/3, fol. 1.
433 Letters between Taylor and Pym, MS Pym 162/3 fols 1-18.
434 Letter Taylor to Pym, MS Pym 162/3, fol. 4.
435 Letters between Pym and Taylor, MS Pym 162/3, fols 7-8.
went on in those circles and I am glad to find it is the same as in other circles. It is not so much a closed book to me as no book at all. Pym reciprocated, commenting on *Hester Lilley* and, later, *The Blush*. They also shared their concerns about the problems of writing and publication.

Ivy Compton-Burnett began publishing well before Pym, but her later work was contemporaneous. She published between 1925 and 1971 when *The Last and the First* was published posthumously. The novels published during Pym’s early successful period were *Darkness and Day* (1951), *The Present and the Past* (1953), *Mother and Son* (1955) *A Father and His Fate* (1959), *A Heritage and its History* (1959), *The Mighty and Their Fall* (1961) and *A God and His Gifts* (1963), some of which appear in Pym’s reading. Pym’s attitude toward Compton-Burnett was complex, as suggested in her letter to Taylor, cited above. Her more serious comment made on Compton-Burnett’s *More Women Than Men*, in 1934 that she ‘saw no point in it – unreal characters and not much of a story’ appears to be Pym’s straightforward literary assessment. In reference to reading Charlotte M. Yonge’s *The Daisy Chain* in March 1943, Pym appears to have changed her attitude to Compton-Burnett’s writing when she comments that it is ‘so well written, very Ivy Compton-Burnett’. She embroidered this thought in 1971 when she re-read *The Daisy Chain* and referred to ‘the echoes or rather foreshadowings of Ivy Compton-Burnett in it’. Liddell’s, and later Larkin’s, admiration for Compton-Burnett may have contributed to Pym’s prevarication. However, with experience and age Pym could have as well changed her mind about the

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436 Letters between Pym and Taylor, MS Pym 162/3, fols 7-8.
437 She had already referred positively about the novel to Smith, MS Pym 162/1, fol. 4.
438 Letter from Taylor to Pym, MS Pym 162/1 fols 9 and 10.
439 Letters between Taylor and Pym, MS Pym 162/1 fols 1-18.
440 MS Pym 10, fol.209.
441 Pym commented critically on other authors’ specific works, such as *The Unicorn*, describing it as: ‘so feeble and silly and unrewarding’ (MS Pym 160, Letter to Bob Smith 13/11/66) despite Murdoch being one of her favourite authors (Robert Till, Coincidence in a Bookshop, in *IW*, p.166). She also commented, when asked about Angela Thirkell’s work, that her later novels had become “snobbish” (Till, in *IW*, p. 166).
442 MS Pym 108, fol. 24.
value of the work. In 1934 when she criticised Compton-Burnett’s novel she was working in her very different style, on Some Tame Gazelle. Pym’s novel was the antithesis of Compton-Burnett’s absorption with ‘relentlessly uniform conjuring up lives of the well-to-do, an imagined petty aristocracy and propertied but usually impoverished upper middle class in their country places and mansions, locked into the Victorian years444 and concentration on ‘conversations between family groupings’.445

Pym admits to having found it hard not to adopt Compton-Burnett’s style446 and refers to her dialogue as influential for a time in her own work (CS, p.410). No such continuing influence is evident in Pym’s published fiction,447 although she speculated about the possibility of including a ‘Compton-Burnett twist with Agatha and Henry’ in Some Tame Gazelle.448 Compton-Burnett’s language is used extensively in Pym and Liddell’s correspondence. The tone is satirical, and letters playful, suggesting that the two were adept at playing with style and that Compton-Burnett’s suited to their purpose.449 Pym also adopted Compton-Burnett’s language in satirical letters to Harvey and his new wife.450 She and Larkin appear to have replicated this part of Harvey and Pym’s relationship.451 Pym’s ruminations where she adopted Compton-Burnett’s

445 Light, p. 21.
446 Letters 1940, AVPE, p. 100.
447 The tone Pym adopts for “Old Mrs Killigrew” and her language in Crampton Hodnet is reminiscent of Salina Middleton, the grandmother in Compton-Burnett’s The Mighty and their Fall (First published 1961, London: Virago Modern Classics, 1990). Pym described herself as very pleased with that characterisation. However, the characterisation of a Mrs Killigrew and her language are unique to this early work. Also, a phrase unused by Pym in any other context “continuing on her own line” (JP, p.5.) is used in Compton-Burnett’s Men and Wives, p.68.
448 MS Pym 3, Notebook August 1945, fol. 3.
449 Letters between Pym and Liddell, MS Pym 153, fols 154-197.
451 Pym and Holt, AVPE, p. 224. The quote is from The Mighty and Their Fall, p. 23.
prose style suggest that at times the influence lived alongside her own authorial voice.

Jill Neville was also a contemporary with whom Pym had a minor correspondence. They read each other’s novels, talked on the phone and Pym invited her to visit. Another correspondent, for whom only a small amount of information is available, was Penelope Lively. She accepted Pym as a source of ecclesiastical information and offered to visit. In correspondence they discussed Lively’s Treasures of Time and similarities between its central women characters, Laura and Leonora (TSDD). Pym suggested the relationship and Lively concurred, saying that although her character’s mother was “very nice”; her father ‘had a streak of manic egotism’.

Margaret Drabble, whose writing Pym claimed she wanted to emulate in An Academic Question, began publishing during the 1960s when An Unsuitable Attachment was rejected. Drabble’s first novel, The Summer Birdcage, was published in 1962 and she continued to publish throughout the hiatus in Pym’s publication with The Garrick Year (1964), The Millstone (1965), Jerusalem The Golden (1967), The Waterfall (1969) The Needle’s Eye (1972) and The Realms of Gold (1975). The Ice Age (1977) was published the same year that Pym regained favour with Quartet in Autumn.

Drabble’s writing and Pym’s concern with it possibly provides the foundation for the claim that An Unsuitable Attachment was not a novel of the times. Certainly, the works are very different. Where Pym is subtle about

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452 Pym and Holt, AVPE, p. 83.
453 MS Pym 92, fols 160-188.
454 Letter from Pym to Jill Neville, incomplete and unsigned, MS Pym 92, fol. 195.
455 Post Card, n.d. Lively to Pym thanking her for ‘the photo and ecclesiastical guidance’ and sending her Treasures of Time, MS Pym 173, fol. 216.
456 MS Pym 173, fol. 93.
457 Laura Paxton has spent a married lifetime depending on her appearance and sexuality to command men’s interest. She is an unhappy woman and, although an unsympathetic character, as the background narrative unfolds her selfishness is partially explained by her insecurities (Penelope Lively, Treasures of Time, London: Penguin, 1979).
458 Letter, from Lively to Pym in response to a letter about Treasures of Time, ‘Yes, I think you’re right that Laura and your Leonora may be related – second cousins on the father’s side’, MS Pym 173, fol. 93.
unhappy marriages or unromantic events, Drabble is direct. Where Pym writes of women’s friendships, *The Summer Birdcage* examines the negative relationship between competitive sisters. Drabble’s work on the conflict between marriage and pursuing a career in the same novel compares robustly with Pym’s depiction of Caro’s dilemma in *An Academic Question*. *The Garrick Year* concentrates on a marriage, focussing on the woman’s role as a mother, would-be career person and her lack-lustre affair. It is a first person narrative of an egocentric woman with bleakly insular interests. In contrast, Caro (AAQ) reacts with other people, often vastly different from herself, and considers the wider issue of women’s work and marriage.

Other contemporaries include Elizabeth Jane Howard whose first novel, *The Beautiful Visit*, was published in the same year as *Some Tame Gazelle* and Muriel Spark, whose first novel *The Comforters* was published in 1957, a year before *No Fond Return of Love*. Howard’s war trilogy459 illuminates a major difference between her detailed treatment of war on the home front and Pym’s sparse but effective detail.

Pym and Jilly Cooper express a mutual interest in their meeting at Hatchard’s 1979 Authors of the Year party.460 Despite the sharp difference in their writing, Cooper refers to having ‘nearly fainted with excitement to see two sweet-faced women standing smiling, slightly apart from the mob. It was Barbara and her sister Hilary. Rushing over, I only had time to stammer out a few words of gratitude’ (*JP*, 2007, xi). In the preface to the Virago publication of *Jane and Prudence* Cooper refers to Pym as her favourite author, replacing ‘Nancy Mitford, Georgette Heyer and even Jane Austen’ (*JP*, 2007, p.vi). In the same year, Cooper published *Class*,461 which Harrison Solow suggests

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explains much of Pym’s characterisation.\textsuperscript{462} Cooper’s humorous non-fiction assessment of class in part explains some of Pym’s descriptions, but Pym also uses her observations to effect their own subversive comedy.

The role of Pym’s male “mentors” as possible detractors and their potential role in her obfuscation about her feminist ideas, which amounts to self-censorship, are ignored in commentary on Pym’s work. The way in which Pym is portrayed in the letters and diary entries chosen for \textit{A Very Private Eye}, although the romantic outpourings of a young woman in a new, exciting environment, has been used by commentators to suggest she was overly dependent on men. In particular, Pym’s early relationship with Harvey, and Liddell’s commentary on those years, has coloured the way in which she is seen personally and as a writer. I argue that the impact led her into finding a fictional environment in which she could express her ideas, much in the way she attempted to elude censure of her love of unconventionality. The pattern which emerged is to some extent replicated in the attention given to Larkin’s place in her life from the 1960s.

Harvey’s influential role in Pym’s life diminished after his first marriage. However, Liddell continued to have an impact on her through their mutual interest in writing and publishing. His attitudes changed over time, as recorded by Robert Smith. \textit{Some Tame Gazelle} was written while Pym was still closely allied to her Oxford friends. Liddell’s praise was unstinting and compares with his commentary on later works. He particularly admired her use of quotes saying:

\begin{quote}
I think you have a genius for quotation which has probably never been equalled – not only have you put the culture you have acquired here [i.e. in Oxford where Liddell worked as a librarian] to effective use, you have also permanently increased your readers’ knowledge of English literature. \textit{Literary illusions}: Some cutting is essential – but cultivate, even more, the practice of using them as recurrent themes – e.g. ‘sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo’. And each character
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{462} Solow.
could have his liet-motiv I daresay. But do not be too ruthless

Pym was as self-confident\(^{464}\) in her written response to Liddell’s work:

I have altered your style a little sometimes – very bold of me, but there appeared to be some long Harveyesian sentences. That I thought would be better for the reader if broken up. By the way, who is the reader?\(^{465}\)

*Some Tame Gazelle* was, according to Smith, the only time in which ‘the direct influence of Robert Liddell on Barbara Pym’s writing – the period in which she may almost be described as his protégée – came to an end.\(^{466}\) Although she continued to admire Robert as a writer and critic, as well as cherishing him as a friend, she relied henceforth on the approach to writing of fiction which she worked out, and continued to work out for herself.\(^{467}\) In contrast to his reaction to *Some Tame Gazelle*, Liddell was censorious about the merit of *An Unsuitable Attachment*:

like a more celebrated work, *Northanger Abbey*, it seems to have a fatal flaw in its structure. We are glad to see these books for the sake of many felicities in them, but it is difficult to see how their authors could have brought them into a form satisfying to themselves, and the publishers evidently could not see this either. It is not surprising that Cape’s readers gave this book negative reports.\(^{468}\)

At odds with Larkin’s appraisal of the novel, and independent reviewers, Liddell adds ‘it was fortunate for Barbara that *An Unsuitable Attachment* was not published, even in a revised state. It would certainly have attracted unfavourable

\(^{463}\) Letter from Liddell to Pym, 22/12/35, MS Pym 153, fol. 87.

\(^{464}\) Note her comment that she felt more comfortable writing than verbalising an argument, p.44

\(^{465}\) Letter Pym to Liddell 14/7/1937, MS Pym 153, fols 185-v185.

\(^{466}\) Pym sent “Gervase and Flora”, published posthumously in *Civil to Strangers*, to Liddell and Harvey while they were together in Finland. Although she records her progress in her 1938 diary (MS Pym 104, fols 13-v16; fols 9-v20; 23-25) and records beginning to type the draft, fol.26. Holt says there was little discussion of this piece and Pym appears to have considered it fundamentally the writing out of the end of her affair with Harvey (*ALTA*, pp. 64-65).


\(^{468}\) Liddell, p. 89.
notices, and might probably have been followed by another book written from the declining impulse of the “canon”, and then a final rejection. After that the author might not unreasonably have thought that she had ‘written herself out, and her silence might therefore have been unbroken’.\footnote{Liddell, p. 98.} That Pym would stop writing because of rejection is an assumption unsupported by her previous determination to keep writing and belied by her having ‘two new novels ready to offer for publication’\footnote{Liddell, p. 109.} in 1977 after years of failure.

Liddell’s additional commentary\footnote{Liddell, pp. 90-97.} demonstrates his inability to deal with the theme of \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment}: the marriage between a handsome younger man of questionable background and a gentlewoman. While Liddell sees Ianthe as a ‘dreary prig [and] wrongly cast as a leading lady’\footnote{Liddell, p. 103.} the sexual frisson between Ianthe and John suggests that she has much in common with Sandra, Pym’s alter ego. Liddell’s disapproval of the novel, when considered with his criticism of some unconventional features in \textit{No Fond Return of Love}, referred to below, is as likely to be based on his prejudices, as a literary opinion. In addition, unacknowledged by Liddell in his negative appraisal of \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment}, are his own difficulties with Cape. His manuscript was rejected and he was to suffer nine years’ hiatus in the period in which Pym regained her position as a published writer.\footnote{Smith (3).} He referred to \textit{Quartet in Autumn} as ‘her strongest finest work’.\footnote{Liddell, p. 122.} However, in his assessment of the novel Liddell ignores the challenges presented by the portrayal of the effect of retirement on middle-aged women; the newly burgeoning role of social workers, joining medical practitioners, in replacing religious comfort; and the fragmentation of community. He described Pym’s success with \textit{Quartet in Autumn}:

\begin{quote}
I see her success as the triumph of the Common Reader, bored with the contemporary novel [...] burdened with politics of “social messages”
\end{quote}
which could better have been conveyed in non-fiction works.\textsuperscript{475}

Liddell’s antagonism to social commentary makes it unlikely he would have supported Pym’s use of subtext to address social concerns. He was certainly reluctant to acknowledge the impact of gender in Pym’s work as shown by his assessment of a scene in the Swan home in \textit{Less Than Angels}. He assumes that ‘Unfortunately it will be the mother and aunt who have to do the washing up’\textsuperscript{476} but does not recognise the gender implications in Pym having established such a scene and its context. Further, he rejects the gender implications in \textit{Jane and Prudence} with his assessment that:

Prudence, we learn, has to choose between shepherd’s pie and stuffed marrow in a restaurant. Nevertheless, we also learn that Geoffrey Manifold, Dr Grampian’s assistant, has the same choice before him, in the same restaurant. Age and income, not gender, are here operative, and neither would be eligible for the club. Prudence is not being ill-treated and badly fed by a masculine world. The old adage “always verify your references” must always be in the minds of those who read (or write) books about Barbara Pym – the mistakes and misunderstandings are as rife as if she were a writer if a distant age.\textsuperscript{477}

Liddell ignores the similarity in Prudence and Geoffrey’s education and their experience in the workplace. Geoffrey Manifold has an office of his own; Prudence Bates shares hers with two other women. In addition, unequal pay ensured Manifold a larger income. Whatever way he chose to spend it, Prudence does not have the same economic choice.

Later Liddell acknowledges that Wilmet (\textit{AGB}) ‘is perhaps the only “frustrated woman” in the Pym world’, and ‘that spinsters are never so occupied’.\textsuperscript{478} Liddell’s comment suggests that he sees the married/unmarried dichotomy in Pym’s work, without recognising it as feminist commentary. When

\textsuperscript{475} Liddell, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{476} Liddell, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{477} Liddell, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{478} Liddell, pp. 69-70.
he describes the way in which men curtail women’s “excesses”\textsuperscript{479} he does not recognise that Pym’s sympathy lies with women’s refusal to conform \textsuperscript{480} as sharply demonstrated in \textit{A Few Green Leaves} with Daphne’s exuberance (p.10) and in Wilmet’s extravagant language about rolling in lupins (\textit{AGB}, p.186). Significantly, in his appraisal of \textit{Some Tame Gazelle} Liddell ignores the overarching theme of the novel: the challenge to conventions about marriage and spinsterhood. Together with Pym’s preference that Henry remain Belinda’s idealised former lover, Liddell’s disregard for the theme of the novel suggests his view of her was so well established that he was unable to countenance alternative readings of her work. Hilary Pym’s correspondence with him, related below, suggests this was the case.

After reading the manuscript of \textit{No Fond Return of Love} Liddell made his dislike of what he saw as Pym’s working with risky topics and characterisation abundantly clear. He wrote ‘I do \textit{not} like your heroine carrying on with a divorced man. One sees of course that it comes of not being a good churchwoman and of only going to church in the evenings (nor to Evening Mass either) — but do you think you have made that clear to every reader?’ \textsuperscript{481} Later, in defence of his criticism of the content of \textit{A Very Private Eye} Liddell defended himself as a friend concerned for Pym’s moral reputation.\textsuperscript{482}

Further evidence of Liddell’s antipathy to Pym’s interest in contemporary social issues is his reaction to Pym’s comments on Naomi Mitcheson’s \textit{We Have Been Warned} (1935). Not only was his response unenthusiastic,\textsuperscript{483} he commented negatively on Pym’s reference to abortion as a topic.\textsuperscript{484} His criticism of her ‘mild comedy of Pymdom [which] does not pose such penetrating questions for self-examination as do the works of Jane Austen or Ivy Compton-Burnett’ conflicts with his disinclination to study her work as possible social commentary. He goes on: ‘Barbara, who has caused some

\textsuperscript{479} Liddell, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{480} See Chapter 4 and the discussion of Dr Shrubsole’s reaction to middle-aged Daphne.
\textsuperscript{481} Quoted in Holt, \textit{ALIA}, p. 184.
\textsuperscript{482} Letter, Liddell to Hilary Pym, n.d., Walton Collection, Bibliographia Critica, uncatalogued.
\textsuperscript{483} Letter from Liddell to Pym 10/10/35, MS Pym 153, fol. 74.
\textsuperscript{484} Letter from Liddell to Pym 10/10/35, MS Pym 153, fol. 74.
laughter and many smiles, has made no-one shed a tear’. That he did not acknowledge the pathos in *The Sweet Dove Died or Quartet in Autumn* in this commentary is astonishing. Further, that Liddell did not appreciate Pym’s sharp observations and irony as Austen-like is contrary to independent commentary.

Smith deplores Liddell’s ‘belittling estimate of Pym’s work’.\(^{485}\) His continuing comment suggests that Pym might not have been wise in her assessment of her relationship with Liddell as unremittingly positive. He notes that:

> The estimate [of Pym as a “story-teller who wrote well”] could not have been ill considered, since it was not spoken casually, and it reflected similar assessments which Robert had made in conversation and writing. However carefully Robert had given this opinion and however firmly he held it, he was, I suggest, rash to make a comparison and ungenerous to express so simplistic a conclusion about a fellow writer with whom he had been associated in friendship for over fifty years and to whom he had given much friendly criticism and advice, and encouragement. Nor does his estimate accord with opinions of Barbara’s work which he had published after her rediscovery and her death, when he was coming, gradually and somewhat reluctantly, to terms with the importance that critics, especially in America, were according to her work’.\(^{486}\)

Smith’s value as a commentator on the relationship between Pym and Liddell is supported by his relationship with her. He was a recipient of Pym’s concerns about her failure to publish\(^{487}\) and she identified him as having special knowledge of her work, writing ‘You are one of the few who know how truly B. Pym it is’.\(^{488}\) Smith believed that Liddell welcomed *A Lot To Ask*, as he would

\(^{485}\) Smith, *Twentieth Century Literature*, Winter 1995 (4-5).

\(^{486}\) Smith.

\(^{487}\) Holt *ALTA*, p. 166.

\(^{488}\) Holt *ALTA*, p. 181.
have seen this work as an antidote to the content of *A Very Private Eye*.\textsuperscript{489}

Pym’s behaviour, as Smith observes, is at variance with Liddell’s version of her as ‘an almost idealized Barbara, devout Anglo-Catholic, dedicated to a single life, whose emotions, unlike those of the undergraduate of St Hilda’s, were strictly controlled’.\textsuperscript{490} Reflecting further, Smith notes that ‘This prim ideal could hardly be sustained against the lively flesh-and-blood, almost “flighty” Barbara in both her youth and middle age, who emerges from the pages of *A Very Private Eye*.\textsuperscript{491}

Hilary Pym’s correspondence with Liddell after she was approached on his behalf in relation to *A Very Private Eye* supports the view that he had a particular image of Pym that he wanted to protect. She responded:

> I do not agree with anything you say! I would have found it quite impossible to destroy those grey notebooks, especially as I always had the strongest feeling that Barbara wanted them, sometime, to see the light of day. I think they must be looked at, if possible, in relation to the later diaries and notebooks; and I cannot see how Barbara’s complicated character (and she was a very many sided person) can be accounted for without reference to these early outpourings [...] I don’t want Barbara to survive as a sort of non-person outside her books – there are plenty of people already who think of her as daughter-of-the-vicarage – and you, yourself wanted her to be the eternal keeper of the English tearooms at Delphi!\textsuperscript{492}

Hilary also spoke to Penelope Lively who records ‘I suspect that many admirers of the novels will be startled, her sister anticipates this with quiet satisfaction’.\textsuperscript{493} Hilary’s desire to correct the view that Pym was ‘a quiet,
genteel clergyman’s daughter who spent her days doing needlework in some secluded village.\textsuperscript{494} suggests that she found nothing of merit in such a description, preferring her assessment that ‘Barbara was very frivolous [...] Unmarried she may have been but spinsterish she was not’.\textsuperscript{495} Lively claimed on Hilary’s behalf that she ‘finds her version of how things were both accurate and honest’.\textsuperscript{496}

IX

Contemporary commentary also exposes the environment in which Pym worked. The letter she received from Chatto & Windus upon their rejection of \textit{Some Tame Gazelle} must have given some encouragement to an untried author:

I have read “Some Tame Gazelle” and talked it over with one of our readers. I am sorry to say that we both feel that we could not launch it successfully. On a novel of that length\textsuperscript{497} we should have to sell about 1500 copies to recover our outlay, and when I tell you that many a first novel nowadays sells less than 500 you will appreciate our fears. On the other hand I should like you to know that we both thought the novel to be something a good deal more than promising. It showed a close observance of character and a marked ability in portraying it. Also you have an easy and lucid literary style which is a pleasure to read.\textsuperscript{498}

In 1947, after more revisions\textsuperscript{499} Jonathan Cape accepted the novel in less extravagant, but more practical terms.\textsuperscript{500}

Pym was able to consider her first publication a success amongst friends,

\textsuperscript{494} Lively.
\textsuperscript{495} Lively.
\textsuperscript{496} Lively.
\textsuperscript{497} It is notable that Cape did not suggest removing the material about the Nazis to shorten the novel.
\textsuperscript{498} Cocking, ‘\textit{Some Tame Gazelle}: a brief history’ in \textit{GL}, 8 1 May 2002 (10).
\textsuperscript{499} Pym noted that ‘The first version of STG runs to over 500 pages of typescript, but when I revised it after the war for its eventual publication in 1950, I cut it by almost half. Perhaps ones first novel should always be drastically pruned!’ MS Pym 98, fol.99.
\textsuperscript{500} \textit{GL}, 8 1 May 2002 (12).
fans and local, national and international reviewers. Reviews were generally positive, Cocking noting she found only ‘one in a disparaging vein’. Even that gave Pym credit for ‘an excellent parody of a “literary” sermon’. Some Tame Gazelle was seen as 'something of Trollope, something of Jane Austen, something of "Cranford" but the comments ‘a small well-bred Eden, but contrives to insert a little of old Adam as well’ and ‘her mild vein of ribaldry turns to pure joy the account of the lecture given in the little village hall by the Bishop from Mbawawa® are particularly perceptive in their recognition of Pym's breadth of writing style well beyond the nice, church going middle class woman she was portrayed in later life. Antonia White, in her review in The New Statesman and Nation, July 1, 1950 writes:

Miss Pym will almost certainly – and not without reason – be compared to Jane Austen, and very possibly to Trollope. My own impression is that she is a modest and original writer who owes nothing to anyone. If my first sip of Some Tame Gazelle suggested this was merely a pale mixed cup as might be served at the vicarage tea party, my second convinced me it was an authentic wine. Not everyone’s wine perhaps, not one that “travels well” in the reviewing, but with a bouquet of its own and more body than you might suspect from its lightness.

The Spectator’s reviewer, L.A.G. Strong, saw the theme as ‘an emphasis on the effects upon women’s lives of the few men who move in their environment’. Other opinions differed on Pym’s wittiness with the comments ‘little wit and much incident’ to ‘Its wit is so gentle that the reader scarcely

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501 GL, 7 November 2001 (8).
502 GL, 7 November 2001 (8).
503 MS Pym 163/7, fols 153-173, fols 112-123.
504 MS Pym 163/7.
505 MS Pym 163/7.
506 See Robert Smith’s comments in this chapter, p.
507 MS Pym/163/1, fol. 124.
508 MS Pym 163/1, fol. 126.
509 MS Pym 163/1, fols 112-123.
notices the claws'.

Pym’s second publication, *Excellent Women*, was well received, with the BBC choosing it for The Women’s Hour serial, in an abridged and adapted form. John Betjeman gave it a ‘favourable review’ in the Telegraph. Tennyson Jesse wrote to Cape expressing her admiration. Commentary included: ‘The piecing wit of gentle women is to be savoured with trembling’ and ‘Barbara Pym is a splendid humorous writer, she is not sarcastic but is always dry and caustic’. Morghampton Lashe equates Pym ‘tentatively, very hesitantly’ with Jane Austen. A post card from a Mr J.G. of Bumpas included another congratulatory message, as well as a request to ‘send me twelve more’.

The patronising nature of early media coverage of Pym’s post-1977 success was not necessarily deliberate; Pym’s resurgence through the auspices of two middle-aged men may have been partially responsible. Added to this was the impression that what Pym wrote was “women’s literature”, establishing it in a genre she may have been tempted to accept after the poor reception of *An Unsuitable Attachment*. The positive reception of *Quartet in Autumn* gave Pym some support for a more openly ideological approach. Holt records some of the comments on *Quartet in Autumn* in *A Lot to Ask*: ‘This quietly powerful novel’; ‘The wit and style of a twentieth-century Jane Austen’; ‘Barbara Pym has a sharp eye for the exact nuance of social behaviour’; An important novelist’; ‘An exquisite, even magnificent, work of art’.

**Conclusion**

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510 MS Pym 163/1, fol. 112.
511 MS Pym 163/1, fol. 95.
512 MS Pym 163/1, fol. 158.
513 MS Pym 163/1, fol. 177.
514 MS Pym 163/1, fol. 9.
515 MS Pym 163/1.
516 MS Pym 163/1, fol. 9.
517 Presumably of Bumpas Booksellers, London.
518 MS Pym 163/1, fol. 160.
Pym’s comfortable middle class background could well have resulted in her producing the conservative novels of which she has been accused. However, her mother endowed her with a positive example of unconventionality, a sense of humour and love of irony. Together with the example of her aunts’ contentment with spinsterhood, Pym had the beginnings of the features she realised in her fiction. Pym’s experiences at Oxford showed her the inequalities, personal and academic, between women and men. Her observations, throughout her writing, provide a picture of the physical and social environment in which, in turn, her characters observed and commented. Pym created narratives and characters that challenge conformity. Engagement with discrimination, in particular in the relationships between women and men, lies at the centre of her work. Her sadness, claimed to be the result of her personal relationships, is likely to have been exaggerated. Pym’s notes about Belinda’s character that ‘she should be a little less vague and sentimental, more observant, sharper’⁵²⁰ suggest that the initial characteristics she assumed for her personal persona were unlikely to have been interpreted as “sad”. Pym’s final portrait of Belinda was a choice based on her literary technique of contrasting pairs of women, as discussed in Chapter 2. The environment in which Pym wrote until the 1970s encouraged her to adopt a subterfuge for the underlying, but purposeful expression of her feminist ideas. Her work mirrored Austen’s methods to cover her similar response to her observation that women’s place was circumscribed. In the 1970s, encouraged by a changing social environment, Pym wrote An Academic Question and Quartet in Autumn which are overtly social commentary. In this supportive environment, An Academic Question in particular, became an important feminist novel.

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⁵²⁰ MS Pym 3, Notebook August 1945, fol. 3.
CHAPTER 2

SPLENDID SPINSTERS AND MELANCHOLY SPOUSES: THE TROUBLESOME WOMAN IN SOME TAME GAZELLE, EXCELLENT WOMEN, AND JANE AND PRUDENCE

The position of the unmarried woman — unless, of course, she is somebody’s mistress — is of no interest whatsoever to the readers of modern fiction. The beginning of a novel?

Barbara Pym

I

Some Tame Gazelle, Excellent Women and Jane and Prudence establish spinsters as “troublesome women”: single women who question the conventions devised to circumscribe their behaviour. Pym’s first three novels demonstrate three of her feminist approaches: centring women in an unromantic narrative; the development of a binary feminist approach to women and men’s substance and behaviour; and undermining the assumption that women have inherent qualities that should limit their choices. The novels introduce the theme that runs through the totality of Pym’s work: spinsters are rarely dissatisfied with their unmarried state and they diverge in their aspirations, behaviour and appearance. Spinsters’ position, actions and thoughts dominate the texts. They have precedence in Pym’s focus on broader issues, and their perceptiveness about the patriarchal environment in which they function is extended to race, class and ethnocentrism. In this chapter, Pym’s depiction of women who defy long-established understandings of their unmarried and married roles in fiction is examined.

521 MS Pym 70, fols v5- 6.
522 See Appendix 3.
Katherine M. Rogers refers to understandings about fictional spinsters as follows:

The old maid provides a [...] convenient butt for hostility against women [...] since she [does] not justify herself by being a wife or mother. Hence she was often depicted as a figure of fun, stripped of the sentimental chivalry with which other women were swathed, caricatured as ugly, disagreeable, and relentlessly in pursuit of men.\textsuperscript{523}

In contrast, the spinsters described in this chapter typify Doan’s description of women who ‘challenge, even ridicule, a social order that calls for the repression of unkind retorts [...] and pits their individual needs against the larger set of social expectations’.\textsuperscript{524} In doing so they ‘challenge and subvert prevailing social expectations’.\textsuperscript{525} At the same time, spinsters, like most of Pym’s women characters, often examine their own assumptions. Women are depicted as complex as they are given internal as well as external dimensions. Men are depicted as having few internal characteristics.\textsuperscript{526} By making her central women characters introspective Pym achieves several aims. She is enabled, through them and as a narrator, in debating broad social issues; her characters’ dual voices raise questions about conventional thought and behaviour; and what would be considered character flaws in women characters in non-feminist novels are examined sympathetically. Binary feminism is particularly apparent in the early novels as Pym adds another dimension to her concentration on making women central to the narratives. The implicit portrayal of men as “the other”, which in non-feminist novels is the treatment meted out to women, enhances women’s significance.

\textsuperscript{524} Doan, \textit{IW}, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{525} Doan, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{526} Norman (and Edwin to a more limited extent) in \textit{Quartet in Autumn} is unusual in that their inner thoughts are described.
Some Tame Gazelle, to the more sophisticated Excellent Women and Jane and Prudence undermine the conventions that controlled spinsters’ behaviour in the 1930s to the 1950s. Chronologically Civil to Strangers is part of Pym’s early work. However, it stands out from the other novels in this period because the troublesome woman is absent. Janie Wilmot and Angela Gay are secondary characters. Janie, a dutiful daughter, marries the curate and Angela, initially a predatory and disappointed spinster marries. They meet the criteria for the spinster stereotype, as unlike Jessie (CH and JP) they flout no conventions to achieve their marriages. All the other characters also meet conventional expectations, only exaggerated behaviour or unconventional settings detract from the depiction of stereotypes. The setting, which is relevant to the anomaly, is part of the discussion of the village cover Pym adopted. Crampton Hodnet is also chronologically relevant to this chapter. However, in its use of the North Oxford and academic setting as a village cover the novel is referred to in this context in Chapter 4. In the context of the village setting as camouflage, Crampton Hodnet also makes a promising contrast with Pym’s later academic novel in Chapter 6. Jessie Morrow is introduced in Crampton Hodnet and appears in Jane and Prudence. In this chapter, she is discussed in relation to spinsters.

Pym’s treatment of spinsterhood is feminist when compared with Austen, Weldon and Fairbairns’ portrayal of single women. Spinsters in Pym’s novels reject conventional understandings about women and marriage in their enthusiasm for spinsterhood and, when she contrives marriage, Jessie’s behaviour challenges the acquiescence expected of her unmarried status and occupation. Whenever Pym turns her mind to her familiar territory of spinsters, marriages and religion she creates a positive image of spinsters while undermining the status usually ceded religion and marriage. In comparison with Austen, who also questions the authority of religion and marriage, Pym’s

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527 Pym referred to Some Tame Gazelle as ‘a juvenile novel’, MS Pym 98, fol. 75 and ‘now sounds crude and too full of obscure literary allusions’ MS Pym 106, Diary, 1940, fol. 75.
528 Pym described Excellent Women as her first adult novel, MS Pym 98, fol. 75.
affirmative posture towards spinsters is well beyond the quietly satisfied (although clearly disadvantaged) Miss Bates. At times Pym’s depiction of spinsters resonates with Austen’s Anne Elliott, one of Pym’s favourite Austen characters. Pym’s spinsters are also unpredictably more radical than the portrayals adopted by Weldon. At times, they are a modest, but related form, of the overtly politically motivated spinster in Fairbairns’ work. Pym’s treatment of spinsters confirms her feminism. Pym separates spinsters from a desire to marry so that they are immune from being seen as the “other” in a world in which marriage is the “norm”. Pym’s unmarried women flourish, despite a social context in which their participation in the workforce was limited; spinsters were considered unsuccessful because they were unmarried; and women were classified according to their marital status. Spinsters in Pym’s work are depicted as members of the community in a variety of roles similarly to its other members. If spinsters are depicted as stereotypes, these qualities are used to undermine rather than reinforce the stereotype. Most often stereotypical spinster qualities are given to men.

II

The 1970s gave writers such as Weldon and Fairbairns the opportunity to portray spinsters in a variety of roles. However, they concentrated on identifying and fictionalising feminist debates about women and marriage rather than elevating spinsterhood to independent scrutiny. In non-feminist literature, spinsters’ roles are also limited to their place as unmarried women who wish to be married. Typically, their desire to marry involves them in destructive behaviour toward other women and their marriages. Alternately,

531 MS Pym 83, fol. v18.
532 The way in which Pym’s marital status is presumed to have influenced her work is discussed in Chapter 1.
533 Mary Beamish (AGB) initially is portrayed with stereotypical spinsterish qualities. Her early portrayal emphasises the changes she makes in her life when she has the economic means to do so.
534 Doan argues in IW, pp. 64-65 that Pym often gives men stereotypical spinsterish qualities.
they are depicted as the "rightful" partner for a man who has been "tricked" into becoming involved with the "wrong" woman. In both cases, the man is the "reward" for a "good" woman.

In this context, it has to be acknowledged that Weldon's approach to spinsterhood often relies on traditional non-feminist ways of using single women to their disadvantage. The angry jealous spinster or woman who connives to undermine a marriage is as typical of Weldon's 1970s work as of non-feminist novels. However, as a feminist writer Weldon uses the stock situations of non-feminist work to question marriage rather than confirm its status as an institution in which women flourish. Her approach to marriage, women's and men's roles in achieving marriage and living within it, questions the value of marriage to women in a patriarchal society. None of her characters, female or male, is unflawed and her male characters are clearly no prize. She also mounts the argument that marriage is an economic relationship as well as a romantic one and graphically illustrates the economic difference marriage makes to women. Women's economic vulnerability is an important part of Weldon's depiction of women under patriarchy, shown through women's experiences within marriage, if they are deserted or when they leave the marriage.

Weldon's spinsters are the antithesis of Pym's. In *Down Among The Women* women from a generation younger than Pym's characters see success in terms of their relationship with a man. Weldon's third novel, *Female Friends* is unfailingly about marriages. Replicating the idea that marriage is central to women's happiness, *Female Friends* ends with a woman in a war zone described as 'Without her womb [...] she seems cheerful enough'. The idea that a professional woman in a traditionally male world only "seems" satisfied is hardly a strong endorsement for women's independence. A war zone suggests death; the implication of barrenness

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537 Weldon, *Female Friends* (London: Heinemann, 1976). Read by Pym in 1978, MS Pym
 emphasising the futility of a single professional woman’s life. *Remember Me*\(^{539}\) confirms marriage as problematic for women, a feminist concept. However, unlike Pym’s work, the alternative of satisfied spinsterhood is non-existent. Weldon’s character acknowledges ‘It is not easy thus to change the patterns of the past: to forgo the reassuring pleasures of servitude, to face the unknown’.\(^{540}\) The statement describes a woman’s complicity in rejecting singleness as a viable alternative to marriage, encouraging the idea that women are unable to be independent. Although her recognition of the problems women create for themselves is a legitimate contribution to feminist debate, the statement addresses only one reaction to divorce and spinsterhood at the end of a novel largely dedicated to marriage.

*Little Sisters*\(^{541}\) portrays a spinster determined to gain power through married men, a traditional approach that identifies spinsterhood as a threat to marriage. The spinster is a secretary, typically a woman’s career and, as is familiar in non-feminist writing, resents her spinsterhood. A later work, *The Hearts and Lives of Men*\(^{542}\) embellishes the theme with a wealthy spinster dedicated to destroying a marriage. The last 1970s Weldon novel, *Puffball*,\(^{543}\) includes a spinster in a minor role. Weldon’s short story, “The Year of the Green Pudding”, takes a non-feminist approach to spinsterhood in its portrayal of a spinster in an affair with a married man. As a result, his pregnant wife commits suicide. The spinster is sacked when she embarks on another affair. Ironically, Weldon’s failure to use her story to present positive images of spinsterhood in *More to Life than Mr. Right: Stories for Young Feminists*\(^{544}\) ignores its value.

*Praxis*\(^{545}\) is the only one of Weldon’s 1970s novels in which spinster has a central role. Praxis Duveen is university educated, lives with a parasitical man,

\(^{540}\) Weldon, *Remember Me*, p. 222.
falls into prostitution, later works for the BBC and eventually becomes a feminist icon. That her success in feminist terms means nothing to her is apparent in her despairing ‘Dear God, do I have to go on living?’ Only Weldon’s 1998 novel, Big Women, gives a central strong role to spinsters: Layla who owns a publishing house, Medusa; Nancy who works for Medusa in a practical but undervalued role; Alice the mystic; and the successful career woman of the 1980s, Saffron, who engineers the sale of Medusa from feminist hands to a large publishing company.

Fairbairns’ approach to single women is a more typical feminist approach to spinsterhood. Fairbairns’ spinsters acknowledge the difficulty of choosing between being single or marrying. In Stand We at Last sisters’ choices are juxtaposed to the advantage of spinsterhood. The married sister dies from venereal disease, the product of two patriarchal institutions: acceptance of men’s sexual freedom during war, and marriage. In contrast, the spinster is portrayed as a strong independent woman who travels from England to Australia in the 1890s. She surmounts emotional and physical hardship, returning to England to become politically involved in the complexities of the discriminatory Contagious Diseases Act and the battle for women’s suffrage.

In Daddy’s Girls Fairbairns takes a more complex approach to marriage and spinsterhood. She debates the challenges posed for women who confront conventional gender roles. The conflict for women who resist conforming is shown through a young spinster. She is the third sister to observe the negative aspects of her parents’ traditional marriage. As a teenager, and later young adult, she debates with herself the notion of being “inside” or “outside” society, the choice between accepting conventional gendered behaviour and rejecting it. The one Fairbairns novel that revolves

546 Weldon, Praxis, p. 283.
548 Fairbairns, Stand We at Last (Melbourne: MacMillan, 1984).
entirely around a spinster is *Closing* \(^{551}\) in which a salesperson avidly pursues her career. She believes in herself, her product and her future, despite evidence to the contrary. This novel is unique amongst Weldon and Fairbairns’ works in positioning a spinster as the central character. Fairbairns reprises the centrality of spinster’s concerns in her short story, “How Do You Pronounce Nulliparous?” where she fictionalises the negative associations of the expectation that women should marry and have children.\(^ {552}\)

Austen, Pym, Weldon and Fairbairns write mainly of middle class women, making a comparison of spinster’s opportunities in the writers’ work consistent across class. However, the single women about whom they write are in significantly different economic situations. Women’s lack of independent access to property is the underlying reason for the majority of marriages in Austen’s novels. In comparison, Pym depicts situations where property is passed to a daughter, and women are entering the workforce. Although their economic positions vary, Pym consistently makes the point that financial independence is an important factor in her spinster’s satisfaction with their unmarried lives. Weldon and Fairbairns also acknowledge the importance of economics in their characters’ choices about marriage. However, the writers diverge from their interest in middle class spinsters and the economics of marital status in the way they use spinsters to construct a feminist argument. While Weldon is more interested in demonstrating the flaws in marriage than presenting a positive picture of spinsterhood, she is considered a feminist writer. Fairbairns, also accepted as a feminist writer, similarly concentrates on marriage. However, she portrays spinsters in pivotal roles and in one novel as the central character.

III

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In the context of Weldon and Fairbairns' approach to unmarried women, Pym's work sits well as a feminist depiction of spinsterhood. Firstly, Pym includes spinsters as central characters with none of the negative aspects associated with Weldon's portrayal. Secondly, although none of Pym's spinsters has the conspicuously political feminist aspects of Fairbairns' spinsters, they subtly undermine conventional ways of considering spinsterhood and expectations of their behaviour. Pym's depiction of men reinforces spinsters' status. They are portrayed as needing women's assistance, advice and affection.

Marriage is the definer of women's success in non-feminist novels. However, Pym makes the importance of marriage to men, or their relationships with women, a vital part of her feminist approach in her early work. Even 'the kind of man who does not marry', 553 is committed to relationships with women. 554 They are disposed to marriage. From the men in Some Tame Gazelle to Pym's most conventional novel in this period, Civil to Strangers, men propose. They marry regardless of whether the woman is their first or second choice. Some Tame Gazelle sets the pattern for men marrying and central women characters refusing to marry (STG, pp.239-242 and p.58). Only one man, Nathaniel Mold, fulfils conventional depictions of bachelors. He consoles himself with alcohol (STG, p.143) and, on reflection is relieved that his proposal was rejected (STG, p.144). In contrast, the widowed Fabian Diver has 'a confused feeling of irritation and envy' (JP, p.59) as he observes the Cleveland's married familiarity. Less than a year after his wife's death he is tired of affecting 'the role of an inconsolable widow' (JP, p.63) and believes that he 'might start again' (JP, p.63). Count Bianco continues to propose to Harriet Bede despite routine rejection (STG, p.58). When Jane speculates about a partnership between Edward Lyall and Prudence, she is depicted as

554 It is only when Pym is demonstrating the bitterness of Leonora's defeat by Ned that she includes a male character who actively dislikes women (TSDD).
somewhat old fashioned in her desire that Prudence should marry. Pym’s later inference that Lyall depends on marriage to enhance his political career reinforces the importance of marriage to men. Men such as the librarians and Bishop Grote (STG) and Everard Bone, an anthropologist, (EW) are depicted as baffled bachelors. In contrast, it is rare that a Pym spinster casts around for a husband or is at loss for something to do. Friendships between single women and men are a consistent theme of Pym’s work although a dim reflection of the stronger friendships between women. Where the depiction of women and men differs significantly is in women’s preparedness to act where men avoid action; articulation of their friendly but mocking attitude towards men; depiction of women’s amusement at the expense of men; and their ironic responses to men’s expectation that women will sustain them.

Pym’s novels studied in this chapter were written between 1935 and 1952. In this environment, a writer who wanted to valorise the unmarried woman had none of the advantages of the feminist ideology that assisted feminist writers in the 1970s. Pym’s presentation of a range of positive versions of spinsterhood challenged the discriminatory one-dimensional depiction of single women. Her depiction worked against the prevailing orthodoxy. Further, she makes conventional understandings of spinsters suspect. Some Tame Gazelle concentrates on the strong links between women and their commitment to each other. In Excellent Women Pym gives a seemingly conventional spinster a dual voice through which she combats conventional attitudes. Jane and Prudence has a seemingly romantic plot, in which two spinsters vie for a man.

Pym had the opportunity to develop a spinster with more colourful characteristics than the ones she chose. The proximity of two spinster aunts provided her with examples of spinsters who were clearly individuals rather than a “type”. A spinster who met her aunt’s description, as ‘dashing, full of ideas and initiative, with a passion for painting and a flair for design […] far from being a downtrodden spinster daughter at home […] a splendid example

555 Prudence and he are engaged for a brief time. Prudence ‘broke it off’ (AGB, p. 132).
556 Only Miss Gale (CS) and Marjorie (QA) are conspicuous in doing so.
of how it was possible to be unmarried and still have a "rich, full life" must have crossed her mind as a prototype. Her sister's and mother's traits appear in Some Tame Gazelle and Jane and Prudence respectively and friends' and acquaintances' characteristics are written into characters throughout all the novels. However, as with her other characters, Pym used only elements of her aunt's lifestyle in Prudence Bates (JP) and possibly, Catherine Oliphant (LTA) and spinsters who make a fleeting appearance. Pym appears to have avoided focussing on the type of spinster who would have limited her landscape to a woman inevitably seen as strong, independent and overtly feminist. Such a spinster would have been able to do little of what Pym wanted. Instead, she created characters whose very mildness made their subversive utterances more potent. They contribute to Pym's concept of the stock character as a technique to contribute to a carapace of cosiness as discussed in Chapter 4.

Pym established her stance towards spinsterhood in the early novels. Some Tame Gazelle features the Bede sisters who refuse proposals from overtly suitable men. The nature of the rejections demonstrates the comfort with which the sisters defy convention. The seemingly conventional Mildred Lathbury (EW) raises difficult questions about women's role. In Crampton Hodnet and Jane and Prudence Pym developed a stronger version of independent spinsterhood in the introduction of Jessie Morrow, a companion with assurance. In the later novel, her equally noteworthy foil, Prudence Bates, is a professional woman whose affairs are almost another occupation (JP, p.9). Of the central spinsters, only Jessie is financially dependent. As a companion to Miss Doggett, she represents one of the least well regarded women characters in fiction. Pym's irony is apparent in the contrast between her and her employer, a redoubtable elderly spinster whose control over Jessie is illusionary.

557 Holt, ALTA, p. 10.
558 Catherine Oliphant (LTA) is also a noteworthy spinster. However, the novel in which she appears is ideally suited to the discussion of Pym's overarching theme of conflict between the spiritual or imaginative and temporal or scientific worlds and is placed in Chapter 3 for this purpose.
The pairing of a seemingly strong character with a weaker one is feature of all the novels. In *Some Tame Gazelle* and *Jane and Prudence* Pym pairs disparate spinsters to draw attention to the outward unconventional characteristics of one in each pair: self-effacing Belinda lives with her outgoing sister, Harriet (*STG*); the dowdy companion, Jessie, is contrasted with attractively clad career woman, Prudence Bates (*JP*). In turn, the less obviously troublesome woman in each pair, Belinda and Jessie, has interior thoughts that conflict with her exterior impact. The duality in Pym’s women characters is argued most cogently in *Excellent Women* where the interior and exterior images and commentaries merge in the portrayal of one spinster, Mildred Lathbury. Outwardly, her dress and behaviour assign Mildred a role as the most stereotypical spinster in the three novels. However, her interior voice and the first person narrative of *Excellent Women* emphasises the importance of Mildred’s private as well public utterances.

*Some Tame Gazelle* draws comparisons between the negative aspects of a married woman’s life through Agatha Hoccleve, and the lives led by spinster sisters, Belinda and Harriet. The married life of Helena Napier in *Excellent Women* is also imperfect. She is contrasted with the spinster, Mildred Lathbury. In *Jane and Prudence* Jane Cleveland, a major character, is a married woman and mother. Her life can be judged, not always to the advantage of conventional practice, 559 against those of the spinsters with whom she interacts. Pym’s representation of single men, in contrast with single and married women, identifies Pym’s concern with binary feminism which is most directly enunciated in her early work. Concurrent with her multifaceted characterisation of independent spinsters and unconventional or dissatisfied wives and mothers, Pym’s portrayal of men as less competent than women on a range of gender-neutral activities challenges patriarchy. The romantic

559 The vicissitudes of the rectory life for a clergyman’s wife and children are dealt with by Joanna Trollope in *The Rector’s Wife* (Ealing: Black Swan, 1991). In this novel, referred to by *The Times* as ‘Like a Barbara Pym novel.’ (Cover quotation), the family forms the focus of the work. Pym’s depiction of Jane Cleveland is a subtle reference to the problems faced by the clergy wife, even with an understanding family such as husband Nicholas Cleveland and their daughter, Flora.
overtones in spinsters’ and wives’ positive reception of men in their lives are modified by the universal application to both genders.

III

The material in Some Tame Gazelle remains after frequent redrafting over twenty years. Although Pym acknowledges the novel’s shortcomings, the remaining ideas are there by choice. The novel includes the features that question the status quo which were to be a hallmark of Pym’s future work. The sisters’ credibility is enhanced as they are central characters and advance the narrative. Belinda and Harriet’s active role is emphasised by comparison with the group of characters who would usually have precedence: an Archdeacon, a Bishop, the head of a prestigious library and the Archdeacon’s wife. Both sisters are churchgoers, giving credibility to their critical utterances about the church and its representatives. The sisters’ opinions on other characters are aired during the narrative; their familiarity with other people’s lives typical of the stereotypical spinster. Atypically Belinda and Harriet highlight other spinsters’ unconventionality.

The sisters’ observations give Edith Liversidge’s non-conformity status. She is a gentlewoman ‘with [...] cropped grey hair [...] shabby clothes which weren’t even the legendary “good tweeds” of her kind and [has] a blunt, almost rough, way of speaking’ (STG, p.13), has travelled and undertaken refugee work ‘of an unpleasant nature too, something to do with sanitation’ (STG, p.13). Edith’s experience is transferred to her domestic persona when she is observed at the vicarage garden party talking openly and loudly about sanitary arrangements. Her behaviour and Belinda’s embarrassed response, (STG, p.27) accentuates the difference between what was expected from women in wartime and the conventional behaviour expected from a spinster in public in peacetime. Edith’s discussion with the Archdeacon humanises him but also challenges his status. At the same time, the validity of her war work is recognised.

Other spinsters are Miss Prior the seamstress who is not ‘entirely the meek person one expected a little sewing woman to be’ (STG, p.44), although she reverts to a typically spinsterish distress when she is deprived of her task decorating the lectern (STG, p.74) and Olivia Berridge. Olivia partially fulfils
conventional views of a typical spinster, with her dull appearance and the possibility that her eagerness to marry led her to propose to the curate (STG, p.216). However, the stereotype is adjusted by her relationship to the formidable Agatha Hoccleve, her academic status and ‘work on The Owl and the Nightingale [which] has been a most substantial contribution to Middle English studies’ (STG, p.204).

Additional spinsters are stock characters who provide a comforting aspect to a novel in which the church, marriage and stereotypes of spinsters are challenged. Miss Beard and Miss Smiley are Sunday School teachers; Miss Jenner has a haberdashery shop; and the downtrodden Connie Aspinall is a former companion to ‘a lady in Belgrave Square who was a kind of relation of one of Queen Alexandra’s Ladies-in-Waiting’ (STG p.14). Miss Beard and Miss Jenner’s argument over polishing the altar brasses (STG, p. 62) promotes the village imagery through its predictability.

Pym challenges institutions through comedy which is common to her central spinsters’ armoury. Belinda and Harriet Bede’s behaviour conforms to this pattern. Belinda’s overtly spinsterish qualities have two purposes: they make her uncomfortable pronouncements more acceptable and they provide a foil to Harriet’s openly unconventional behaviour. While Harriet finds pleasure in giving flirtatious hospitality to the new curate, Belinda tries to curb her enthusiasm. Harriet’s appearance in Celanese vest and knickers early in the novel is depicted against Belinda’s agitation that the curtains are not drawn. (STG, p.7). Where Belinda exhibits concern about spending an entire afternoon with the Archbishop unchaperoned, Harriet is annoyed that their “tryst” is interrupted. In contrast with Belinda’s reticence, Harriet allows her imagination free range, creating a romantic story around the married clergyman and spinster, lamenting only his wife’s robust health as an impediment to Belinda’s “romance” (STG, pp.154-157).

Belinda’s non-confronting image is embellished through her conventional occupations such as knitting and assisting at the vicarage garden party as well as being a regular churchgoer. Her outward compliance adds acceptance, and therefore potency, to the questions she raises about the virtue of the Archdeacon, the curate, church practice and her rejection of the Bishop’s
proposal. Both her criticism and defence of the Archdeacon is complicated by her self-knowledge, romanticism and religious commitment. Her recognition that her idealisation of Archdeacon Hoccleve is suspect when confronted with his selfishly lengthy Judgement Day sermon is light-hearted. His diatribe puts awry his congregations’ Sunday meal but his is immune because, as Belinda realises, the meal to be served at the vicarage is duck which ‘needs to be very well done [...] It can’t really be cooked too much’ (STG, p.113).

However, Belinda also draws attention to more severe problems with the Archdeacon’s behaviour. He has ‘very few of the obvious virtues that one somehow expected of one’s parish priest. His letter [in the] parish magazine, announcing the arrival of the new curate, had a peevish and condescending tone that a stranger might have thought not quite the thing for an archdeacon’ (STG, p. 6). The Archdeacon is connected to Pym’s exposure of posturing political figures through their shared complaints about the arduous nature of their work. He cancels early services because he has no curate to undertake this task and complains about having had no holiday. However, the comfortable reality of the Archdeacon’s life is exposed through Belinda’s visit to the vicarage on the day of the garden party. He is still having a bath while Belinda, Harriet and Agatha prepare for the event. Belinda’s reluctance to find fault with him magnifies his failures, making her the ideal vehicle for his exposure through comic interplay between his actions, Belinda’s support and her eventual realisation that his behaviour is indefensible. The one positive judgment she retains is her admiration of the Archdeacon’s sermons. They are filled with classical quotes: a tribute to the writing style of her alter ego, Barbara Pym.

The curate whose visit begins the novel becomes a source of humour when viewed through Belinda’s eyes. The visibility of his combinations and her derision about his platitudinous observations (STG, p.161) as well as his inept response to rumour of his engagement when he makes a ‘kind of bleating noise’ (STG, p.89) undermines the prestige of a minor member of the clergy. When Belinda rejects Bishop Grote’s proposal, her disparagement of religious advocacy is compounded because she is criticising a prominent member of the church hierarchy. On a personal level, he is described as ‘one of the most
sought-after curates in the history of the Church of England' (STG, p.159). Belinda links the Bishop and curate to create a poor impression of both through their common association with a sheep (STG, p.163). The conflation of the clergy continues with Belinda's negative description of Bishop Grote's greeting as 'an unctuous voice, a clergyman's voice, a Bishop's voice' (STG, p.221).

Belinda also raises the question of women's role in the church. She undercuts the value of being an "excellent woman" by rejecting the association of women with flower arrangements, mending a surplice or being a general dogsbody, in favour of assisting the Archdeacon as a Deaconess (STG, p.7). Her claim that women have equality in Nonconformist churches (STG, p.7) implies criticism of the way in which the Church of England treats women. She directly rejects the appellation of an "excellent woman" when she reacts negatively to the Archdeacon's reported description of her as doing 'a lot of good work in the parish' (STG p.8). Belinda finds the account makes her sound 'almost unpleasant' (STG, p.8). By raising objections to the term in her first novel, Pym's continuing reference to the "excellent woman" is placed under scrutiny, raising the prospect that at times the description is ironic.\footnote{560 See Garner's account of the "excellent woman", Garner, p.21.}

Belinda's resilience also challenges conventional understandings of unrequited love and the assumed sadness of spinsterhood. Her feelings about the Archbishop in their Oxford days have mellowed to the extent that even her private feelings confirm her satisfaction with her single status. Her supposed regret is put into perspective when she is described as seeing her love as 'more like the cosiness of a winter morning by the fire than the uncertain rapture of a spring morning' (STG, p.15). After an evening alone with the Archdeacon, she contemplates that 'Just one evening like that every thirty years or so' is enough (STG, p.158). The unpleasant reality of marriage to the Archdeacon is highlighted when a domestic discussion between him and Belinda is conducted in no greater harmony than the angry exchanges between the Archdeacon and
his wife (*STG*, pp.22-25). Under Pym’s authorial influence, Belinda’s romanticism has no negative consequences. She is able to indulge in romantic notions because she has a satisfying alternative life.

Both Belinda and Harriet undermine the supposed value of marriage to women. A comic interplay is created between Belinda’s attempt to make ravioli and momentary fluster at being covered in flour when the Bishop calls to propose. The disjointed proposal and rejection are contrasted with Belinda’s sentimentality over her old garments in the previous scene. Completing the unromantic image, Belinda’s excitement about her success with the ravioli contrasts vividly with her lack of interest in the Bishop (*STG*, pp.219-230). Her characteristic sentimentality does not extend to the Bishop’s presence or proposal as she compares his advances with the prospect of a ‘man on the doorstep opening his suitcase’ (*STG*, p.223). Belinda also criticises the Bishop’s inept poetic allusion (*STG*, p.223), creating an academically superior position for herself. At the same time, Belinda’s portrayal undercuts the image of a simpering spinster seeking compliments:

She felt rather annoyed. Not even a middle-aged spinster likes to be told in so many words that she is not fair to outward view. ‘Although I am not beautiful myself and never have been,’ she went on, ‘I must confess that I like to see beauty in other people.’ ‘You mean beauty of character, ah, yes. That is something we all like to see.’ ‘No, I mean beauty of person,’ said Belinda obstinately (*STG*, p.223).

As frequently happens in Pym novels, an unattractive clergyman uses the excuse of celibacy to protect him against “predatory” spinsters (*STG*, pp.223-224). Bishop Grote is unabashed at Belinda’s rejection of his proposal and sharp corrections. His self-approval and prompt reaction to rectify his single status links him with Mr Collins.561 Connie Aspinall, like Charlotte Lucas,562 is a desperate spinster. Her shared home, unlike Belinda’s and Harriet’s is not

562 Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. 
one of happy consanguinity, and she accepts the proposal. The background to
the proposal and the unattractiveness of the couple reinforces the ordinariness
of most partnerships formed in Pym’s work.

Harriet Bede’s portrayal as a troublesome woman is explicit. She has no
concern with proprieties, flirts with young curates, enjoys thwarting people of
status, and has an exaggerated interest in fashion. Harriet also rejects
proposals. Although Count Bianco’s is treated with respect and Mr Mold’s
becomes a comic incident, the result is the same: Harriett remains a contented
spinster. Count Bianco is a constant in Harriet and Belinda’s lives, playing a
similar role to the unmarried clergy or homosexual men in Pym’s other novels.
Nathaniel Mold’s proposal is developed as farce when Belinda crouches behind
a large rhododendron bush at his approach and Harriet is inside strengthening
corsets. Mold sees his draw card as his substantial house with a large garden.
Harriet is economically and emotionally independent. She needs neither a
house nor male approval. Her non-compliance with the stereotypical spinster
is emphasised by the way in which she later lampoons Mold’s proposal (STG,
p.143). The sisters’ companionable laughter reinforces Harriet’s statement:
‘my sister and I are very confirmed spinsters’ (STG p.139) and undermines
marriage as desirable.

Belinda and Harriet Bede are typical of Pym’s spinsters who comfortably
flout convention. While they are offered marriage, both prefer to be single. Their
comic responses undercut romance and patriarchal notions of male superiority.
The nuptials which take place in Some Tame Gazelle also reinforce the
unromantic view of marriage: Connie Aspinall’s marriage is a convenience to
both partners and the curate’s, a lacklustre event. The spinsters’ decision to reject
convention is thus reaffirmed.

IV

Excellent Women, Pym’s second published novel, is a more sophisticated
work. While Pym continues to use comedy and irony, some commentators
have ignored the significance of Mildred Lathbury’s control of the narrative. Liddell sees Pym as showing spinsterhood as ‘almost sad’ and Larkin believes the novel exhibits ‘the pain of being single, the unconscious hurt the world regards as this state’s natural clothing’. Both comments ignore Mildred’s centrality to the narrative and the way in which she uses her role. Throughout the novel Mildred’s dual voice undercuts her public utterances; assumptions about spinsterhood; and convention. Pym’s use of the dual voice for Mildred’s observations works against the typical understanding of a spinster: she is expected to be ‘involved and interested in other people’s business’ (EW, p.5) ‘mousy and rather plain [...] dressed in a] shapeless overall and old fawn skirt’ (EW, p.7) or ‘fussy and spinsterish’ (EW, p.12). However, throughout the novel Mildred’s observations and internal voice, juxtaposed with her conventional behaviour and utterances, give her authority.

Doan’s explanation of Pym’s double narrative describes the strength Pym gives to the character:

On the surface, the reader is presented with a narrative voice fully compliant with normal social expectations – a voice politely civil even when answering an impudent, audacious query. Yet underneath this veneer of mild-mannered conformity, another voice speaks to challenge, even to ridicule, a social order that calls for the repression of unkind retorts. On this level, Mildred characterizes Mallett’s remarks as roguish and pompous, but she internalises anger and irritation. These deeper feelings are revealed only to the reader. Most of Pym’s characters are continually engaged in this quiet, civilized struggle which pits their individual needs against the larger set of social expectations.

Contrary to the view that spinsterhood is synonymous with sadness, the spinsters in Excellent Women have a range of feelings and personalities. Only

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563 Liddell, ALTA, p. 160.
564 Larkin, ALTA, p. 161.
565 Doan, 1991, p. 64.
one is a figure of sadness and hers is an affected sorrow. Pym describes Winifred Malory as of a ‘romantic, melancholy nature, apt to imagine herself in situations [...] kept by her bed a volume of Christina Rossetti’s poems bound in limp green suede’ (EW, pp.40-41). Mildred affects no sorrow. Although she also has a volume of Rossetti, she is more inclined to read a book of Chinese cookery (EW, p.21). Mildred is open to the new experiences the Napiers bring into her life. At the same time, she continues to enjoy her annual meals with William Caldicote, uninhibited by any possibility of romance; outings with Dora Caldicote; her relationship with the Malorys; her church activities and part-time work on behalf of impoverished gentlewomen.

Pym establishes two brother and sister relationships in Excellent Women: Winifred and Julian Malory and Dora and William Caldicote. Winifred has made a home for her brother at the rectory; Dora is economically independent. Pym considers the feminist implications of the changes envisaged in the Malorys’ lives. When Julian Malory plans to marry, Winifred is potentially left to her own very limited resources. In comparison, the single Dora Caldicote is economically independent (EW, pp.70-71). Her economic independence ensures her a comfortable life independent of her brother’s choices. In comparison, Winifred’s life will change dramatically with her brother’s marriage: she will lose her home, her intimacy with the church and status as the rector’s sister. Winifred is typical of the non-working woman, most often the typical spinster, who relies on a man for economic and emotional sustenance. She can also be compared, to her disadvantage, with the central married woman in the novel. Helena Napier is dependent on her husband for neither economic nor emotional support, because like Dora, she has a profession. As well as being compared covertly with Winifred, Dora is compared overtly with Mildred. Here Pym juxtaposes two very different spinsters, enhancing her argument that there is no “typical” spinster. Dora’s visits to Mildred provide the hearty antidote to Mildred’s outward refinement: Mildred does not ‘have Dora’s temperament which makes her enjoy sleeping on a camp bed and eating off plastic plates’ (EW, p.11).

Three spinsters who observe the vicar’s attempts to distemper a room illustrate two points in feminist writing. In the example of Miss Statham and
Miss Enders 'two bird like little women whom [Mildred Lathbury] tended to confuse' \(EW\), p.40\) Pym again addresses the way in which spinsters are often seen as a group rather than independent identities.\(^{566}\) Mildred’s dual voice makes her comment a reflection on society’s treatment of spinsters as part of an indeterminate group. Pym confirms the sexism of the underlying inaccuracy by identifying the two minor characters as significantly different in a few well-chosen words \(EW\), pp. 60 and 63\). The third spinster, Sister Blatt, ‘stout and rosy in her grey uniform, with a blunt no-nonsense manner’ \(EW\), p.40\) is openly critical of the vicar’s efforts, giving advice but unable to do anything practical because of her bulk \(EW\), pp.41-42\). Her self-satisfaction is the antithesis to the common assumption that a single woman must care about her appearance. Sister Blatt is supremely indifferent.

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Mildred’s dual voice is emphasised when the first sentence of the novel shows Mr Mallett, a churchwarden, attempting to establish her as the quintessential spinster: ‘Always on the spot when something is happening’ \(EW\), p.7\). Mildred’s outward response is mild. However, her internal response is tart. Honesty then undercuts her self-justification when she acknowledges to herself:

I don’t know whether spinsters are really more inquisitive than married women, though I believe they are thought to be because of the emptiness of their lives, but I could hardly admit […] that at one point I had arranged to be brushing my flight of stairs so that I could peer through the banisters and watch her furniture being brought in \(STG\), p. 8\).

\(^{566}\) Pym also refers to the feminist understanding, that to a disinterested audience all middle aged women look the same (and could be the same) in \textit{Quartet in Autumn} when Letty Crowe and Marcia Ivory, two substantially different women in appearance and behaviour are seen as interchangeable at their retirement function \(Q4\), p. 102\).
Mildred's initial observation becomes a full exposure to the Napiers' lives. She is juxtaposed with Helena Napier, superficially a very different character. Mildred is a churchgoer and dresses simply or dowdily. Helena is 'fair-haired and pretty, gaily dressed in corduroy trousers and a bright jersey' (STG, p.7). She 'has no use for church going' (STG, p.7), is undomesticated, referring to herself as "a slut" and as 'too busy to do much' (STG, p. 9). She is an anthropologist who has returned from Africa with Everard Bone, her co-worker. The working partnership continues in the London flat, with meetings, writing up observations and preparation and presentation of a paper. Mildred's reaction through her dual voice sets out the arguments for and against Helena's enthusiasm for her profession, at the expense of preparing the flat for Rockingham (Rocky) Napier's return. Mildred establishes the conventional argument that a wife should conform to the expectation that her husband's need is paramount.\footnote{In Jane and Prudence Pym is ironic about Prudence's commentary on the same topic (pp. 55-56).} At the same time, her ruminations make clear the unfairness of such a proposal (EW, pp.10-11)

Initially, the women's only shared interest is their dislike of sharing a bathroom. Mildred's shame at her shared facilities (EW, p.8) is the price she pays for a flat in post-war London rather than an indication of her lack of personal worth or financial position. The Napiers' financial position is also comfortable as they own a cottage in the country, and their having to share underlines the post-war housing shortage (EW, p.7). Despite the women's dissimilarities, they quickly find other opportunities to share, whether it is having a mug of tea and thick slices of bread with jam prepared by Helena (EW, pp.8-10); drinking good coffee prepared by Mildred (EW, pp.24-27); or celebrating Rocky's return with wine (EW, pp.34-38). Mildred also shares in Helena's professional life by attending her and Everard's presentation at the Learned Society.

Mildred claims initially that Helena's unenthusiastic description of her marriage makes her feel 'spinsterior and useless' (STG, p.28). Rocky, whom
Helena has married under wartime conditions, is described as ‘a shallow kind of person’ (EW, p. 107). Mildred is charmed at the same time as she is aware of the Wren officers in their ill-fitting uniforms whom Rocky has made feel at ease as part of his role as Flag Lieutenant to an Admiral in Italy (EW, p.9). The almost light-hearted discussion of Rocky’s shortcomings conceals a problem that Pym returns to in A Glass of Blessings with Wilmet and Rowena’s problematic marriages. The wartime marriage, a romantic ideal, is undercut by the reality that Pym addresses in both novels. In Excellent Women Helena’s complaints about her marriage gives Pym the opportunity to emphasise Mildred’s skills and perspicacity. Mildred’s initial feeling of dismay at Helena’s confidences is replaced by her internal acknowledgement that she had wanted to give couples advice during her censorship days during the war (EW, p.25). Her ability to deal with ‘stock situations or even the great moments of life birth, marriage, death, the successful jumble sale, the garden fete spoilt by bad weather’ (STG, p.8) suggests that Mildred’s experience is far ranging. Pym’s association of death and a successful jumble sale, for example, illustrates Mildred’s perception of the world as one in which she can deal comfortably with starkly dissimilar events.

Mildred’s statement ‘I almost wish the Napiers hadn’t come to live in my house [...] Things were much simpler before’ (EW, p.165) is patently untrue. Their proximity and needs put her into a position where her accomplishments are not only useful, but she becomes part of a community which fascinates her. Her claim that she would prefer to be with people with uncomplicated lives (EW, p.99) can also be disregarded. Her decision that ‘It would be best not to see too much of the Napiers and their disturbing kind of life’ (EW, p.100) and her assertion that ‘It was only people like the Napiers who were beyond my experience’ (EW, p.151) are further examples of Mildred’s duality. Her behaviour belies her internal claim when she becomes increasingly involved in the Napiers’ lives. Mildred’s professed innocence is at odds with her intimate knowledge of human affairs. She has already compared the unworldly nature of the Malorys with her own cynicism: ‘I knew more of the wickedness of the world than they did, especially as I had learned much of the weaknesses of human nature in my Censorship work’ (EW, p.46). Mildred is also consistently
sceptical about the widow, Allegra Gray (EW, pp.45-48; p.57; p.64; pp.81-84; p.121; pp.133-134). In contrast with the Malorys’ romantic vision of Allegra Gray, Mildred is at home with comments on infidelity and is unfazed by mention of divorce (EW, p.119).

In her representation of Mildred, Pym is fictionalising her own observations. She raises questions about the way spinsters can be imposed upon as, having no husband, it is assumed they have nothing of importance with which to occupy themselves. Mildred appears to epitomise Kate Browder Herberlein’s claim that women in Pym’s novels are exploited despite being depicted as men’s equals if not their superiors. However, Mildred is well aware of what she is doing. Her assistance to the Napiers comprises little more than writing a letter and supervising furniture removal, something she chose to do surreptitiously upon the Napiers’ move into the flat. Meeting Miss Clovis is hardly an imposition as she is curious about the woman who works in close contact with Everard Bone. Mildred’s contemplation that under similar circumstances she could assist Mrs Gray (EW, p.199) further undercuts the burdensome nature of the tasks. The possibility that she would assist Mrs Gray, whom she has consistently criticised, is farcical. Even the events with which Mildred does become involved are rendered negligible.

Pym’s use of the dual voice undermines the conventional aspects of Mildred’s behaviour and thoughts. Mildred’s disapproval of Helena’s work in the field with a man who becomes a familiar visitor to the flat creates a new dimension to the gender politics in Pym’s work. Mildred’s feelings are counterpointed by her recognition that she is struggling with misdirected indignation because of her authentic feelings about the inequality in women and men’s relationships. Mildred’s criticism of Helena is written to question the idea that women have inherent domestic characteristics which should be

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568 Pym notes: ‘I’d probably noticed that unmarried women seemed to be expected to do all kinds of things that nobody else was willing to do and of course having got the idea I exaggerated it a little, after all art must improve on life’, MS Pym 98, fol. 32.
directed toward nurturing a man. Mildred’s expectation that Helena should put aside her other activities to welcome her husband back from overseas, however short the notice, and that her domestic abilities should meet a certain standard are hardly surprising pre-1970s. However, Pym uses conventional ideas of the period to question, rather than confirm their validity. Helena is also used to convey the feminist idea that a woman is as suited as a man to a career. Rocky’s love of cooking, together with his undoubted masculinity, also suggests that nurturing can be natural to men. Mildred has noticed that ‘men did not usually do things unless they liked doing them (EW, p.11), highlighting Pym’s suggestion that choice rather than gender is the issue.

Both Helena and Mildred raise difficult questions for readers for whom traditional aspects of women’s lives, married or single are appealing and preferably unchanging. The unromantic images presented by Mildred are not alone in demonstrating her role as a typical Pym troublesome woman. Her acceptance of assumptions about her position as a spinster exists alongside her exercise of an independent voice. That voice constantly undermines her and others’ conventional assumptions about spinster-like behaviour. Mildred’s verbal and physical responses appear to confirm that she is a stereotype of the conforming spinster. From when she is recorded in conversation with the churchwarden to her last observations that her plans will include proofreading and preparing an index as well as protecting Julian Malory, Mildred appears to support the patriarchal institutions which give all women secondary status and where being an unmarried woman is a symbol of failure.

In reality, Mildred raises questions about these institutions. She has already drawn the reader’s attention to a spinster who appears on the list of the Learned Society medal winners in 1907 (EW, p.91). In doing so, she makes the point about the unique nature of her appearance amongst a body of men, and contrasts it with the presence of Helena in an authoritative position. Less positively, Helena is also one of a few women in the profession. Mildred’s acceptance that she will proofread and prepare an index ‘which would make a nice change’ (EW, p.255) is accompanied by her internal ironic observation that ‘before long I should be certain to find myself at his sink peeling potatoes and washing up; that would be a nice change when both proofreading and
indexing began to pall’ (EW, p.255). Mildred’s dual voice in relation to the church is also significant. The pattern established with the churchwarden continues throughout the work with Mildred’s personal relationship to Julian Malory, and her observation of his incompetency; the unchristian behaviour of the canon’s widow, Allegra Gray; and Mildred’s final suggestion that a “full life” will include protecting Julian from the women who will come to live in the rectory flat. Once again, Mildred’s comment is not meant to be taken at face value.

In showing that Rocky has had a momentary impact on Mildred but her considered attraction is to Everard, Pym again introduces spinsters’ ability to deal with romantic ideas sagely. In Excellent Women Winifred’s and Mildred’s romantic notions exist side by side. Winifred weaves hers around Allegra Gray. Rocky Napier provides the short-term romance in Mildred’s life with which she is content. Similar to Belinda Bede’s romanticism, neither woman is harmed by her romantic imaginings. Mildred’s proposed role as the protector of Julian against predatory women and suggestion of work for Everard ostensibly gives her something to be as ‘involved or interested in other people’s business’ (EW, p.7). The ending of the novel seemingly fulfils conventional expectations of Mildred’s place as a spinster, reflecting the beginning of the novel. However, the connection also recalls Mildred’s dual voice, suggesting that the appearance is not to be trusted.

IV

The central characters in Jane and Prudence are located in three different relationships to marriage. Prudence Bates is a spinster who enjoys love affairs. Despite being described as ‘twenty-nine, an age that is often rather desperate for a woman who has not yet married’ (JP, p.6) Prudence does not wish to marry. Jessie Morrow’s is in her early thirties and a spinster who does want to

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570 Jessie’s narrative in Pym’s work begins as a companion to the redoubtable Miss Doggett in Crampton Hodnet is discussed in Chapter 6 where Pym’s two academic novels are contrasted.
merry. Jane Cleveland, at forty-one, is married to a clergyman. He has a small role in the debate about marriage that is central to this work, when he ponders the benefits of celibacy to the clergy (JP, p.153). Another gender issue in Jane and Prudence relates to the workplace, where Prudence’s position is compared with that of a male colleague. Class is also an issue illustrated through comparisons made between Prudence and her female colleagues. Competition between the two spinsters, Prudence a university graduate and Jessie, a companion, also introduces class. In addition, language is used as a classifier through other domestic staff (JP, p.17) and voluntary church workers (JP, pp.128-129).

Early in Jane and Prudence, marriage is presented as a desirable state. Prudence disagrees: ‘I often think being married would be rather a nuisance. I’ve got a nice flat and am so used to living on my own I should hardly know what to do with a husband’ (JP, p. 9). It is typical of Pym’s ironical approach and unearthing of superficialities that a gathering of university graduates prefers marriage to a career. The unmarried graduates are expected to fulfil themselves in ‘less obvious ways, with novels or social work or a brilliant career in the Civil Service’ (JP, pp.8-9). Adding to the irony, the spinster in the novel who does want to marry, Jessie Morrow, is not eligible to be present.

Jessie and Prudence compete for the affections of the handsome but demonstrably mediocre Fabian Driver, providing a story line reminiscent of a romance novel. However, Jane and Prudence is far from a romance, and the women are far from romantic figures. Prudence’s behaviour throughout the novel attests to her satisfaction in having love affairs that specifically do not end in marriage and pleasure in having her own home. Significantly, men find it uncomfortable (AGB, p.246). At the end of the novel she remains single, her emotional command over her life intact. She rejects an invitation from a man with whom she imagined herself in love at the beginning of the novel, her closing thought: ‘We have many more evenings before us if we want them’ (my italics, JP, p.252). Further, she is ‘overwhelmed by the richness of her life’ (JP, p.252).

In contrast to Prudence, and most of the spinsters in Pym’s work, Jessie actively pursues marriage. However, her portrayal conflicts with the image of
the "mousy spinster" conjured up by Solow.\textsuperscript{571} Jessie's qualities disliked by Larkin\textsuperscript{572} suggest that he saw her through the framework of Roger's account of spinsterhood and its treatment in fiction. However, only Jessie's pursuit of Fabian has any similarity to Roger's description. In contrast with Larkin's disquiet, Jessie's strength and humour are positive characteristics. Pym replicates the strategies she uses in Jessie's observations in \textit{Crampton Hodnet} and Mildred's dual voice in \textit{Excellent Women} in Jessie's characterisation. Jessie interacts with Miss Doggett, Jane, Fabian and Prudence. However, she has an anomalous status, detected during conversations overheard by Jane. Miss Doggett's superior position is established through the timbre of her voice (\textit{JP}, p.26), her directions to Jessie and the latter's overt willingness to comply. However, Jessie's acceptance of her inferior status is illusionary, as shown by her replies or inner thoughts. Although she uses what Pym refers to as a "very demure" voice in agreeing with Miss Doggett that "festival" has a pagan quality, she promptly suggests that the word conjures up the vision of a church dignitary in 'a leopard skin with vine leaves' (\textit{JP}, p.27). Her voice is described as "serious" when she acts on Miss Doggett's concern that Jane is walking in long grass with no galoshes. However, her suggestion she inspect Jane's footwear (\textit{JP}, p.28) is ironic and undermines the impression that Miss Doggett is in control. The humour at Miss Doggett's expense is reprised when Jessie returns to the theme (\textit{JP}, p.32) and later, Jessie is only just stopped from 'letting out a shout of laughter' (\textit{JP}, p.28) at the thought that Miss Doggett might renounce her authority over church decorations to the vicar's wife.

Jessie provides Jane with information about Fabian Driver's infidelities during his marriage to Constance 'impart[ing] this information in cool, detached tone [with] nothing secretive or gossiping about her manner' (\textit{JP}, p.29). The language Jessie uses is in keeping with Pym's detachment, an essential trait of Pym's observation and writing, which gives authenticity to both the writer and the character. The tone of Jessie's commentary is also

\textsuperscript{571} Solow.
\textsuperscript{572} Larkin, p. 242.
removed from the stereotype of a gossiping spinster, placing Jessie into a
category removed from the stereotype. Jane is a suitable confidante as she is
also an observer and commentator on the extraordinary (JP, p.36). The
relationship between the women develops, joining spinster and married woman
in their shared critical approach to community icons. Both recognise the comic
aspects of the parish women’s adulation of their local Member (JP, pp. 98-100)
and share the humour in Jessie’s confiscation of the oyster patties baked
especially for him (JP, p.102). They have in common an irreverent approach
to Fabian’s assumed sorrow over the sorting of his deceased wife’s clothing
(JP, pp. 119-121).

Jane and Jessie’s consanguinity diverges when their aspirations for
Fabian’s future differ. Miss Doggett and Jane consider Fabian a suitable
partner for Prudence (JP, pp.143-143). Their assumption that Prudence wants
to marry, whatever the credentials of her proposed partner, is pure Austen.
Jane introduces Fabian and Prudence and follows their relationship with
enthusiasm, replicating Mrs Bennet.573 Because of her education, economic
independence and insouciance about marriage, Prudence rejects their verdict.
Jessie is also planning her marriage to Fabian despite knowing his
shortcomings. Jessie’s approach is direct but subtly plays on Fabian’s guilt
about his past. Jessie dresses in a garment which previously belonged to his
wife and visits Fabian in his home (JP, p.158). In behaving with alacrity and
possibly ‘stooping to ways Miss Bates wouldn’t have dreamed of’ (JP, p.243)
Jessie is drawn as a very different spinster from the others in Pym’s work.
Pym acknowledges the place of a companion and that Jessie can only enhance
her status through marriage. Pym adopts Austen’s solution to economic
insecurity, marriage to a man of means. Jessie’s approach is predicated on
1950s economic inequalities but, unaffected by conventional behaviour, has the
boldness of a 1970s woman.

573 Austen, Pride and Prejudice.
The relationship between Fabian and Jessie is an example of Pym’s anticipation of binary feminism and reprises Jessie’s similar intellectual superiority to the curate in *Crampton Hodnet*. Fabian is aware of the likelihood she is laughing at him ‘as if she knew things about him that he didn’t want known’ (*JP*, p.62). Jessie’s acuity contrasts with his shallowness and she refuses to engage with Fabian’s superficial comments. Her comment ‘A man needs meat’ (*JP*, p.62) about Fabian’s steak lunch, places him in an inferior group whose masculinity is a matter for irony rather than admiration. The comment subtly undermines men as the “stronger” sex. Pym is even more explicit about women’s strength in a conversation between Jessie and Fabian. In conceding his distress, Jessie says ‘Yes, you are having the pain now [...] Women are very powerful – perhaps they are always triumphant in the end’ (*JP*, p.125). Although he dismisses Jessie’s kiss as ‘no more than his due’ (*JP*, p.125) Fabian consistently follows her lead (*JP*, pp.160-161); yields to her requests (*JP*, pp. 201-202) and emulates her behaviour (*JP*, pp. 199-200).

Prudence Bates is linked through her name with Austen’s Miss Bates in *Emma*, reinforced by several references to her as “Miss Bates”’. Prudence is the opposite of the quiet Miss Bates. Rather than fit into her environment as behaves a spinster, Prudence is portrayed as contentedly out of kilter with social situations. Amongst the drably clad university women she is likened to ‘someone in a women’s magazine, carefully “groomed”, and wearing a red dress that sets off her pale skin and dark hair’ (*JP*, p.7). She is unsuitably clad for a suburban parish function, in her ‘green-and-gold shot taffeta cocktail party dress’ (*JP* p.96). The ‘lilac cotton dress of deceptive simplicity’ (*JP*, p.192) provides her with a romantic image at a garden tea party but she has already been supplanted in Fabian’s life by Jessie dressed only in a crumpled ‘faded blue linen dress’ (*JP*, p.191).

At the same time as Jane seeks a husband for Prudence, she contemplates forfeited opportunities.\(^574\) Jane’s concerns are her incomplete research and the

\(^{574}\) MS Pym 41, fol. 11.
romantic vision that becomes ‘Mild kindly looks and spectacles [...] this is what it comes to in the end’ (JP, p.52). Jane is drawn as the embodiment of the woman who knows the conventional ideas she should have about marriage, flouts them, but barely dares to acknowledge the questions below the surface. Jane scarcely fulfils the requirements of a clergy wife. She is unconcerned about her appearance, publicly using a safety pin to rectify her drooping petticoat hem only under duress from Miss Doggett. On a trip to London intended to purchase Christmas presents she instead dreams of fine dining in the glamorous food hall at Fortnum and Mason’s. Jane is not only domestically deficient but ignores the idea that she should be any different. She considers opening a tin for supper ‘as if this were a most unusual procedure, which it certainly was not’ (JP, p.16) and sometimes she has no tin to open (JP, p.53). Her suggestion that she and Nicholas go out to lunch as neither Flora or Mrs Glaze is there to cook and she has forgotten to order any meat (JP, p.pp.52-53) is part of her open acknowledgement: ‘you know how indifferent I am to domestic arrangements’ (JP, p.17). Jane’s complete rejection of the domestic role expected from a married woman in the era and more so from a clergy wife, is profound.

Counteracting the feminist implications of Jane’s attitude to domesticity Liddell suggests that Jane’s necessity to go out to lunch is the outcome of rationing rather than her repudiation of cooking. As the novel was first published in 1953 and written in the post-war years his speculation is reasonable. However, Liddell ignores Jane’s explicit rejection of domestic tasks. Early in the novel she is taken aback when confronted with Mrs Glaze’s approach to cook their meal as she ‘had hardly yet grasped where the kitchen was and in any case it was a part of the house in which she took little interest’ (JP, p.18). Pym would have seen no moral imperative in a woman’s dislike of domestic work and she is certainly not being pejorative about Jane. Although the vicissitudes of war remain features of the novels, as in the damaged church

575 Liddell, p. 34.
in *Excellent Women* (*EW*, p.48) in *Jane and Prudence* it is an unlikely explanation for Jane’s behaviour.

Flora performs the domestic tasks neglected by Jane as competently as could conventionally be expected from a clergyman’s daughter. However, there is little that she or Nicholas Cleveland can do to rectify Jane’s ineffectual care for the parish. In comparison with the critical observations she makes of other clergy in the novels, Pym uses Nicholas to broach an understanding of the pressures on clergy wives when he reflects ‘poor Jane, he must let her go where she wanted to’ (*JP*, p.131). He and Flora accept what they see as Jane’s fanciful notions and domestic incompetence. Flora’s salient points about her mother accentuate Jane’s lack of nurturing skills at the same time as highlighting Pym’s fictional subterfuges. Jane’s resort to using stock phrases, which prevent her noticing other peoples’ expectations, reflects Pym’s use of familiar phrases and characters in her work. Jane’s rejoinder ‘No, I notice the things one shouldn’t’ (*JP*, p.36) is a reminder that Pym, while superficially writing of churches and clergy and marriages and spinsters is raising questions about matters that are usually hidden.

vi

The three novels, amongst the first full length work written and published by Pym, laid the foundation for the feminist ideas that were to inform the remainder of her work. Importantly, she recognised spinsters as women with individual characteristics rather than part of an amorphous group. In doing so, Pym gave the most easily disregarded women a status absent in any non-feminist work. Pym’s spinsters eliminate the possibility of their being stereotyped. They rely on a variety of sources, rarely marriage, for fulfilment. Spinsters in *Some Tame Gazelle*, *Excellent Women* and *Jane and Prudence* articulate ideas that undermine the institutions that are essential to patriarchy.

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576 Flora presents a different picture from Mildred (*EW*) as she is not caring for her father after her mother’s death. Flora’s similar role is predicated on Jane’s disinclination for domestic tasks.
As part of Pym’s feminist agenda, spinsters are central to her work and are often shown in situations that demonstrate preparedness to act where men are inert. Some Tame Gazelle, Excellent Women and Jane and Prudence establish spinsters as “troublesome women”: single women who question the conventions devised to circumscribe their behaviour.  

The novels demonstrate Pym’s readiness to endorse the relationships between women. Although Pym’s novels were written before the term “sisterhood” became part of the language in the 1970s, her characters are confidently aware of the benefits of female friends. Some Tame Gazelle demonstrates the relevance of sisterhood, through biological sisters. As an advance on Austen’s sisters in Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice, whose closeness is broken by marriage, Pym’s sisters are enabled in their desire to stay together. Mildred Lathbury, as overtly critical as she appears to be of Helena Napier, defends and supports her choices through her dual voice. Jessie Morrow is a more driven woman because of her economic dependence, but escapes censure because her behaviour on behalf of Fabian’s wife has the principles of sisterhood. Jessie’s marriage has little impact on Prudence who remains happily unmarried. Even Jane’s disappointment for Prudence does not prevent her being indignant when Fabian slights Jessie (JP, p.213). Spinsters remained Pym’s predominant troublesome woman until the married Caroline Grimstone adopted the central position alone in An Academic Question.

577 See Appendix 3.
578 Two characters stand out against this pattern, Allegra Gray in Excellent Women and Leonora Eyre in The Sweet Dove Died.
579 Ironically, the closeness between women is broken in Pym’s 1970’s novel, Quartet in Autumn, where it could be expected that the image of “sisterhood” could be developed in keeping with the times. However, Pym demonstrates the difficulties women experience in a patriarchal world if they have no supportive women friends. This discussion is developed in Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 3

LESS THAN ANGELS, A GLASS OF BLESSINGS AND NO FOND RETURN OF LOVE: THE TROUBLESOME WOMAN IN THE CREATIVE, SPIRITUAL AND SCIENTIFIC WORLDS

I learned how it was possible and even essential to cultivate an attitude of detachment towards life and people, and how it was even possible for the novelist to do ‘fieldwork’ as the anthropologist did... Less Than Angels became a mixture of all the worlds I had experience of.

Barbara Pym

I

The feminist ideas that are apparent in each of the novels to be discussed in this chapter include the centring of women in the narrative, exemplified by Catherine Oliphant in Less Than Angels, Wilmet Forsyth in A Glass of Blessings and Dulcie Mainwaring in No Fond Return of Love. Pym also enhances the binary feminism which is already apparent in the precedence she gives women in all the narratives. Each of the novels includes specific instances of binary feminism, contrasting Tom Mallard and Alaric Lydgate’s ineffectuality with Catherine’s ability to take action (LTA); Sybil Forsyth’s highlighting men’s inadequacies in A Glass of Blessings and the treatment of the Forbes brothers by their mother in No Fond Return of Love. Conflation of domestic and professional tasks is a particular feature of Less Than Angels, but also appears in Dulcie’s sleuthing/research (NFRL).

The conflict between the relative value of an imaginative and spiritual life, expressing Pym’s attitudes towards imaginative and scientific thought is a particular feature of Less Than Angels. Commentators on Pym’s work have addressed her attention to the topic, but have not related it to the comparative roles she gives observation within the novels. Ackley says ‘Social scientists and

580 MS Pym 96, fols 100-101.
novelists do the same thing, but novelists are creative. The writer of fiction has unlimited freedom – fiction is humanising in a way that science cannot be’.\(^{581}\) Nardin judges that ‘people who approach life through religion or literature tend to be more decent and humble than scientists, for they are generally aware they have no direct pipeline to truth, no privileged knowledge denied ordinary people’\(^{582}\).

Pym’s response to which discipline has the answers: ‘The anthropologist, laying bare the structure of society, or the writer of romantic fiction, covering it up?’ (\textit{LTA}, p.191) apparently counteracts the authenticating status she gives the literary observer. However, her work reflects the idea that a writer can observe, cover and choose when to lay bare, if not the structure of society, its hidden inadequacies.

Pym considers the values inherent in religious practice and spirituality, which is a less clear-cut discussion, in \textit{A Glass of Blessings}. Spiritual commitment is secondary in the novel’s concentration on practice rather than contemplation. As a novelist adept in anthropological method\(^{583}\) and a regular churchgoer, Pym is ideally positioned to consider the contrasting merits of spiritual and secular knowledge. She retains a somewhat prosaic approach throughout her novels, culminating in her treatment of the church in \textit{Quartet in Autumn} and \textit{A Few Green Leaves}.

In comparison with the other novels examined in this chapter, \textit{No Fond Return of Love} suffers from lack of a broad theme. By neglecting the overarching theme of creativity and scientific thought, the novel deprives the central woman character from taking her place in a wider world. Only through the brief comment on the nature of history does she forge a connection with events beyond her personal interests. Although it briefly refers to the meaning of history, anticipating the thorough debate over this in \textit{A Few Green Leaves}, \textit{No Fond Return of Love} stands apart from Pym’s other work in this period. The

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\(^{581}\) Ackley, p. 58.

\(^{582}\) Nardin, p. 48.

\(^{583}\) Pym wrote in her notebook ‘The concept of ‘detachment’ reminds me of the methods of the anthropologist, who studies societies in this way’. ‘The joke definition of ‘the study of man embracing woman’ might seem peculiarly applicable to the novelist’, MS Pym 96, fols 100-101.
disappointing nature of this novel possibly influenced Pym’s desire to try a
different type of work, resulting in the initially unsuccessful *An Unsuitable
Attachment*.

*Less Than Angels*, *A Glass of Blessings* and *No Fond Return of Love* were
written in the mid-to-late-nineteen fifties. *Excellent Women*, with its portrayal of
Helena Napier as an anthropologist, established Pym’s preparedness to write
about women in the full-time workforce. In the novels studied in this chapter
Pym again challenges the claim that women are inherently suited to domestic
lives. Professional anthropologists (*LTA*), women in the civil service who are
described as ‘splendid and formidable’ (*AGB*, p.11) and young women who are
training for work and assume that women have careers (*NFRL*, p.121) feature in
the novels. Pym’s conflation of domestic and professional work is most apparent
in *Less Than Angels*. With its attentiveness to anthropologists, their workplaces,
their professional methods and their link to domestic environments *Less Than
Angels* undermines assumptions about occupations based on gender. Although
weaker in its application, *No Fond Return of Love* adopts the same method by
equating personal investigation with “research”.

Catherine (*LTA*), Wilmet (*AGB*) and Dulcie (*NFRL*) build feminist
arguments and contribute to wider philosophical debate. Catherine provides a
systematic rebuttal of behaviour based on gender through her omnipresent role.
Her observations and commentary affect all aspects of the novel, the professional
anthropologists, the domestic observers and the debate over the relative value of
science and creativity. Wilmet’s experience highlights the inconsistencies of a
financially comfortable but unfulfilling married life. Her formal religious
interests contrast with the secular emphasis in *Less Than Angels*. Despite the
shortcomings of *No Fond Return of Love* Dulcie’s employment of
anthropological research method for personal investigation contributes to the
argument that aptitude is not gender specific. She introduces Pym’s awakening
interest in the nature of history.

*A Glass of Blessings* concentrates on marriage, reflecting the agenda in
which Weldon and Fairbairns approach their feminist advocacy. Pym’s focus on
the married woman’s world is drawn through Wilmet and Sybil Forsyth and
Rowena Talbot. The domestic worlds in which Pym, Weldon and Fairbairns’
women characters function are differentiated by era: understandings of women’s rights; opportunities to achieve economic independence; and the role of the church in their lives are predictably different. As has been noted, where Pym was working under the constraints of 1950s conservatism, Weldon and Fairbairns were supported by 1970s feminist ideology. Although Pym’s resolution of Wilmet’s problems has less clarity as a feminist argument than her approach to spinsters, as discussed in Chapter 2, connections can be made between her work and acknowledged feminists’ writing. Friedan’s concern with married women whose seemingly comfortable lives cover ennui and powerlessness is conveyed through Rowena, a secondary character in A Glass of Blessings. Wilmet’s narrative is also linked to Friedan’s work, but is more complex.

Pym’s realisation of Friedan’s feminist idea is located in the 1950s. Fairbairns’ narratives question the efficacy of using patriarchal institutions to solve gender-based problems. Fairbairns’ approach to a married woman in the previous century recognises women’s powerlessness as a problem of gender exacerbated by marriage rather than a moment of history. In her account of Helena’s life in Stand We at Last she exposes the difficulties for women whose middle class marriage and convention prevent them from seeking paid work. Fairbairns’ work depicts an explicit concern with patriarchy. Her depiction of Jo in Daddy’s Girls is encased in a violent and emotionally charged environment. Unlike Wilmet, Jo is fully cognisant of the cause of her unhappiness and her narrative focuses on the emotional and economic aspects of being alone. To be employable she must retrain to update her qualifications because she chose marriage and domesticity. She relies on a patriarchal institution to protect her and unsurprisingly it does not. In Fairbairns’ Stand We at Last the unhappily married Helen, a century later than Helena, departs from the depiction of Jo and Wilmet. Helen’s problems under patriarchy are unambiguous and her 1970s rejection of patriarchy is straightforward when she leaves her husband to manage an iconic

584 Fairbairns, Stand We at Last, 1988, pp. 9-89.
family institution: Christmas celebrations.\textsuperscript{586}

Some of Weldon’s work is unexpectedly closer to the ideas Pym advances through *A Glass of Blessings*. Weldon’s characters often see changing partners as a way to assuage their unhappiness. Wilmet’s flirtations with Piers Longridge and Harry Talbot could be read as a restrained version of Weldon’s characters’ behaviour. Although Weldon is more concerned with the dramatic effect of unhappy marriages, she also articulates the type of concerns with which Friedan dealt. In *Down Among The Women* Weldon refers to such women:

> It is true that others of my women friends live quiet and happy married lives, or would claim to do so. I watch them curl up and wither gently, without drama [...] ‘We are perfectly happy,’ they say. Then why do they look so sad?\textsuperscript{587}

A secondary character in the same novel creates a similar image until she is forced to rebel. Initially she takes refuge in an imaginary world \textsuperscript{588} also reminiscent of Wilmet’s behaviour. When that fails, like Wilmet, she acts to change her environment without resorting to separation or divorce.\textsuperscript{589}

\textbf{II}

Anthropologists and their work are the apparent focus of *Less Than Angels*. However, the whole gamut of professional anthropologists is not enough in this most anthropological of Pym’s novels. Pym includes Mabel Swan and Rhoda Wellcome, domestic amateur anthropologists, and Catherine Oliphant, a writer and observer. Catherine and the amateur anthropologists provide the process through which domestic and professional work is compared, the similarities exposed, and then conflated. As a result, the nexus between women and the qualities and activities presumed natural to them under patriarchy is broken. The broad issues debated through *Less Than Angels* also contribute to Pym’s feminist

\textsuperscript{586}Fairbairns, 1988, pp. 473- 474.
\textsuperscript{587}Weldon, *Down Among The Women*, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{588}Weldon, *Down Among The Women*, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{589}Weldon, *Down Among The Women*, p. 80.
approach as Catherine, the central character carries the debates. Her relationships with the anthropologist, Tom Mallow and the former colonial administrator, Alaric Lydegate, provide the focus for Pym’s overarching theme of the relative value of the world of imagination and science. In addition, she is an important part of the debate about the ethnocentricity of anthropological investigation, which demonstrates the similarities between the cultures studied and those in which the anthropologists live. Pym conflates the “superior” with the “inferior” to investigate the hypocrisy of hierarchies, and the value of anthropological observation.

Three vehicles of investigation in *Less Than Angels* conflate domestic and professional observations: Catherine’s omnipresent role; Rhoda and Mabel’s familiarity with their neighbours’ behaviour; and commentary throughout the novel related to the professionals’ studies in Africa. Pym uses two strategies to conflate domestic and professional observation.

Firstly, Pym discounts the professionalism of the anthropologists. Pym’s description of four young anthropologists competing for scholarships is a reminder of the fallibility of anthropological research and the observational method of the anthropologist. When they are under observation, their unease influences their behaviour, suggesting that the communities they observe might be similarly affected. The young anthropologists’ status is also undermined by their affiliation with the older professional, Professor Mainwaring. His observations lack objectivity because of his assumptions about gender. His observation of male anthropologists poised for flight from an academic meeting leads him to speculate that they are leaving to socialise. In contrast, he openly considers that women leave to prepare a casserole (*LTA*, p.17). His prejudices have serious consequences for the funding of his projects when a woman with all the accoutrements of conventionality deceives him. He misjudges her financial commitment to his cause because he is unaware of Mrs Foresight’s assumption that all anthropological endeavours are similar (*LTA*, p.243). Her identification of anthropologists’ studies as valuable to missionaries and administrators in their zeal to evangelise or govern (*LTA*, p.13) is also perceptive. Her name confirms her perspicacity, conflicting with her image as a rich, foolish woman. The anthropologists’ interpretation of her behaviour, like their misunderstanding of
Catherine's, confirms their lack of credibility.

Secondly, domestic observers are connected to the professionals through their amateur observations. Rhoda's domestic life appears to fit the stereotype of the spinster: she lives with her sister and her children, inserting herself into the domestic and filial duties (*LTA*). She also seeks an imaginary world that draws upon her avid reading of newspaper reports (*LTA*, p.33) and observation of her neighbours. One focus is Alaric, whose behaviour is pronounced upon by Rhoda and Mabel in the manner in which an anthropologist might observe and write up findings in the field (*LTA*, p.30).

Lastly, connections are made between the similarity of the domestic and professionals' attitudes. The conservatism of the young anthropologists, Mark and Digby, is demonstrated through their observations on Catherine's domestic behaviour. They disapprove of her cleaning in the late afternoon, depending on the defence that it is a largely accepted ritual that domestic work should be undertaken in the morning (*LTA*, p.30). The way in which they censor Catherine's behaviour undercuts the claim that they are neutral observers. Their views also echo the conservative understandings expressed by the domestic observers. Catherine's opinion about aunts, of whom Rhoda is one, that they are 'somehow lacking in dignity and prestige' (*LTA*, p.129) further invalidates the professionals' prestige. Their connections with Rhoda and the equal status Pym gives her commentary undermines that of the professionals. In choosing both domestic and professional observers to record domestic activity, the professionals are demonstrably unable to think beyond gender, ritual and tradition, typical of the non-expert domestic observers.

At a broader level, the associations between English society and the societies studied by anthropologists undermine the implied superiority of both anthropologists and English society. Catherine's speculation on her relationship when she wonders 'whether anthropologists became so absorbed in studying the ways of strange societies that they forgot what was the usual thing in their own' (*LTA*, p.24) supports Pym's interrogation of marriage. Catherine reaffirms Pym's association of marriage with convention rather than romance when she suggests that anthropologists are concerned with 'the importance of conforming to the "norm"' (*LTA*, p.24).
Catherine’s living arrangements reject the norm, as she is unmarried but lives with Tom. The couple are subject to ritual understandings, challenged by Catherine’s refusal to accept a double standard. Her reaction devalues the moral imperative of the norm. Catherine’s relationship with Tom gives Pym the opportunity to make an explicit feminist statement about the double standard associated with sexual freedom. Catherine understands that she is unlikely to be introduced to Tom’s family (LTA, p.27) as she does not conform to the cosy image of his former “love”, Elaine. With her dog breeding and home in Tom’s family village, she is closely associated with Tom’s past and family.

However, the cosy village images are undercut by the indirect links that are made between the unconventional Catherine and Tom’s mother. Mrs Mallow sees her work in the context of Tom’s studies (LTA, p.178), which take place in Catherine’s flat. Her casual and dry commentary is also a reminder of Catherine, whose treatment of Tom’s artefacts, the symbols of his profession, is also casual (LTA, p.26). Tom’s association with Catherine influences the way he sees anthropology, making another connection with the familiar, but not necessarily comfortable, English village life he sometimes misses (LTA, p.176). Ironically, it is in his village, surrounded by the past that he recognises himself as one dimensional, like the anthropological language he uses. When he observes himself in the shuttered windows as ‘a shabby trudging figure, carrying a briefcase and a canvas bag’ (LTA, p.173) he sees himself as anthropology personified.

Although he is now distant from Catherine and her imagination, the writer’s influence is pervasive, reinforcing Catharine’s omnipresent role in the novel. Catherine has observed that the rituals familiar in English society are no less bizarre than the activities studied by anthropologists in the field’ (LTA, p.133). In his disembodied state, Tom also speculates. He draws his life as an anthropologist together with English village life when he reflects on the similarities between his mother and his field of study. He sees parallels between her market stall where she sells produce from her garden and African stalls; and between African village elders and Mrs Mallow as an “elder” of the
English village when she opens fetes and festivals when visiting “deities” are unavailable.

Although Tom’s family’s disapproval of Catherine is intense, Catherine’s influence is apparent in her meeting with Tom’s aunt when she visits to remonstrate about their living arrangements. The aunt’s attitude is initially what would be the “norm” for such a situation. She relies on the negative stereotype of a woman who accepts such arrangements, suggesting that Catherine must be unworthy and immoral. In contrast, the family are “worried” about Tom, rather than judgemental. Pym makes an authorial statement about the sexism inherent in the family’s premise. The aunt’s statement: ‘I don’t myself think that there should be different codes of behaviour for men and women’ (LTA, p.132) is powerful. The effectiveness of the statement is enhanced by Pym’s choice of the married of Tom’s two aunts to make it. In referring to her as ‘the superior one – Belgravia and the married state had raised her up’ (LTA, p.129) the status of the statement is reinforced. In this context Pym, while using her work to challenge spinsters’ lack of status, does not underestimate the value of a married woman making a direct feminist statement. She also places the event at an English afternoon tea, thus muting the enormity of the statement in her typical “village” cover.

Miss Clovis’s detachment about ‘initiation ceremonies of the tribe [...] and the licence allowed in certain forms of behaviour’ (LTA, p.92) contrasts with Catherine’s experience of Tom’s family, and reflects her own dispassionate attitude. English and African rituals are linked to develop the debate about ethnocentricity. Deirdre and Tom are the only professional anthropologists who question the ethnocentricity inherent in anthropology. However, Catharine has influenced Tom and Deidre is already bored with the professional aspects of the discipline. She wonders whether she should change to History or English Literature (LTA, p.11), studies that are notably unscientific. Deirdre joins the non-professionals in her speculation about a domestic situation, her brother’s club. It reminds her ‘of the young men’s associations which she had read about in the course of her studies’ (LTA, pp.36-37).

Catherine carries the debate about the relative merit of creative and scientific thought in Less Than Angels. As a writer, she creates illusions and embroiders
events. While she adopts the objectivity reminiscent of anthropologists’ claims for their discipline, it is selective: the behaviour of an author, and Pym herself. Catherine’s function as a woman who speculates about possibilities is illuminated by her musings early in the novel. While sitting in the sunshine steaming through café windows of ‘amethyst and gold stained-glass’ (LTA, p.5) Catherine mentally transposes the picture of office workers streaming to lunch with a more exotic image of ‘English tourists shuffling round a church in Ravenna’ (LTA, p.5).

Catherine’s ruminations on why the office workers do not pay obeisance to the mosaic peacocks on the walls (LTA, p.5) connect her domestic musing with the rituals observed in the field. The image of stained glass windows contributes to the analogy made between the creativity of the writer and the church connects spirituality and creativity. Pym also makes links between the anthropologists and Catherine through these images. Off prints offered to Esther Clovis serve as the academic equivalent of the potatoes and other items of religious observation Catherine has expected to be laid before the peacocks in the café. Hopeful young anthropologists could almost regard Esther Clovis as a “high priestess” through her role in the “temple” of the anthropological library and relationship with influential anthropologists. Reciprocity is linked to both African and English cultures through these images.

Catherine also carries the focus of feminist debate in suburban and bohemian domestic settings and the anthropologists’ world. As a romance writer, Catherine could think in romantic terms. However, under circumstances that a romance novelist would treat as emotional, she maintains a prosaic outlook. She is responsible for the unromantic cast of the novel, beginning with the nature of her relationship with Tom. They met on a channel boat, Tom stayed in Catherine’s spare room and after another trip into the field, returned to Catherine’s flat ‘as naturally as if it had been his own home. They had become fond of each other, or perhaps used to each other; it was almost like being married except that there were no children’ (LTA, pp.23-24). Catherine thinks of Tom only as her ‘present love’ (LTA, p.6), suggesting that she discounts their living arrangement as a serious matter. In close proximity to that statement, she speculates how tiring it would be if every lover were to
pass by (LTA, p.6). Catherine’s contemplation of such likelihood suggests that Tom is one of many.

In contrast, Deidre, for whom Tom leaves Catherine, is a potentially romantic character. At nineteen, she is at a very different stage of spinsterhood from Catherine at thirty. Pym reinforces her undermining of the stereotypical spinsterhood. In the terms that Pym constantly questions, Catherine should be keen to marry; Deidre should be keen to be in love. Deidre initially fulfils the stereotype: she is young, conventionally attractive and believes herself to be in love with Tom. In outlook she is quite different from Catherine. However, she is torn between being a young woman typical of her suburban background and aspiring to Catherine’s bohemian lifestyle. At the same time, she is shocked at Catherine and Tom’s living arrangements, emphasising both Catherine’s unconventionality and her own desire to conform.

The tedium of conventional domestic life, to which the male anthropologists in the novel consign women, is identified through Deirdre’s suburban experience with her mother and aunt. Their two-storey house, with stained glass windows, set back from the road with a garden and lawn contrasts with Catherine’s in a flat on the ‘shabby side of Regent’s Park […] over a newsagent’s shop which she had taken cheaply after the war’ (LTA, p.23). Deidre claims to be dissatisfied with the suburban meal ritual with ‘Large knives, small knives, pudding spoons […] large forks, serving spoons, mats, glasses’ (LTA, p.31). She proposes serving ‘Some rice, all oily and saffron yellow, with aubergines and red peppers and lots of garlic’ (LTA, p.35). Her mother’s response highlights the effect domesticity has had on her former high spirits, after ‘marriage to a good dull man and the life in a suburb had steadied her’ (LTA, p.32). The stained glass windows are reminiscent of those Catherine observes in the Kardomon. Unlike the imaginary events that can be woven about those, the windows in the suburban home seem to promise more than is possible in such surroundings.

Pym’s portrayal of Catherine’s domestic persona continues to rebut the argument that specific qualities are inherently gender based. She is casually domestic and although she likes to cook, her flat is dusty, with partially filled sticky bottles of alcohol and inadequate furnishings. As a writer of romantic short
stories, Catherine is able to create an illusion of an attractive, although bohemian, environment. She is independent, from her sexual freedom to her relaxed acceptance of her right to use her time as she wishes. When she sips her tea in the Kardomon while watching others gulp theirs and hurry away, she feels no guilt. Her occupation requires her to sit and reflect: as a writer, she finds those about her a source of inspiration (LTA, p.5). Catherine’s behaviour suggests that her capacity to defy convention is the main source of her equanimity.

Catherine’s meals from a restaurant run by Cypriots or a risotto arrived at through combining whatever resides in her refrigerator (LTA, pp.25-26) is closer to Deidre’s vocal, but possibly imaginary, aspiration. Catherine has no such reservations. Suburban comfort is too high a price to pay for the loss of her freedom. After two weeks in the Swan household, she is eager to escape. ‘In that short time she experienced all the cosiness and irritation which can come from living with thoroughly nice people with whom one has nothing in common [...] she began to feel restless, like a trapped bird who might be safe and happy in a cage but must go out into the cruel world because it is the natural thing. She began to long for her flat and her typewriter and her odd solitary life. All sorts of ideas for stories and articles were bubbling up inside her and she could hardly wait to get work’ (LTA, p.245).

Catherine’s openness to outlandish possibilities, in her fiction and life is at the core of Less Than Angels. When she suggests that Alaric could be ‘an interest [...] it will take me outside of myself to study someone equally peculiar’ (LTA, p.252), she confirms their compatibility around eccentricity. Her recognition that they are both “peculiar” demonstrates Pym’s desire to give status to characters who be impossible in cosy fiction.

The rituals associated with Guy Fawkes Night identify the inconsistency between conventionally accepted custom and what the domestic observers deem exotic. Her perception clouded by ethnocentrism, Rhoda describes Catherine and Alaric’s bonfire as an “orgy”. She perceives their dancing around the fire, possibly wearing African masks and ‘wrapped in some sort of native cloth or blanket’ (LTA, p.226) quite differently from the English rituals of Guy Fawkes Night. The ritual is in itself a comment on exotic customs that are familiar in English gardens. Well observed by Pym are the children’s
cowering to the father’s enthusiasm for lighting the fireworks and the old Sealyham’s complacent posture under Mrs Lovell’s care inside the house. However, instigated by Catherine, their fire finishes the anthropological aspect of Alaric’s life when his tin trunk of studies is burnt. Miss Lydgate’s expressions of horror over the destruction of Alaric’s notes are thwarted by his speculation that he might write a novel. ‘There was a shocked silence’ (LTA, pp.225-226). The anthropologists retreat from the writer of fiction.590

III

* A Glass of Blessings * is an exercise in understanding Pym’s changing approach to a narrative as well as a study in contrasting some of women’s options. The first draft591 shows that Pym proposed that a married woman should be juxtaposed with a working woman as an equal protagonist. In the published novel, the romantic view of a working woman’s life becomes an unrealistic view of a relationship with a man. The original story line becomes a minor speculation when Wilmet Forsyth, the central character, notes that if she were at work she ‘could be in a friendly office drinking tea and eating biscuits and complaining with other women about the “boss”’ (AGB, p.25). * A Glass of Blessings * is instead a study of an economically agreeable but emotionally bereft marriage and the woman592 worker appears only briefly, in insalubrious circumstances (AGB, p.73). * A Glass of Blessings * precedes, but explores Friedan’s feminist ideas. Rowena Talbot’s marriage provides additional evidence of Pym’s identification of the issues raised by Friedan. In contrast with the two younger women, Pym’s portrayal of Sybil Forsyth reverts to her attention to depicting unconventional women. Mary Beamish, in fulfilling a spinster stereotype, discards Pym’s usual unconventional approach

590 Miss Lydgate’s horror would be shared by any anthropologist to whom burning their papers would be anathema. Even the most damaged papers would be kept by any anthropologist (personal communication, Dr Alison Stratton, anthropologist). Pym’s awareness of the practice makes her burning ritual a strong advocacy for the triumph of literature over science.
591 MS Pym 17, Notebook, fols 1-6.
592 MS Pym 17, Notebook, fol. 10.
to spinsters. *A Glass of Blessings* focuses on the institution of marriage through partnerships in a variety of forms: Wilmet and Rodney Forsyth and Rowena and Harry Talbot’s long-term marriages; Sybil Forsyth and Arnold Root’s and Mary Beamish and Father Ransome’s proposed weddings; and Piers and Keith’s homosexual partnership.

The church and its calendar of events influences the way in which Wilmet attempts to fill her time. The church is as bereft of spirituality as Wilmet’s marriage is of pleasure. Wilmet’s attempt to find a more fulfilling role in the church is less unsuccessful than the indeterminate resolution she finds in her marriage. Despite references to priests, incense, celibacy and the appellation “Father” for all the clergy in the novel, ideological debates are ignored. In *A Glass of Blessings* Pym’s treatment of religion lies in adopting neither an overtly spiritual, nor a theological approach, as a counterpart to Wilmet’s concern with worldly moral dilemmas.

Wilmet’s personal journey to find justification for her life begins in church but emphasises the secular nature of her journey. The jangling of a telephone makes her turn and see Piers whom she knows as Rowena’s “unsatisfactory” brother. Wilmet is censorious about the caller because their interruption means they are ignorant of the church calendar. The scene introduces Wilmet’s self-censorship, which parallels her criticism of others. She criticises herself for attending a service designed for those too lazy to attend earlier (*AGB*, p.5). Her conjectures also provide clues to Father Thames’ character as she assumes he is the likely beneficiary of ‘wealthy elderly female friends inviting him to luncheon or dinner’ (*AGB*, p.5).

Piers appears to provide one solution to Wilmet’s abundance of free time. However, Wilmet’s relationship with him draws her into an imaginary world which eventually results in her recognising her negative qualities. Like each of the spheres she inhabits, it is complete with her characteristic inconsistencies. Initially she protests, to others and herself that her involvement with Piers is on his behalf. More truthfully, she desires his attention and compliments. When she receives a beautiful, anonymous Christmas gift she is disappointed that it is not, as she believed, from Piers (*AGB*, p.135). Combining religious and secular concepts, the gift becomes penance (*AGB*, p.139). More directly, Piers
is the vehicle through which Wilmet’s partial image of herself as a ‘flawless, sleek Goddess’ is challenged. She ‘is forced to realize the more unsavoury aspects of her character’ as a result of Pier’s attack on her snobbery about Keith. He excuses what he refers to as her lack of humanity because ‘some people are less capable of loving their fellow human beings than others’.

Pym’s feminist agenda is served by the links between Pier’s commentary on Wilmet’s inadequacy and a similar scene in Elizabeth Jenkins’ The Tortoise and the Hare. Helen McNeil says Jenkins’ ‘subject has been the intermingling of female strength and weakness. She uses conventional forms to convey profound perceptions about women’s contradictory inner lives.’ In her novel Jenkins concentrates exclusively on her central characters, and in particular, Imogen’s inner life. Pym’s work ranges more widely so that, although Wilmet’s story is central to the narrative, it is not covered in such detail. However, Pym’s work makes salient points about a similar character and there is a feminist connection between the two novels.

In tone and literary function, Piers’ accusation is remarkably close to that made by Evelyn Gresham. An unfaithful and controlling husband, he accuses Imogen of having no capacity for passion. Both women accept the accusations made by the men who charm them. Both are also deceived about the men’s sexual natures. Wilmet does not realise that Piers is homosexual. The nature of his attention to her, including several meetings, culminating in his invitation to a clandestine conversation over tea (AGB, p.47) lead to her mistake. Similarly, Imogen does not perceive Evelyn’s femininity, although she has detected early in their marriage that he objects to her passionate

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594 Kelly.
595 Ironically Wilmet is later depicted as embarrassed by Keith’s description of someone ‘as quite a common sort of person’ (NPRL, p.216).
596 Kelly, p. 2.
Pym admired Jenkins’ writing and read The Tortoise and the Hare.
599 Jenkins, p. 36.
commitment to him. Both women ignore the men's contribution to their misconceptions.

Wilmet and Imogen combine self-abnegation with self-satisfaction about their appearance. That women's reliance on their appearance is ill judged is conveyed strikingly through The Sweet Dove Died; self-absorption is also a feature of Imogen and Wilmet's failure to see the duplicity of the men who have entranced them. Imogen compares herself to her advantage, with the woman who eventually takes her husband. Wilmet's preoccupation with her clothing is as obsessive as Imogen's. Jenkins places Imogen in a small world, which compares with the one in which Pym places Leonora (TSDD). Wilmet's world is not so limited, and her capacity to look beyond herself is enhanced. Wilmet's assistance to Mary and amusing but nonetheless compassionate interaction with Wilf Bason and his 'theft' (AGB, pp.176-179) demonstrates the benefit of community, however limited. Pym's portrayal of Wilmet represents an ambiguous figure, creating a character who cannot be as easily dismissed as Piers would like. Despite Wilmet's illusions about Piers, his criticism, unlike Evelyn's of Imogen, does not have the potential to destroy her. However, the dramatic effect on Imogen is short lived and, when she recovers she makes a robust response. She leaves her marriage, acknowledging 'There is a very great deal to be done'. In giving Imogen this unambiguous reaction, Jenkins and Pym separate on their treatment of marriage. In what appears to be an anti-feminist response, Pym maintains Wilmet's conventional marriage with an increased emphasis on her domestic role. Wilmet is depicted as a woman who accommodates herself to her marriage and society's expectations.

Because she is not in the workforce Wilmet's secular world revolves around her marriage, with sporadic attempts to find other occupations. The wartime romance, with Rodney a dashing officer in Italy where she was a Wren, is now over. Like the Napiers' experience in Excellent Women

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600 Jenkins, p. 10.
601 Jenkins, p. 252.
circumstances have changed in peacetime. Wilmet and Rodney live in Sybil’s house that potentially places both in a child-like situation. Wilmet’s ‘infantalization, with which most of her friends and family collude’ contributes to her remaining in a child-like state. However, Wilmet recognises the house is not an appropriate environment for her. It is “bleak and respectable” and more suited to Rodney in his occupation as a civil servant. Wilmet’s role is limited to arranging the flowers. Although Sybil is tolerant of Wilmet’s “idle” life, suggesting that she will change as she ages, Wilmet does not take such a sanguine approach to a life she finds empty. She becomes a student of Portuguese, attempts some charity work with Sybil and donates blood. She shops and lunches with disparate companions such as the tardy Piers, Sybil who chooses unsympathetic surroundings (AGB, pp.22-23) and Harry who may be “caddish” (AGB, p.45) but provides grand roasts served in splendour.

Sybil’s treatment of “Noddy” as she refers to Rodney, possibly with, Wilmet thinks ‘a sardonic pleasure’ (AGB, p.11), has no ramifications for him. Rodney’s alternative view of himself arises from his role in the workplace in which he is indisputably an adult. In contrast, Wilmet has never been in the full time workforce, apart from her stint in the Wrens to which she looks back with nostalgia. Rodney’s belief that a wife should work only for only financial reasons (AGB, p.17) is shown to be not only old fashioned, but damaging for Wilmet, who, having neither a job nor children feels useless (AGB, p.37).

Wilmet is compared with the other women in the novel. Fergus describes Pym’s approach to Wilmet as similar to the way in which Austen contrasted the characters of Emma and Jane Fairfax, to Emma’s disadvantage. Mary is a natural comparison in Pym’s novel. As she is the stereotype whom Pym usually avoids in her depiction of spinsters, her characterisation is particularly relevant to the feminist examination of this novel. Initially Mary clearly fulfils the

602 Kelly, p. 1.
603 Jan Fergus, ‘A Glass of Blessings, Jane Austen’s Emma and Barbara Pym’s Art of Allusion’ in IW, pp. 110-111.
stereotype, adding to Wilmet’s dissatisfaction with herself. She makes Wilmet ‘feel particularly useless – she was so very much immersed in good works, so splendid everyone said [...] she was on several committees as well as being a member of St Lukes parochial church council’ (AGB, p.19). Mary has spent her life caring for her mother; Wilmet reflects thankfully that her mother would not have had such expectations and that Sybil is independent (AGB, p.21). Mary, who is plain, badly dressed and seemingly uninterested in caring for her appearance contrasts vividly with the detailed portrayal of Wilmet in her expensive clothing. Upon arriving at the Settlement to assist in charitable work, Wilmet’s thoughts are particularly uncharitable when she finds that Mary is the centre of attention’ (AGB, p.19).

Pym’s failure to sustain the comparison suggests that she used the stereotypical spinster for a purpose other than giving credibility to an image she rejected so forthrightly in her other novels. Pym questions the validity of Mary’s self-sacrificing behaviour. Sybil advances the arguments in a scene where her silence and generalised admonition to “move on” is reminiscent of Mildred’s dual voice in Excellent Women. Sybil does not criticise, but her words infer her belief that Mary is posturing (AGB, p.20). Her reaction to Mary, in comparison with her sympathetic understanding of Wilmet’s position suggests that she has the all seeing eye, P.D. James referred to as typical of Austen and Pym. Sybil’s independent authority has weight when applied to both young women as her assessment of both is justified. Both change during the course of the novel.

After her mother’s death, Mary’s contemplation of a life committed to devotion is shown to be devoid of meaning because of her secular interest in clothing for the funeral which overrides her spiritual concerns. Her dedication is short lived and she becomes almost as worldly as Wilmet (AGB, p.126). In the final depiction of her, Mary’s worldly reaction to Father Ransome brings her into Wilmet’s secular world. The unworldly nature of Wilmet’s familiar naivety and conceit is confirmed by her surprise that Mary is to leave the nunnery to marry.

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605 James, GL.
In comparison with Mary, whose character is shown to be less significantly different from Wilmet’s than originally depicted, Rowena’s world is defined by her marriage and children. It is unlikely to change. Her dedication to her family and enhancing Wilmet’s self-esteem contrasts with Wilmet’s apparent self-absorption. Their pre-marriage behaviour is identical, but recalling the light-hearted romantic aspects of being a Wren, short-lived love affairs with Rocky Napier and admiring the younger handsome Harry confirms the differences in their present lives. Now Rowena’s hands that then were so smooth are evidence of the physical work associated with marriage. They are ‘stained and rough, the nails uncared for, hardly even clean’ (AGB, p.42) and compare markedly with Wilmet’s. Her shame at evidence of her own indolence is illustrated when she finds herself ‘liking better those [hands] that seemed a little careworn, however cunningly they might have been camouflaged with bright nail polish and jewelled eternity rings’ (AGB, p.42). The children are an important marker of Rowena’s married life as shown by the unusual attention given them by Pym. The children are all too noticeable for Wilmet’s peace of mind on several occasions and she has no desire to acquire the most obvious definer of Rowena’s world (AGB, p.37). Children control Rowena’s life when despite their ‘gambolling and capering’ (AGB, p.40) she describes her time in a restaurant as relaxation until she begins ‘looking anxiously round for the children’ (AGB, p.40).

Rowena provides a fine example of Pym’s treatment of Friedan’s concerns. Her world is constrained and deadened by marriage. The lack of drama in the examples Pym uses establishes the novel as very different from the marital tragedies in Weldon and Fairbairns’ work. However, as well as the connection with Friedan’s theory, Pym makes feminist points through her exposure of the illogic of discrimination based on gender. Rowena spends time in the car with the children while Wilmet joins Harry at the pub which he is reluctant to leave (AGB, pp.40-41). Rowena drives the small car with the children in the back; her husband drives the Jaguar. Pym uses food as an indicator of restriction in a similar way to the way in which she infers the restrictions of the Swan’s suburban life (LTA). Like Caro (AAQ) Rowena also ‘would have liked to make exotic dishes, but the tyranny of Harry and the children made it necessary for her to keep
to plain wholesome English food’ (*AGB*, p.37). The advantages in being married to man of Harry’s type are promoted in such a way that the disadvantages are also implied. Harry is ‘one of those non-intellectual men who are often more comforting to women than tortured intellectuals. He might not have any very interesting conversation for his wife at the end of the day, might indeed quite easily drop off to sleep after dinner, but he was strong and reliable, assuming he would be the breadwinner and that his wife would of course vote the same way as he did (*AGB*, p.37). Rowena’s reminiscences and encouragement of her husband’s flirtation with Wilmet early in the novel raise questions about her contentment. Later she is explicit about her unhappiness when she compares ‘despised spinsters [... who] can have their dreams’ (*AGB*, p.146) and her own desire for freedom, from marriage, Harry and the children (*AGB*, pp. 146-147).

Sybil Forsyth is the most obvious troublesome woman in the novel. She is one of Pym’s strong, economically independent women characters. She is sixty-nine; has no feminine features, from appearance to behaviour; and her conversation is frank and controversial (*AGB*, pp.15). Her lack of artifice in arranging flowers, appearance and conversation creates a contrast to Wilmet’s apparent superficiality. Sybil is the antithesis of the unfulfilled widow and, although she remarries, she is unlikely to change herself or her lifestyle. In the first chapter she is established by Wilmet as ‘a real character, but not in a tiresome way’ (*AGB*, p.10). She and Rowena compare their mothers-in-law to Sybil’s advantage, as they are unimpressed with Rowena’s mother-in-law’s interest only in ‘household linen and knitting for the children’ (*AGB*, p.36). Sybil is agnostic, which Wilmet considers courageous in view of her age (*AGB*, p.14). Sybil’s character also carries Pym’s binary feminist argument. She is amused rather than impressed with Rodney’s work at the Ministry. Her suggestion that men’s customary drinking of port alone is comic rather than serious (*AGB*, pp.16-18) undermines the convention that men’s conversation is so important that it must take place apart from women, questioning the implied gender differences in the custom. Sybil and Arnold’s proposed marriage is one of equals. He will live in Sybil’s house where she has already established practice and convention. They have a shared interest in the gender-neutral study of archaeology that has been hers from her youth. It manifests itself throughout the house and the couple
conduct their relationship over shards and artefacts. Although Sybil has welcomed her son and his wife, when she remarries, Sybil asks the young couple to leave: the couple’s presence in the house as a seemingly comfortable fixture is an illusion.

The portrayal of Wilmet as an Emma-like figure, inferior to her female counterparts, but with redeeming features is less complex than the rendering of her as a feminist construct. Her divergent features are worth excavating and understanding from a feminist perspective. From the beginning of the novel Wilmet acknowledges her flaws. When she changes her remark that a character should be formed by the time a person is thirty, to thirty-five (AGB, p.16) she is possibly thinking of Piers. However, her attempts to improve herself also suggest she hopes her character is not at its pinnacle. Like the women about whom Friedan wrote, she realises only vaguely that she is taking responsibility for others’ shortcomings.

Wilmet is as unaware of her positive features as she is aware of her failings. When she is dissatisfied with events around her she also deflects their negative effect on her, turning the insensitivity of others into affirmation of their goodwill. Her life has none of the romance with which she invested it when she met Rodney during the war. Her birthday present has ‘nothing really spontaneous or romantic about it’ (AGB, p.12) as Rodney has arranged a ‘transfer of a substantial sum of money’ (AGB, p.12) to her account. Wilmet immediately turns her disappointment to appreciation of Rodney’s worth and placates herself with the thought that:

something good and solid like money was better than the extravagant bottle of French scent that some husbands – my friend Rowena’s for example – might have given. And the whole thing was somewhat characteristic of Rodney and those peculiarly English qualities which had seemed so loveable when we first met in Italy during the war and I had been homesick for damp green English churchyards and intellectual walks and talks in the park on a Saturday afternoon (AGB, pp.12-13).
In comparison with her finding merit where there is little, Wilmet’s self-satisfaction is constantly contrasted with her expressions of worthlessness. Sometimes she expects to be corrected, and basks in the compliment (AGB, p.87). However, she also genuinely compares herself disapprovingly with Mary and Rowena. Mary is a “good” woman; Rowena has children. Wilmet does not fit into the religious world she tries to embrace because of her feelings of worthlessness in her secular world. Kelly’s interpretation of her impinges on the concept of what is a “good “woman” and Wilmet demonstrably meets few of the requirements. Neither does she function as an adult. More directly related to what is seen as an acceptable role for a woman in a patriarchal society, Wilmet has no domestic role but essentially occupies a domestic world in which she is treated like a child.

Changes imposed upon Wilmet lead her into an independent domestic role, a seemingly conventional outcome. Wilmet embraces her new role with enthusiasm, distancing her from the feminist treatment Pym metes out to domestic work in novels such as Jane and Prudence and Less Than Angels. The gender-based nature of domestic work in A Glass of Blessings is magnified as Sybil is the only woman character whose relevance does not depend on a domestic function. Keith’s obsession with housework (AGB, pp.190-193) and Wilf Bason’s with cookery (AGB, p.99) lose any connection with masculine practice because their overtly effeminate qualities emphasise its status as feminine.

Nevertheless, Wilmet’s domestic interests are treated unconventionally. Her new domesticity is associated with her friendship with Keith, achieving a resolution to the problem caused by her relationship with Piers. Instead of Keith remaining the foundation for Piers’ criticism he becomes a source of comic sustenance to Wilmet. Her first independent conversation with Keith foreshadowed the resolution of her unsatisfactory friendship with Piers and her dissatisfaction with her marriage when the scene was set for his becoming her

606 Kelly.
domestic confidante. In *A Glass of Blessings* Wilmet achieves a combination of adulthood and acquaintance with a traditional woman’s role which, while sitting uneasily with a feminist approach, emphasises the lack of choice in Wilmet’s life.

Wilmet’s confirmation of her marriage is based on feasibility and a minor, but positive change in its nature. Although Pym does not force the point, Wilmet’s decision to accept her new role is economic necessity. At thirty-three, she has no training for a career and she has observed the aridity of the working conditions that she could experience. With Rodney’s increased sensitivity, demonstrated by his gift of attractive jewellery at Christmas (*AGB*, p.103) and a suggested holiday in Italy that does not attempt to reprise their past, Wilmet’s marriage is limited but feasible. Wilmet has recognised that her self-satisfaction as far as he is concerned may be misplaced, but not threateningly so. She dissolves in laughter with him after he admits to his short-term flirtation with Prudence Bates (*AGB*, p.245).

Wilmet’s portrayal in a later novel as ‘cherished and secure with her three men’ (*NFRL*, pp. 215-217) is an observation from a distance. The men with whom she is observed sightseeing are Keith, Piers and Rodney. From the outside, Wilmet’s situation appears cosy and attractive, similarly to her marriage at the beginning of *A Glass of Blessings*. The perception might be justified. Wilmet acknowledges that her life could be a glass of blessings as secure as Mary’s (*AGB*, p.252). In many senses both women have reason to feel contented with their middle class lives free from financial concerns. Mary has maintained the caring role to which she has become accustomed, with a far more attractive focus in Father Marius Ransome. Moreover, her religious and domestic lives have interconnected even more closely as wife of a vicar. Wilmet is not necessarily so fortunate in her glass of blessings, although as usual she takes any adversity and treats it as a benefit. In Wilmet’s portrayal in *A Glass of Blessings* Pym provides an interpretation of a woman who has made the best of what she has been able to achieve from the limited opportunities available to her. Wilmet’s sadness, referred to throughout the novel, resonates with Weldon’s quote earlier in this
chapter. Unlike the women Weldon refers to Wilmet does not ‘curl up and die’ as she has more resilience. However, Piers’ comment that life, like Wilmet can be both sad and happy and that like her name Wilmet is ‘neither one thing nor the other’ (AGB, p.71) confirms the ambiguity of Wilmet’s characterisation and the resolution of her narrative.

IV

Unlike the complexities explored in Less Than Angels and A Glass of Blessings there is only one theme in No Fond Return of Love: the satisfaction a rejected woman achieves through her private investigations. Pym planned that ‘Dulcie must be involved in a quest but not about anyone well known [...] it could start off like this but in the course of it she falls in love with a young man half her age.’ She does investigate and the possibility of a new partner, of suitable age, but a divorcée, emerges. No Fond Return of Love reads almost as a romance with four marriages contemplated, and another referred to during its execution. Dulcie Mainwaring and Viola Dace are two spinsters disappointed in love. They meet at a conference, Dulcie to “get over” her broken engagement to Martin and Viola to be in the company of Aylwin Forbes for whom she has a passion (NFRL, pp.5-7). To Viola’s disappointment, her interest remains unrequited despite Aylwin’s wife having left him. No Fond Return of Love covers a narrower spectrum than the other novels examined in this chapter as it addresses no broad issues in any depth. The novel comments only briefly on class, the value of education and the nature of history. A significant difference between No Fond Return of Love

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607 Wilmet’s sadness has also been referred to by Harry (AGB, p.88), Rodney (AGB, p.244) and Mary (AGB, p. 205).
608 Weldon, Down Among The Women, p. 6.
609 MS Pym 18, fol. 3.
610 Marjorie Williton, Aylwin’s estranged wife plans to remarry. She meets her proposed husband in the dining car returning from the Forbes’ Eagle House Hotel. Mrs Williston is indisposed and cannot prevent what might, or might not, be another mistake on her daughter’s part. Dulcie’s aunt makes the only “suitable” marriage in the novel when she marries the vicar (NFRL, p. 267). The imminent birth of a child for Deidre and Digby from Less Than Angels is noted (NFRL, p. 82).
and Pym’s other work is the location in the suburbs and the disparate nature of the events and characters. Little seems to unite them, unlike Pym’s usual novel where location or profession provides a village like atmosphere.

However, the novel does contribute to Pym’s creation of different types of spinster. Dulcie and Viola are well educated, compile indexes, do a little research and writing and interact with men in professions which require assistance of the type they provide. In appearance Dulcie is ‘a rather tall woman in her early thirties, with a pleasant face and fair hair [...] wearing] a tweed suit and broughed shoes’ (NFRL, p.6). Viola, who sees Dulcie as ‘Already half way to being a dim English spinster’ (NFRL, p.6) wears ‘a black dress [...] has] a pale, rather haggard face and untidy black hair’ (NFRL, p.7). She applies lipstick ‘almost savagely, as if she were determined to make herself look as unlike somebody who worked on the dustier fringes of the academic world as possible’ (NFRL, p.7).

Viola and Dulcie also have very different attitudes. Dulcie initially presents as sensible and accepting; Viola has an angry but distressed presence and literary pretensions. Viola is surprised at Dulcie’s acknowledgement that ‘finding out about people [...] is] a sort of compensation for the dreariness of everyday life’ (NFRL, pp.13-14). Despite Viola’s romantic protestations, she is pragmatic about marriage, happily accepting Bill Sedge’s proposal and giving up her passion for Aylwin. In contrast, Dulcie weaves romantic notions around Aylwin from the moment she sees him at the conference, through her investigations into his domestic life, horror and severity at his imagining that he is in love with Laurel, her niece, and his eventual arrival in a taxi at her home. Her claim that he should marry sensibly, that is, someone like her, is at odds with her interior behaviour. He is momentarily disconcerted at the idea of marrying sensibly ‘a woman no longer young, who could help him with his work’ (NFRL, p.286) until he realises that the proposed marriage remains out of character (NFRL, p.286).

The two main male characters, Aylwin and his brother Neville, are

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611 Dulcie works from home but in a professional capacity to provide such services (NFRL, p. 29). Viola’s position is not so clear. However, she seems free to do research for her own work and claims to be writing a novel (p. 39).
professionals: Aylwin is the editor of a learned journal and Neville is a clergymen. There is little merit in the way they fulfil their roles. The brothers’ shortcomings while gently observed by Dulcie and Viola (NFRL, p.68) are robustly voiced by their mother. She conflates their very different callings and characters into the “hopeless male”, in Pym’s limited example of binary feminism the novel. Both men are incompetent in their relationships with women. Aylwin has married unwisely, given Viola false hope that he returns her interest, and is unable to reject her offer to make an index for his book (NFRL, p. 135). He believes he has fallen in love with a woman young enough to be his daughter (NFRL, p.250) and is content to marry Dulcie only if he can maintain a facade of doing the extraordinary. Neville has continuing trouble with his female parishioners (NFRL, pp. 174-175) but is unable to learn from experience. His mother has to sound a warning when he invites Dulcie to attend his church. His incompetence is reinforced when he tries again to persuade her to become involved. He then compounds his obtuseness by offering her the accommodation previously owned by the woman who caused his most recent “trouble” (NFRL, pp.281-282). That Dulcie owns a substantial house makes the situation even more farcical. The brothers’ roles as professionals are undermined through comic references to their work in the capacity of the sons of the proprietor of the Eagle House Hotel (NFRL, p.202).

The novel relies on Dulcie who adopts Pym’s persona in her interest in investigating, or as Pym suggests what could be described as gossip is conducted in ‘the tone of one seeking scientific information’ (LTA, p.16) giving it the imprimatur of research. The comment adopts the anthropological approach that gives the novel its flavour and conflates academic and community investigation, reprising the approach Pym uses in Less Than Angels. At the same time as using anthropological method, or inferring that she is doing so, Pym points out its universal use by those who are not necessarily experts. The theme is incomplete in No Fond Return of Love, the
novel seeming to be limited, rather than enhanced, by Pym’s closeness to the material. It rarely moves beyond Dulcie/Pym.

At the same time that No Fond Return of Love\textsuperscript{612} lacks the breadth of Pym’s other work it also has none of the directness of the unpublished short stories. The original drafts suggest that it had the capacity to do so. The published work suggests that this particular novel received less of Pym’s detailed attention than usual.\textsuperscript{613} The original ideas about Viola create further speculation about Pym’s self-censorship. In the early draft, Viola’s background is significantly more radical than in the published version. Pym speculates that Viola has ‘a plain 12 year old in boarding school, but refers to her in such a self-conscious manner that Dulcie thinks she could be illegitimate’.\textsuperscript{614}

In support of my claim that Pym carefully chose a combination of conventional and unconventional topics to cover in her novels, in this early draft Aylwin’s life is modified by widowhood.\textsuperscript{615} As a widower Pym’s task of bringing him together with Dulcie would have been easier than the divorce envisaged in the final work. As a corollary of the potential divorce in the published version, Viola has a less striking background and is depicted as an unencumbered spinster. In the early draft and the final publication, Marjorie and Aylwin separate because of his supposed infidelity with Viola (NFRL, pp. 282-283) and Marjorie returns to her mother.\textsuperscript{616} When compared with her other work, Pym made an unusual choice in including the possibility of divorce in

\textsuperscript{612} The original title, ‘A Thankless Task’ was not approved by Pym’s publishers and was described by them as ‘not enticing’ (Cocking, ‘A Thankless Task?’). No Fond Return of Love, the chosen title, misquotes the title of a poem, “No Return of Love”. The publisher vetoed the correct quotation as they had ‘no positive responses from the advertisers’ for it (Cocking, ‘A Thankless Task?’, North American Barbara Pym Conference, 18-20 March, 2001 and monograph, http://www.barbara-pym.org/Conference-papers.

\textsuperscript{613} MS Pym 18, Notebooks 1-3, fols 20-97; 11-12; 65-126.

\textsuperscript{614} MS Pym 18, Notebook 2, fol. 2.

\textsuperscript{615} MS Pym 18, Notebook 1, fols 2-3.

\textsuperscript{616} The potential for divorce is raised by Marjorie’s behaviour in the early version, MS Pym 18, Notebook 1, fol. 52, is discussed in Chapter 4.
the published novel.\textsuperscript{617} However, the feature she rejected, the possibility of an illegitimate child was a more powerful subversive image.

It is possible that Pym’s familiarity, not only with the behaviour exhibited by Dulcie but her rationale, is one factor in her approach toward the main narrative of \textit{No Fond Return of Love}. Dulcie’s interest in the handsome Aylwin Forbes, and her pursuit of information about him and his family, reflects the intensity of Pym’s romantic interest in various Oxford men. The learned conference has its roots in the Swanwick Writers’ Summer School she attended in 1957.\textsuperscript{618} In her depiction of spinsters and her interest in the domestic anthropologist, Dulcie’s investigations in part reflect those of professional anthropologists. However, in her focus on distinctive individuals, rather than representatives of groups, Dulcie’s pursuits do not provide the full-bodied challenge Pym presents the professionals in \textit{Less Than Angels}. Dulcie’s investigations do no more than demonstrate her facility with the method. No debates on the relative value of the fictional and scientific worlds are presented through her protagonist. In the other novels, Pym’s experiences are treated as part of a theme which highlights and extends arguments about a wider world. In contrast, Pym’s focus on her personal activities, with no wider application to any ideological approach, is never as apparent as in \textit{No Fond Return of Love}.

In contrast with Pym’s other novels which move from the individual’s relationships to expositions of greater ideas, Pym gives no attention to developing a complex novel. Dulcie’s response to the observation that literary research is hampered by the ‘shortage of obscure poets’ (\textit{NFRL}, p.13) and her observation that ‘Perhaps the time will come when one may be permitted to do research into the lives of ordinary people, people that have no claim to fame whatsoever’ (\textit{NFRL}, p.13) briefly refer to issues. However, no debate ensues and the remarks remain unexplored until the examination of the nature of history in \textit{A Few Green Leaves}. Pym’s concern with the value of education is

\textsuperscript{617} As noted in Chapter 4 Pym contemplated including divorce in \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment}.
\textsuperscript{618} The program includes Writing for Television With Special Reference to Television Drama. Although Pym refers to television in \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment}, it is not until \textit{An Academic Question} and \textit{A Few Green Leaves} she introduces a person who writes for television.
addressed more frequently, but also in little depth. Miss Lord ponders Dulcie’s
degree in English Literature and research work with the comment ‘All this
reading [...] what does it lead to?’ (NFRL, p.32) and gives her ‘a pitying look at
her vague philosophisings’ (NFRL, p.95). Dulcie is also sardonic about her
niece’s choice of English and History as her favourite subjects thinking
‘Russian and nuclear physics were perhaps too far advanced, as yet, but
English and History would hardly do’ (NFRL, p.50). Viola refers to ‘that
academic stuff – where does it get one [...] One only meets people like Aylwin
Forbes, and what use are they?’ (NFRL, p.255) and refers to research as
“dreary” (NFRL, p.258). Aylwin has already referred to himself as ‘learned
but useless’ (NFRL, p.133) and on this earlier occasion was defended by Viola.
The commentary is typical of Pym’s irony but goes no further.

Viola’s marriage raises class differences that observers comment, but do
not expand, upon (NFRL, p.255 and p.268). The execution of Viola and Bill
Sedge’s partnership is prosaic, drawing attention only to Viola’s quest for
romance ‘in these pushing jostling days of the so-called equality of the sexes’
(NFRL, p.188). Viola’s statement is disingenuous rather than indicative of an
ideological observation and the treatment in No fond Return of Love compares
markedly with the attention Pym gave Piers’ and Keith’s relationship (AGB).
The Forbes brothers are the offspring of a marriage in which class differences
were an issue, a son from the castle in the area ‘made an unsuitable marriage
[...] to quite a common sort of person’ (NFRL, p.216). However, Mrs Forbes
is a strong character who appears unaffected by the origins of her marriage,
proud of her sons, contemplates Neville becoming a Bishop, and refers to
Aylwin as “Professor” (NFRL, pp. 178-179).

Feminist ideas are underdeveloped, although references to the Forbes
brothers provide some elements of binary feminism. An independent
observer’s statement ‘You would not allow yourself to be moulded by any
man’ (NFRL, p.14), although part of a comic moment, is a direct feminist
comment. However, rather than contributing to an overarching theme, as with
Pym’s conflation of domestic and public behaviour; questions about
anthropological and historical research; and women’s rejection of convention,
No Fond Return of Love falters. No Fond Return of Love essentially remains a
novel about events and characters rather than one of ideas. The ideas that are expressed in the novel have a potential that is not developed. Pym was surprised by the largely positive reception for *No Fond Return of Love*[^619], which indicates her own dissatisfaction with the work. That she moved into a different mode for her next novel, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, supports the view that the novel was the last in her familiar repertoire.

The three novels examined in this chapter contribute to the argument that Pym had a broader canvas than has been recognised. Her debate about the relative value of imagination and science, developed largely through writers and anthropologists is an essential theme in *Less Than Angels*. Pym’s commitment to observation as a tool, and assuredness that the writer’s use of it is superior is demonstrated throughout the novel. At the same time, Pym explores gender through a central woman character who defies convention. In *Less Than Angels* secondary characters, anthropologists, professional and domestic, are used to demonstrate Pym’s concern with gender and feminist ideas as well as the debates about literature and science. *A Glass of Blessings* takes a complex woman character and arguments to make a feminist case that considers the role of domestic work and its possible value in a life of idleness. Secondary women characters enhance the feminist debate. *No Fond Return of Love*, the last novel in this group continues the theme of domestication of a profession dedicated to scientific investigation and conflates it with a woman centred activity. Some of the ideas, such as class differences and their impact on marriage and the community are fully explored in *An Unsuitable Attachment* to be discussed in Chapter 5.

[^619]: Cocking, 'A Thankless Task?'
CHAPTER 4

A FEW GREEN LEAVES: VILLAGE PARADISES OR A COSY COVER?

A meek woman of retirement age could be of inestimable value.

*A Few Green Leaves*, p.57.

Is the country necessarily *more* evil than the town? No but evil in a different way.

Barbara Pym

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Pym’s self-censorship combined with her desire to publish and yet ‘write about the things that interest me’ encouraged her to develop a literary vehicle through which to express her social commentary without censure. The vehicle was largely the village or village like setting. Although Pym professed a delight in writing for her own and her friends’ enjoyment, she also aspired to remain a published writer. Her statement ‘a friend’s words although heard are not as important as a publisher’s acceptance’ attests to the importance she gave publication. So, too does the work she undertook to polish her work before submitting it to publishers. Her novels, with the possible exception of *No Fond Return of Love*, went through numerous drafts. Pym wrote many notes and partial drafts, sometimes beginning one novel and later using some of that material and developing something entirely different. What is abundantly clear from her notebooks and drafts is the thoroughness with which Pym selected her material, characters and narratives. Examination shows that Pym included or omitted material with thought and precision.

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620 MS Pym 26, Notebook “A Few Green Leaves”, fols 3-4 and MS Pym 28, fol. 7.
621 MS Pym 98, fol. 83.
622 Letter to Bob Smith 24/7/55, MS Pym 162/1, fol. 9.
Pym’s publishing history taught her to use her material and ideas with caution. Her first novel, *Some Tame Gazelle* was unpublished until 1950 after its initial rejection by Chatto and Windus as unlikely to ‘create much talk’. Gollancz, Curtis Brown, Macmillan and Methuen also rejected *Some Tame Gazelle*. Pym had reworked it to meet friends’ suggestions and publishers’ requirements. Cape requested some changes in 1936, but again rejected the work. In 1948, Cape approached her through Liddell with suggested improvements. With a sharpened approach to the Archdeacon and cutting of extraneous material, *Some Tame Gazelle* was accepted.

Pym had reasons to be optimistic about her work in the form in which she wrote *Some Tame Gazelle* and her reputation following its publication. However, despite enthusiastic reception by American publishers, obfuscation by Cape led her on a round of discussions about her publishing future. Graham Watson, literary agent and writer, thought her worth encouraging when he wrote ‘rummage in your drawers and let me see some of the short stories. Modesty is not a quality which any author can afford!’ In contrast with his optimism, Pym’s uncertainty about her shorter works is apparent. They did not fit the romantic pattern of published short stories and, although Pym disliked the romance genre, she attempted to conform to the market. The stories were unsuccessful. A P.E.N. discussion on “Writing for the Women’s Press” led her to believe ‘that they really do mainly want the Boy meets Girl kind of thing which I am not at all good at’. Pym’s preference for writing to a different audience is clear from her comment that ‘it was stressed that women nowadays have got a sensible down-to-earth attitude towards life, but perhaps not in their fiction?’ Her short stories, discussed in Chapter 5, are the opposite of romantic.

Pym’s preference was to write novels. She received further acknowledgement that the style and content of *Some Tame Gazelle* were

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623 MS Pym 163/7, fol. 43.
624 Holt, *ALT* pp. 143-145.
625 Letter from Graham Watson to Pym, 5 November 1953, MS Pym 147 fol. 171.
627 Letters from Pym to Watson, 8th November 1953, MS Pym 147, fols 172-188, fol. 172.
attractive to publishers when she received more opportunities to publish outside Britain. However, Cape dissuaded her from liaising with the American literary agent, Curtis Brown. They had shown interest in Pym’s work as early as 1950 and offered to handle American publication. Curtis Brown reiterated their interest in American publishing rights in 1953. Cape again advised her that she should leave American publishing in their hands but appear to have done nothing. Pym’s response to her publisher’s dilatoriness combines her desire to publish in America and her natural reticence. She advised Curtis Brown ‘I never wrote again about American or foreign rights because I was hoping that they would do something without my having to be always at them, and also I hate writing business letters and am rather lazy in that way and of a nervous temperament so that the thought of the slightest awkwardness or unpleasantness causes me a sleepless night! But it does seem from my contract as if I have the right to arrange American publication if I see any chance of it, don’t you think? And I should certainly like to do it through you’.

Cape again opposed Curtis Brown’s involvement. At this time their attitude was particularly damaging, as the agent had made a specific suggestion to place Pym with Dutton. Cape claimed to have un成功fully approached over seven American publishers for each of Excellent Women and Jane and Prudence. Cape also warned Pym that Curtis Brown would eventually charge her more than they suggested. Curtis Brown argued that Cape’s small staff would contribute to their failure to find an American publisher and continued to show interest. Ultimately, Pym refused their advances. Although she retained some faith in her work, she suggested it was too narrow.

628 Letter from Cape to Pym, 7/2/50, MS Pym163/1, fols 53-73.
629 MS Pym 92, fols 160-188.
630 Letter from Pym to Cape, 18 April 1954, MS Pym 92, fol. 182.
631 Pym refused to sign the contract and they agreed to better terms, Letters between Pym and Cape, MS Pym 163/2, fols 35, 23 and 224.
632 Letter from Curtis Brown to Pym, MS Pym 164, fol.187.
633 Letter from Curtis Brown to Pym, 21/1/1953 MS Pym 164, fol. 184.
634 Letter from Pym to Curtis Brown, 27/3/1953, MS Pym 164, fol. 186.
for the American market. 635 "A Few Days Before The Winter", a short story with a Curtis Brown sticker is amongst Pym’s papers, 636 proof that she sent them at least one short story. In addition, she sent a typescript of "The Funeral" 637 to another American literary agent, Jacques Chambrau 638 who, having read Less Than Angels also wanted to represent her. Chambrau’s was an attractive proposition as he represented Somerset Maugham and was responsible for the sale of Peyton Place. 639

By the time that Cape rejected An Unsuitable Attachment in 1963 they had published six of Pym’s novels, failed to find her an American market, dissuaded her from accepting Curtis Brown and Chambrau’s offer to do so, and had left her open to litigation by Marks and Spencer. 640 It appears that Tom Maschler of Cape accepted his readers’ comments about An Unsuitable Attachment without reservation. He regretted his decision after reading Pym’s work in 1977 as Jill Neville from The Sunday Times reported to her:

Dear Barbara Pym

You will be amused to know that Tom Maschler, the boss of J. Cape phoned me about some other matter and then said how guilty and ridiculous he felt about not having read your books all these years when you were obviously such a good (crossed out and replaced with superior) writer." 641

Pym’s earliest American publication was Less Than Angels, published by Vanguard Press 642 in 1957. Dutton published Excellent Women and Quartet in

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635 Letter from Pym to Curtis Brown, MS Pym 164, fol. 188.
636 MS Pym 92, fol. 93a.
637 Discussed in Chapter 5.
638 MS Pym 92, fols 189-217; 200-213.
639 MS Pym 163/1, fol. 29.
640 Letters between Marks and Spencer, Cape and Pym, 30/10/53, 3/11/53, 10/11/53, 11/11/53 and 4/12/53, MS Pym 163/2 fols 234-248. Marks and Spencer believed that a phrase in Jane and Prudence was critical of their clothing. It was agreed to omit the offending phrases from reprints. However, page 141 of Jane and Prudence refers to Marks and Spencer clothing.
641 Letter from Jill Neville to Barbara Pym, 12/9/77, MS Pym 169, fol. 173-95, fol. 194.
642 MS Pym 163/2 fols 300-317. Vanguard Press was established in 1926 and originally published left wing books. After it was sold in the late 1930s it ceased publishing left wing
Autumn in 1978 followed by The Sweet Dove Died in 1979 and the remainder of her novels throughout the 1980s. Macmillan published her new novels from 1977; Cape reprinted the early novels after her success with Quartet in Autumn.

II

I argue in Chapter 5 that assessments of An Unsuitable Attachment misinterpreted Pym's new approach to issues she had realised covertly in her earlier novels. Instead, it was judged an inferior example of familiar work. Naturally, Pym's feminist commentary was at its height in the novels Pym wrote in the 1970s as changes in that period gave her the imprimatur for openly adopting those ideas. However, I have argued that Pym included feminist ideas from her first published novel. If Pym was willing to adopt 1970s ideas in the novels she wrote then, it seems unlikely that she was reluctant to embrace the ideas of the 1960s. The body of her work shows that she was more than capable of doing so. The question is whether from the beginning Pym was constrained from being explicit about her ideas and developed a remedy. Pym's novels all reflect on the society in which she wrote. They demonstrate a preparedness to come to grips with social issues. Whether the remedy became an essential part of the reception of her work, resulting in disregard for her underlying concepts is another question.

The rejected works were not the first of Pym's novels to raise difficult questions. Rossen notes that the novels are comforting but 'conversely, cause acute discomfort in the reader'. John Updike claims the early novels were 'deceptively old-fashioned'. His assessment of Quartet in Autumn and the republished Excellent Women, draws attention to their similarities. His belief

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political titles. Less Than Angels was the only Pym novel published by them, although they expressed interest in Jane and Prudence. The firm was sold to Random House in 1988.


that the ‘simultaneous coverage [...] is to reveal [...] how alike they are, even to striking, on the last page, the identical muted chord’ is perceptive about some aspects of both novels. Updike recognises the deception but does not discuss the conspicuous differences of subject, characters and characterisation in the two novels he compares. Nor does he dwell on any of the aspects of deception he believes characterise the six early novels. Pym was concerned to create novels in which the discomfort of her ideas did not predominate. Her novels need re-reading to encompass the ideas raised by Updike and Rossen. They need to be reassessed to counteract the popular understanding of Pym’s village setting discussed by Nardin; acceptance of their “old fashioned” nature with which Wallace is concerned, and Liddell’s belief that Some Tame Gazelle was about ‘a cosier world’ when he compared it with An Unsuitable Attachment to the latter’s disadvantage.

The novels were deceptively old fashioned as Updike suggests, and, as Rossen proposes, included discomfiting topics. A brief survey of the topics in Pym’s novels justifies Updike and Rossen’s commentary. Pym’s concerns with gender, class and race are apparent in Some Tame Gazelle, Jane and Prudence, Excellent Women, Less Than Angels, A Glass of Blessings and in minor ways in the last novel published by Cape, No Fond Return of Love. A continuing theme in Pym’s work is her women characters’ negative experience of the institutions of marriage, work and the church. Questions are raised about the church, clergy and religious observance in Some Tame Gazelle, Excellent Women, Jane and Prudence, and A Glass of Blessings. Pym refers to women in the workforce despite an environment in the 1950s when marriage was seen as the most important achievement for a woman. Pym’s novels undermine that understanding.

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645 Updike.
646 Updike.
648 Liddell, p. 16.
Some Tame Gazelle challenges spinster stereotypes. In Excellent Women infidelity or the possibility of infidelity is an issue for both sexes. In Jane and Prudence a clergy wife is dissatisfied with her married life. In the same novel, a widower’s infidelities are openly acknowledged. A couple in an anticipated marriage in Less Than Angels are described as peculiar. A Glass of Blessings includes disappointments with marriage and a homosexual couple. No Fond Return of Love raises the probability of a divorce and focusses on a spinster’s independent sleuthing which could almost be stalking. Notes for No Fond Return of Love include the possibility that an illegitimate child should feature. Homosexuality is inferred from Pym’s early novels. She uses euphemism, circumlocution and delicate insinuation on the subject. In the 1960s Pym’s notes include a reference to ‘Marcia Raven – although she seemed like the popular idea of a Lesbian in the 20s and 30s, broad brimmed black hat etc. was not one’. 649 By the time she wrote A Few Green Leaves Pym had no difficulty in making a direct reference to lesbianism. Unmarried liaisons occur, although Pym’s notes suggest that she was cautious about her audience.

In direct examples of binary feminism, Pym shows women ranging themselves against men, albeit in small ways. However, unlike the harsh assessment of “men as the enemy” that can be found in post-1970s feminist work, Pym’s men are usually treated relatively kindly. Closer to direct criticism is the comic portrayal of Archbishop Hoccleve (STG) and the incisive portrayals of Adam Marsh-Gibbons (CS), Fabian Driver (JP), and Ned (TSDD), which are as biting as her depiction of Alan Grimstone in her 1970s work (AAQ). The kindness Pym shows other men in the novels is often undermined by her depiction of them as child-like. None escapes the watchful eye referred to by P.D. James. 650 Acceptance of feminist writing from the 1970s enabled Weldon and Fairbairns in their use of audacious, and sometimes

649 MS Pym 58, fol. 5.
650 After Dinner speech quote in Chapter 1, pp. 63-64.
crude,\textsuperscript{651} language. They openly treated such topics as lesbian lovers, incest, rape, domestic violence, infidelity and divorce. In contrast, in Pym's pre-seventies novels potentially provocative relationships are domesticated. I argue that although she was constrained by wanting to gratify the readership which endorsed her first novel, Pym's anticipation of 1970s issues should be acknowledged.

The observations Pym makes in her early work are often as trenchant as feminists' writing in a period in which their "satirical and mocking observations" were bolstered by feminist ideology. As Rossen has described her, she was 'a feminist writer in the 1950s before feminism became fashionable'.\textsuperscript{652} Promoting feminist ideas, however subtly expressed, was not the easy task it became in the 1970s when feminism was part of the literary landscape. Pym therefore needed to find a vehicle to accomplish the tasks of remaining a publishable writer as well as writing social commentary. I suggest that the deceptively old-fashioned nature of the novels referred to by Updike and the understanding of Pym's village advanced by Nardin and Wallace are an essential strategy to allow Pym to write social commentary with an emphasis on feminist issues.

\section*{III}

Pym adopted some of Austen's techniques to make the radical nature of her pronouncements more palatable. Pym's use of mockery is a particular example; her comic approach to conversations and events that have serious import is another. Pym also adjusted her material to ensure that serious or difficult ideas were juxtaposed with familiar and acceptable ideas. Pym's use of continuing characters in her novels also contributed to the sense of community in which even challenging ideas became acceptable was another feature of her work.

\textsuperscript{651} Note that in her 1970s novel, \textit{Quartet in Autumn}, Pym also uses crude language in her portrayal of Norman, an "angry little man", p. 14.
\textsuperscript{652} Rossen, \textit{IW}, p. 2.
Jessie Morrow's mockery of the curate in *Crampton Hodnet* is acceptable because of the comic nature of the circumstances. Her similar mockery of Fabian in *Jane and Prudence* is conveyed in asides that implicate the reader. Belinda and Harriet's ridicule of their suitors and Belinda's charges against the Archdeacon's behaviour to his wife undermine the clergy but do not create any dissonance in a novel in a clerical setting. Pym's use of irony creates a feminist challenge to men's advantages, but is established in comic settings. That a man should have two eggs when his wife has only one (*JP*, pp.55-56) and that Mildred should produce an index for Everard Bone challenge convention but the sharpness is deflected because of the comedy, characters and the settings.

Fischelli argues that Pym followed in the tradition of Austen in 'using domestic circles and events to examine women's place in society'. She writes 'Pym places special emphasis upon the potential of ordinary events: the sewing of a dress, the laying out of a special tea, to illuminate the motives by which we live.' The activities to which Fischelli refers enhanced the conventionality of the characters through whom Pym made subversive observations. The argument can be taken further. Pym's choice of spinsters to express her dissenting views immediately opens the option of looking at her work through a feminist framework. It is only from a feminist perspective that a spinster is considered a strong enough character to have the task of moving a narrative forward. Fictional spinsters are usually considered background or secondary characters, lacking independence and subject to other characters' motivation. Major characters are usually men or if women, married women. Even here, until the 1970s watershed in feminist thought and writing "ordinary" women were rarely at the centre of subversive thought and behaviour. Pym's use of apparently stock characters raises the expectation they will meet expectations and that the novel in which they appear will be

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653 Wallace.
654 Fischelli, p. 2.
655 Fischelli.
comfortable and deliver conventional ideas. Barbara Bowman concludes that such characters serve to enhance the subversive nature of the texts:

The subversiveness of the heroines and of the narrators allows them to challenge the complacency of the male and female characters around them who conform to the dominant culture. But these challenges promote private laughter and a critical examination of their own assumptions too. They take place in an inner private space shared by narrator, heroine and reader rather than in the public space of the interaction between characters.656

Nevertheless, Pym’s troublesome women had to be adapted to her pre-1970s narratives. Women such as Belinda Bede (STG) and Mildred Lathbury (EW) combine their troublesome qualities with dress and demeanour that is non-threatening; Jessie Morrow’s non-compliance is accompanied by comedy; and their sexual freedom is not the focus of Prudence Bates (JP) and Catherine Oliphant’s (LTA) characterisation. Where sexual freedom is an important element of the character’s role as in The Sweet Dove Died, Phoebe Sharpe has a short lived role. Married women such as Jane Cleveland (JP) whose uncaring attitude toward domestic responsibilities threatens conventional understandings are also clothed in comedy or endorse some conventional views.

Pym also uses techniques peculiar to her work to enhance the familiarity of her texts. She uses quotations from poetry or hymns to develop a character or add symbolic complexity to enhance the narrative. An Academic Question and Quartet in Autumn, Pym’s novels which deal most directly with contemporary social concerns do not include quotations, supporting the view that quotations formed part of the village carapace. Similarly, the conflation of professional and domestic activities657 provides readers with associations between the familiar and unfamiliar. Although both techniques appear to be

656 Barbara Bowman, ‘Pym’s Subversive SubText’ in IW, p. 92.
657 Pym’s conflation of professional and domestic activities is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.
very different, both involve the reader in the text in a comforting way. Duncan-Jones says ‘When Pym’s heroines turn, as they so often do, to poetry, read or remembered, in the watches of the night, or time of anxiety, they are not being precious or pretentious. They are simply showing themselves to be, like Pym herself, genuinely receptive to their reading’.\(^{658}\) Similarly, Pym’s readers’ familiarity with literary allusions, or their desire to be, draws them into the characters’ lives. The potential for Mildred’s character, (\textit{EW}) is suggested by her purchase of a colourful lipstick which ‘is reflected upon in an echo of T.S. Eliot’s \textit{Dante’}.\(^{659}\) Belinda’s covert troublesome nature is alluded to in her response to Earl Rochester’s poetry (\textit{STG}, p.5).

At the same time, Pym makes the less well read reader comfortable when she questions the education through which poetry is made accessible. When Pym shows Dulcie Mainwaring imagining Miss Lord’s unenthusiastic reflection on her vague philosophising (\textit{NFRL}, p.95) she does not do so without due consideration. The novel has already established a question about the possible use of a “learned conference” when Dulcie believes her attendance will help her deal with a broken engagement (\textit{NFRL}, p.5). It is unlikely that anyone would consider a conference a way to mend a broken heart: all readers, whatever their educational background would concur in understanding the comic nature of such a solution. In \textit{An Academic Question}, a palpable social commentary, a character suggests that “hospital romances” are valid reading matter; they are a part of life (\textit{AAQ}, p.181).

The most enduring way in which Pym embedded her feminist ideas was through her seemingly comfortable and familiar settings. The most familiar is the English village. The village setting is one source of commentators’ accusations that Pym’s work is conservative and cosy reading. Nardin’s approach to the earlier novels, in contrast to Updike’s assertion that the comforting patterns were deceptive, is conventional. She sees no illusory aspects in the work and discusses their village atmosphere as part of the

\(^{658}\) Duncan-Jones, \textit{GL}, 11 No 2 November 2005(9).
\(^{659}\) John Updike, pp. 120-121.
changing cultural landscape. She accepts that the village culture exists in both
the real villages and the village-like part of London in which some of the
novels are set. Her belief is based on the small scale of the environments and
the sense of community. Nardin believes that *The Sweet Dove Died* denotes a
change in the novels.\(^{660}\) She argues that the early novels adopt the
neighbourhood understandings typical of the period before the mid-sixties.
She then argues that by the time Pym wrote that *The Sweet Dove Died* the
feeling of neighbourhood had changed. She sees Leonora as a character who
epitomises the changes with her ‘ruthless individualism based on cultivated
ignorance [which] has largely replaced the old sense of responsibility based on
intimate knowledge’.\(^{661}\) In making Leonora typical of the new London, Nardin
suggests that she is reacting to her environment as much as her own ruthless
imposition of her desires. London has become ‘a frightening place, lacking
neighbourhoods, where people hide their pain’.\(^^{662}\)

Nardin wrote *Barbara Pym* before *An Academic Question* was published.
She refers to *Quartet in Autumn* and *A Few Green Leaves* to further her
analysis of the village in Pym’s work. In her analysis of *Quartet in Autumn* her
assumptions about the early novels are exposed. To her the new novel is
different from ‘the cozy parochial London of the early novels’\(^{663}\) but less
depressing than *The Sweet Dove Died*. She bases this assessment on what she
believes is ‘the more attractive nature of its characters’.\(^{664}\) *A Few Green
Leaves*, she sees as a return to the early novels’ depiction of the village,
together with some awareness of the destabilisation of society. She largely
blames the demise of religious observance.\(^{665}\) Nardin’s approach is
understandable as it is a familiar and legitimate approach to understanding
cultural change. However, it neglects Pym’s commentary in her diaries on

\(^{660}\) Nardin, *Barbara Pym*, pp. 52-53.
\(^{661}\) Nardin, p. 53.
\(^{662}\) Nardin.
\(^{663}\) Nardin.
\(^{664}\) Nardin.
\(^{665}\) Nardin, pp. 54-57.
villages. It also ignores Pym’s fictional advancement of examples of the malevolence she saw in villages and village life.

Wallace, while acknowledging the strength of Pym’s characters, believes that the settings are old fashioned. Like Nardin, she also sees the village settings as genuine. Kowalik supports the notion of Pym’s work as “pastoral” inferring that the settings almost control the narrative. I contend that Pym’s villages served a comforting purpose but she was well aware of their hidden unpleasantness and, in A Few Green Leaves, uncovered the reality. However, while it suited her purpose Pym developed ideas that were not necessarily palatable to her readers within their cover.

Pym’s villages include the real villages in novels such as Some Tame Gazelle; the London suburban “village” of Excellent Women and A Glass of Blessings; and the pseudo-village in which her characters form a close community, bound by location, profession or cultural distinction, exemplified by Less Than Angels. In a modified form, a central character provides familiar associations in No Fond Return of Love and The Sweet Dove Died. In her last novel, A Few Green Leaves, Pym goes so far as to signal the way in which she has used the village motif throughout her writing. Emma Howick, an anthropologist who is trained to observe and report, deliberates upon the significance of her writing about a “village”. Emma’s statement, that writing about a village might sound “too cosy”, points to Pym’s fictional technique: the cosiness and familiarity that she used to conceal the difficult observations she made and the questions she asked.

The world in which Pym’s troublesome women feature is like Austen’s, small and concentrated around village-like life, whether in the suburbs or the country. Pym’s varied environments serve as an analogy for a village. By giving her narratives unchallenging settings Pym gave her readers the opportunity to accommodate questions that undermined comfortable

666 Barbara Kowalik, A Woman’s Pastoral, Dialogue with Literary Tradition in Barbara Pym’s Fiction, The Mode of Pym’s Writing (Lublin: The Maria Curie-Sklodowska University Press, 2002)
assumptions. Even if Pym’s readers have never been in an English village, and Pym is translated to numerous countries as well as having an American readership, they “know” what to expect. The expectations associated with an English village are pleasant and, the appellation Pym sought to resist as the definitive description of her work, “cosy”. Pym appears to have had an almost insurmountable task when Drabble’s comment on The Sweet Dove Died is considered. She ‘found something cosy’ about the novel.667

Analysis of the novels demonstrates the way in which Pym, when necessary, used the village motif as a comforting vehicle to make unpalatable views palatable. Where narratives emphasise traditional ideas village images are less prominent; where the narrative undermines convention the village imagery is enhanced.668 This is true for all the novels except An Academic Question and Quartet in Autumn. In A Few Green Leaves written between 1977 and 1979 Pym established what was hidden under the camouflage of village and village images. A Few Green Leaves has been cited as a return to themes from Pym’s earlier work.669 However, drafts suggest the novel was expected to adopt new themes. They include a reference to a ‘woman walking with two husbands in the woods’,670 together with Pym’s familiar irony when she also notes that they do not like ‘fashionably sexy novels’.671 Suggesting that in its initial phase A Few Green Leaves was to be significantly more honest about Pym’s response to the village, are the possible titles: “The Soul’s Dark Cottage”, “Battered and Decayed” and “Small Lives”.672

667 BBC Interviews Critics Forum, 8th July 1978, Radio 4, Hilary Walton Collection, Box 8, uncatalogued.
668 For example, in Excellent Women Mildred Lathbury, one of Pym’s strongest spinsters uses the dual voice to undermine numerous conventions observed in the novel.
669 Allen, p. 120. Nardin, p. 47.
671 MS Pym 26, Notebook, fol. 26.
672 MS Pym 26, Notebook, fols 35-36.
Between Some Tame Gazelle and A Few Green Leaves, in order of their writing, Pym wrote the major novels Civil to Strangers, Crampton Hodnet, Excellent Women, Jane and Prudence, Less Than Angels, A Glass of Blessings, No Fond Return of Love, An Unsuitable Attachment, The Sweet Dove Died, An Academic Question and Quartet in Autumn as well as the war time novellas, Home Front Novel and So Very Secret and the novella Gervase and Flora. Before examining A Few Green Leaves in detail, the village imagery in each of the listed novels is discussed briefly.

The two wartime novellas are quite simple in execution and lack the multifaceted approach of the major novels. While both novels feature village settings, the war themes camouflage Pym’s questions about women’s role. Home Front Novel (CS) is incomplete and suffers in part because it was written when Pym was revising Crampton Hodnet, writing So Very Secret (CS) and starting Gervase and Flora (CS). However, its lack of polish is not the reason that Home Front Novel is more like the short stories. The clarity with which Home Front Novel reflects gender and class issues is similar to the directness of the short stories discussed in Chapter 5. The novel depicts familiar events from Pym’s voluntary war work in Oswestry. Like No Fond Return of Love, Home Front Novel has little subtext and its humour falls well short of the comedy apparent in the developed novels. The characters, some of whom appear in later novels, in Home Front Novel are in their embryonic state. Holt notes ‘It is tantalizing to think what she might have made of it had she worked over the carefully observed wartime detail (supplemented by very full diary entries for the period) at the height of her mature powers as a novelist’ (CS, p.236).

So Very Secret is a spy novel, finished before Pym left Oswestry for Bristol and her censorship work there. She found writing the novel difficult, noting in her diary ‘It is getting rather involved and I don’t quite know what

673 Pym wrote many notes and partial drafts sometimes beginning one novel, using some of the material and developing something entirely different. However, the dates used for this list refer to the order in which the work led to the finished novel.
I’m driving at – that’s the worst of a plot’. A “dowdy” spinster, Cassandra Swan narrates the story. She takes Russian papers to safety, is drugged and then, disguised, hides in a bandaging demonstration. She returns to her village, a successful “spy”. Her image as a failure in village practices reinforces her role as a spy rather than acting as a criticism of her unconventionality. In this novel, as for *Home Front Novel*, the war theme makes the village cover unnecessary. Because the war temporarily changed the way in which woman’s place in the workforce was viewed the ideology about domestic nurturing was adapted. Women’s nurturing qualities, in peacetime required in the domestic field with the gender implications that implies, were transposed to nurturing the nation in a gender neutral capacity.

*Gervase and Flora* returns to Pym’s usual form and familiar subject matter. While literally set in Helsingfors the novel largely takes place in Miss Moberly’s drawing room with its heavy English furniture and English maid. Pym’s pattern, in which Englishness pervades overseas settings, also features in brief vignettes in *Civil to Strangers* and *An Unsuitable Attachment*. Pym establishes familiarity through this technique, but also puts her own society under an anthropological gaze. Where characters move outside the village, for example with an Italian excursion in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, the characters remain English, middle class and anxious to find an Italian equivalent of the English teashop (*AUA*, p.145). In *Civil to Strangers* Pym makes an ironic thrust at English insularity with her reference to Budapest including a ‘sort of Hungarian Blackpool to make the English feel at home’ (*CS*, p.163).

The 1970s novels confirm Pym as a writer with a feminist agenda, set in uncomfortable milieus far from village imagery. The novel in which no village or pseudo-village is featured, *An Academic Question*, is set in modern academic surrounds. However, rather than the academic environment substituting for an English village, in concert with other novels in which alternatives serve as a “village”, the campus is fractured. *Quartet in Autumn* is

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674 MS Pym 106, fol. 87.
set in what might have been a community around the workplace. However, this workplace, unlike that in *Less Than Angels*, does not act as a "village". The fissures that become vividly apparent with the women's retirement are already in place and the real village in which Letty has expected live after retirement has no redeeming features. The clergyman who in other novels provides at least superficial comfort is objectionable, a female friend is duplicitous, and the 'possibilities for change' (*QA*, p. 218) envisaged by Letty undermine the static imagery of the typical Pym village. An Academic Question and Quartet in Autumn are discussed in Chapter 6.

Pym's village cover ensures that the difficult questions she asks through her troublesome women and narratives are woven into comfortable surrounds. Where she adopts a conservative posture towards gender relations Pym omits the village cover. In this context Pym's first novel, *Some Tame Gazelle*, makes an effective comparison with *Civil to Strangers*. Both were begun in the mid-1930s, *Some Tame Gazelle* in 1935 and *Civil to Strangers* in 1936. Although *Some Tame Gazelle* was not completed until 1950, its location and form were established in the early years, in the phase of Pym's writing and ideas that also influenced *Civil to Strangers*. However, the differences in the questions raised in each novel about women and men's relationships are marked. The way in which Pym locates the novels is also different, as despite superficial similarities, there is no village cover in the most socially conservative of the two novels, *Civil to Strangers*.

*Some Tame Gazelle* has an obvious village setting (*STG*, p.25) with its Church of England clergy, including an Archdeacon and curate, the vicarage garden party to raise funds for the church roof, the excellent women who work on the stalls and prepare teas for the villagers who attend, and knit socks or make slippers for the clergy. The setting of *Civil to Strangers* is specifically addressed to make the point that the setting is not a village, Up Callow is a 'small town' (*CS*, p. 16) and lacks tranquillity. An early jarring note, and an example of Pym's ironic touch with naming people, events and objects, is the felling of trees at Holmwood. The felling foreshadows the future convolutions the new residents will bring into Up Callow. Holmwood is described as an old fashioned house and it is rumoured that with the removal of one brick it would
subside (CS, p.18), suggesting the impermanence of the past. In comparison, Mrs Gower's house is 'black and white which still looked very new' (CS, p.18) and 'somehow one never imagined the house becoming old, not even in a thousand years' time' (CS, p.18). Stefan Tilos, who rents Holmwood, creates the interest and disturbance that might be expected in this period, of a "foreigner" coming into a small community. He is one catalyst for Cassandra Marsh-Gibbons, the central character and a married gentlewoman, to travel to Budapest. The trip and time spent in Budapest create a colourful experience emphasising the exhilaration of Budapest's difference rather than sentimentalising the safer, seemingly kinder world of an English village.

Significantly, where Civil to Strangers departs from Some Tame Gazelle is in its portrayal of women and men's relationships. Some Tame Gazelle questions the value of marriage; Civil to Strangers confirms it. Up Callow is the focus of marriages. Cassandra and Adam Marsh-Gibbon validate theirs with a romantic meeting in Budapest and pregnancy; Stefan Tilos returns to Homewood with his Hungarian long term fiancé, and his brother joins them in Up Callow to marry the stereotypical desperate spinster, Angela Gay; her uncle and the widowed Mrs Gower marry and the Rector's daughter is engaged to the curate. They are suitable liaisons, despite some anomalies of age and behaviour. No one in Civil to Strangers rejects a marriage proposal, or refers to the pleasures of being a spinster, contrasting with similar events in Some Tame Gazelle. The Marsh-Gibbon's marriage includes some elements which have the potential to radicalise the narrative. However, they are subsumed in Cassandra's behaviour which is unlike any of Pym's other characters.

Nurturing is her vocation. Cassandra has an inheritance which makes her the wealthier partner. However, the marriage is controlled by convention based on gender; Cassandra's wealth is nullified by her gratitude for Adam's love. She rejects her economic status when she decides that 'everything she possessed was as much his as hers, if anything more his [...] she would have done anything for him' (CS, p.16). Cassandra actively creates a marriage based on Austen-like terms of economic dependence and her acceptance of Adam's unrealistic demands.
The support Pym gives traditional values in *Civil to Strangers* creates a comfortable environment in which few difficult questions are asked. Cassandra’s relationship with Adam is couched in ultra-traditional terms. The exotic Tilos and his brother are subsumed into Up Callow mediocrity through marriage. The potential jarring note of Tilos’ pursuit of Cassandra is thwarted. Cassandra’s pregnancy confirms the stability of the Marsh-Adams future as a traditional family. *Civil to Strangers* upholds traditional values, unlike Pym’s other novels where they are questioned and undermined. The village imagery is omitted from the one novel in which traditional values are maintained.

A direct comparison of Pym’s use of village imagery as a cover can also be made between her two academic novels. The comfortable familiarity of Oxford and its academic environs in the late 1930s *Crampton Hodnet*, is quite different from the new university portrayed in *An Academic Question*, written in the 1970s. Pym’s treatment of the behaviour and ideas in each reflects the cultural environment in which she wrote and the questions she was able to ask unfettered. In this context, the difference in cultural context between the 1930s and 1970s, provides the motivation behind whether Pym provides the village cover. *Crampton Hodnet* deals with infidelity, an academic wife’s response to her husband’s romance with one of his students and the community reaction. In *An Academic Question* an academic wife also has to respond to her husband’s infidelity and community reaction. She is further concerned with an issue particular to the 1970s, the debate about women’s responsibility to marriage and participation in the work force. The way in which similar issues are treated demonstrates the freedom Pym was able to adopt in her 1970’s academic novel in comparison with her use of covering devices in her treatment of similar issues in the 1930s. The techniques Pym used to challenge conventional attitudes in *Crampton Hodnet* and some brief comparisons with *An Academic Question* are discussed below.

*Crampton Hodnet* is set in Oxford. The academics are in English Literature. The romantic notions of both Francis Cleveland and his student, Barbara Bird, are unrealistic. Francis turns Barbara’s ‘look of desperation’ (CH, p.35) about his verdict on her essay into the beginning of a love affair; Barbara weaves dreams of reading poetry together. She imagines providing
Francis with a superior union to his almost thirty-year marriage with Margaret. The affair is revealed at the Killigrews’ afternoon tea at which the guests are announced by a ‘stiff old-fashioned parlour maid’ (CH, p.121). The title, “Master of Randolph College”, when Dr Fremantle arrives gives the gathering a false sense of status. His attitude toward the effect of the liaison on the university is off hand, in keeping with the imagery of the Bodleian Library serving as a romantic meeting place or somewhere to send a bothersome husband. Dr Fremantle undermines the sanctity of marriage that Miss Doggett seemingly wants to preserve when he pronounces that ‘Man is by nature polygamous’ (CH, p.125). The scene becomes a comedy with Miss Doggett’s frustration that she is not to be the bearer of gossip about her nephew to the wider community. The comedy is reinforced when Mrs Killegrew’s announcement that she and Edward ‘are not gossips [...] We do not tell stories about people for our own amusement’ (CH, p. 123) results in ‘an almost perceptible pricking up of ears and drawing forward of chairs’ (CH, p.123). The romance has a ludicrous resolution (CH, pp.207-209). Cleveland’s potential infidelity is treated as a comical episode: the events surrounding the affair are humorous; the main protagonists represent a stock situation; each has flaws that undermine their desirability as a romantic character; and the romance is cut short in a farcical manner. There a few consequences, Margaret deals with the situation by treating her husband like a child; Barbara’s regret that a romance cannot rest alone on reading John Donne is fanciful but harmless.

Pym’s direct reference to class that appears in one draft of Crampton Hodnet is omitted from the published novel. Its omission is relevant to the self-censorship Pym deployed in dealing with difficult questions. The humour in Crampton Hodnet, which is central to the characterisation of Miss Doggett and her relationship with Jessie Morrow, is based largely on Miss Doggett’s class consciousness. It may have been enhanced by Pym’s class conscious commentary, through Jessie. However, perhaps the following reflection on Miss Doggett’s attitude to Anthea’s relationships lifted the village cover too abruptly for the time:
Suppose it was a young man from one of the poorer colleges, who came from Huddersfield and had a state scholarship and wouldn’t wear suede shoes even if he could afford them? Supposing they had been sitting together, holding hands by the light of the gas-fire in a dreary room in one of the more remote streets leading off the Cowley road, talking seriously about their future? Miss Morrow could see the room, the gas-fire flickering and popping, the table with its red or green baize cloth piled high with mathematical text books or Latin authors, while in Simon’s rooms in Randolph College, the table was strewn with bills, invitations to luncheons and sherry parties, and even love letters.\footnote{MS Pym10, fols 37-38.}

In contrast, the infidelity in *An Academic Question*, discussed in Chapter 6 takes place in a new university lacking Oxford’s charm. The academic protagonists are sociologists whose subject and language has none of the romance of the English Literature studied in *Crampton Hodnet*. Treatment of the effects of infidelity has a serious element unfamiliar in Pym’s other novels and there is no humorous cover to deflect from the event.

Two novels with a London setting convey a village atmosphere through religious symbols and activities. In *Excellent Women* a church spire is visible from Mildred Lathbury’s London flat (*EW*, p.12) and the community around Julian Malory’s parish is broken only by episodes set in the country or the anthropological community. *A Glass of Blessings* begins with its central character at a church service and its London setting is further softened as the narrative is bound by the religious calendar. Wilmet also insists on attending church on her weekend in the country. Like the use made of the academic and Oxford communities in *Crampton Hodnet*, *Less Than Angels*, although set entirely in London uses communities as a pseudo-village. The first is around the anthropologists’ activities, their studies, their institute, and their
connections. The second is around the domestic observers and the domestic pursuits of Catherine in her flat and Deidre’s comfortable home.

*No Fond Return of Love* uses a different cover, and one that is modest in comparison with Pym’s other novels. Her proposed agenda, apparent in her notes, is modified in the published version of the novel. Pym’s attention to romance provides an out of character cover for the major jarring note, a separation and possible divorce. Both are overlaid by marriages and the possibility of romance between the two central characters. The initial scholarly setting establishes only a fleeting pseudo-village for the questions that are raised about academic research and academics. A jarring topic is the suburban nature of the central character’s home that is described in dismay each time a would-be London dweller ventures to it. However, the negative connotation is reversed when the house becomes a meeting place for possible romances. Religious observance has a slightly negative connotation. Dulcie Mainwaring’s aunt and uncle find it practical rather than spiritual; Mrs Beltane worships in an alternative church setting; and although the Eagle House Private Hotel operates around the church calendar, the clergyman son of the house is described as “troublesome” (*NFRL*, p.142).

*An Unsuitable Attachment* and *The Sweet Dove Died*, maintain few comforting appurtenances of the village or pseudo-village. They are also Pym’s first efforts to develop complex feminist ideas more clearly. Both novels were rejected. *An Unsuitable Attachment*, with its gender and class issues, takes place in North London. Mark Ainger’s parish and the group of people at its core form a cultural community. It combines two aspects of the comforting strategies typical in a pre-1970s Pym novel. Overtly the community and its church provide the comfort its members expect. However, both are also the focal point of uncomfortable judgements. In particular, Sophia identifies the jeopardy posed to the community by Ianthe’s choice of an unsuitable attachment.

*The Sweet Dove Died*, also set in London, has as its focal point the small community associated with Leonora Eyre, the main character. This novel begins with the comforting assertion that women should be cared for (*TSSD*, p.7). However, although the complexities undercut the feminist agendas of *An
*Academic Question* and *Quartet in Autumn*, the comfortable facade familiar to Pym readers is absent. In *The Sweet Dove Died* Pym repudiates the village, using negative images: 'there is too much aggressive greenness and too many trees. And the people are all elderly and keep dropping in' (*TSDD*, p.31). *The Sweet Dove Died* differs from *Civil to Strangers*, the other pre-1970s novel that has no village cover. *The Sweet Dove Died* is unrelenting and has no conservative personal agenda. There is no commitment to marriage; instead, the only proposed marriage is clearly inappropriate, not necessarily because of the age difference,\(^{676}\) but because of its elements of entrapment. The novel instead concentrates on two awkward romantic triangles, each of which involves their characters in confronting situations, none of which end in marriage or a satisfactory relationship.

Even in novels where the “village” seems to be an essential and natural part of the narrative, I argue that in Pym’s early novels it provides only superficial comfort designed to provide a reassuring cover for exploring subversive ideas. The short stories provide further support for the argument as where Pym openly debates questions of class and women’s role the settings are often exotic with no village cover. The short stories compare markedly with the novel, *Civil to Strangers* where the exotic location and introduction of strangers is counteracted by traditional values. The radical nature of the short stories is discussed in Chapter 5.

IV

*A Few Green Leaves* exposes Pym’s belief that villages cover up uncomfortable realities. Her “village” novel points to the technique she used to present unpalatable truths in a presentable facade in her early novels. The focus on a village setting demonstrates Pym’s capacity to incorporate multifaceted ideas about professions, women’s role, class, the status of ageing

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\(^{676}\) Pym had a joyful relationship with Julian Amery, a younger man. She is unlikely to have found the notion of an age difference a problem, and portrays Leonora’s adapting easily to the circumstances in her imagination of such an event.
and history into a comfortable village scenario. In turn, this novel questions the validity of the scenario. It is true that in her last novel Pym appears to establish fictional stability in an uncertain world, adding to the village imagery historical events and the venerability of age as well as her familiar device, the church, as steadying and important influences. However, such assumptions bear examination. The seeming cosiness of the English village is explicitly questioned through Pym’s narrative and characterisation in *A Few Green Leaves*.

Pym’s decision to make an English village a topic for Emma Howick’s anthropological study once again questions anthropology as a useful method of investigation. The novel reflects Pym’s overall theme in which anthropology, or the scientific world, is compared to its disadvantage with the imaginative world. Pym’s belief that facts are made palatable by creativity is made in a comment by Catherine Oliphant in *Less than Angels* ‘life itself was sometimes too strong and raw and must be made palatable by fancy, as tough meat may be made tender by mincing’ (*LTA*, p.5). In *Less Than Angels* Pym sharpens her observations about anthropologists’ ethnocentricity. She questions their judgement as “exotic” behaviour in other societies similar to what is accepted as usual in their own. In her last novel, Pym takes her analogy further and examines the unpleasant realities hidden by what are considered acceptable customs and ideas in what appears to be an idyllic setting. To her familiar study of the relationships between women and men, Pym exposes assumptions about ageing and the merits of medicine and religion. Her openness about the unpleasantness of the country makes *A Few Green Leaves* a study of destabilisation.

Superficially, the novel is a dedication to stability. The first pages take the reader into ‘an imaginary village’ (*AFGL*, dedication). Although imaginary, it is significant that the setting is not the village-like community that features in so many of Pym’s novels. It is not the North Oxford home of the redoubtable Miss Doggett and multifaceted Jessie Morrow; communities located around a professional group, such as the anthropologists in *Less Than Angels* or academics as in *An Academic Question*; or a community bound by social propinquity in North London, the location for *An Unsuitable*
Attachment. These locations are demonstrably not English villages but illustrate the way in which readers are encouraged to imagine they are in a village when reading Pym’s novels. The environment seems pleasant, whatever the social commentary.

In A Few Green Leaves the location is unremittingly referred to as a village. The village has all the expected appurtenances, a manor, woods and cottages; a clergyman and doctors, young and old; distinct social groups, including newcomers to the village and representatives of the past; and spinsters. The last scenes in the novel suggest that there will be a romantic conclusion (AFGL, pp.218-220) one of the few Pym novels in which this occurs. Allen suggests that ‘on a symbolic level, [Emma’s] acceptance of Tom signals the coming together of romance, realism and autobiography’. Even with its acknowledgement that Pym includes “realism”, Allen’s conclusion draws together elements that focus on A Few Green Leaves as a return to Pym’s early work. With its emphasis on images from the past and preoccupation with history, A Few Green Leaves gives the impression that it is one of Pym’s most conservative novels. Counteracting that view, conventional ideas about the venerability of age, the tranquillity and purity of country living and professional merit are challenged. The novel interposes images that undercut convention and point up the inconsistencies in serene settings and familiar images.

Language is one of the most important ways in which Pym conceals and then reveals unpalatable realities. During the annual walk on the Sunday after Easter, with which the novel opens, class differences are low-key. Both the rector’s group and villagers assume a seventeenth century right, suggesting a parallel class interest. The statement: ‘Greetings were exchanged on an equal level’ (AFGL, p.11), affirms their accord. Conversation establishes the civilised nature of the rector’s group. They are depicted as pleasant to each other, to be familiar with social niceties and prepared to adopt them. In a

677 Allen, pp. 122-123.
meeting between a representative of the manor and the rector’s group, the rector, Tom Dagnall, is given credit for Easter being at the right time; it is suggested that Mr Swain, manor agent, has made the daffodils bloom so prodigiously (AFGL, p.9).

In contrast to the inclusive language, the rector blames the owner’s absence on the possibility that the villagers would intrude upon him on the annual walk. However, Emma’s perception of the manor points to the class differences and the unlikelihood that any of the group would be welcome. She sees ‘the windows as unwelcoming as closed eyes’ (AFGL, p.9). In his accusation about the villagers, Tom miscalculates. Ironically, it is Magdalen Raven, Miss Lee and Miss Grundy, part of Tom’s group, who later deliberately walk in the woods to observe Sir Miles and his family. Compounding the duplicity that runs throughout the novel Magdalen appears to have heeded her son-in-law’s health advice. However, like Tom, he is hoodwinked by his prejudices. Magdalen’s supposed meekness (AFGL, p.95) is a façade.

The class prejudices in the assumption that only villagers would be invasive is emphasised by the outward differences in each group. The villagers dress in bright colours and a mindless mumbling emanates from a transistor radio which accompanies them. The rector’s group wear tweed and sensible shoes. The class consciousness established during the walk is strikingly apparent. The problems of hierarchy also apply to the rector. He is emasculated by the implicit presence of the owners of the manor, compounded by the tangible presence of Mrs Dyer, who cleans the rectory. Caught between the two, he retreats from the nurturing role of his profession (AFGL, p.11). The fissures also invade the rector’s group. Emma stands out with her internal criticism of the abundance of daffodils. She is ‘becoming rather tired of daffodils. Their Wordsworthian exuberance had been overdone, she felt, crammed into cottage gardens and now such poetic drifts of them in the park and woods (AFGL, p.9). Her thoughts question the images daffodils project about the English countryside, the first of many destabilising observations
about the country. Emma’s questioning Wordsworth’s poetry also reflects upon the past use to which Pym has put poetry as a strategy for providing familiarity through quotation.

The socially pleasing conversation during the walk is later parodied by Daphne’s dinner conversation. This conversation establishes the prospect that under the social niceties there can be something less pleasant. Daphne asks ‘Did you know that a fox’s dung is grey and pointed at both ends?’ (AFGL, p.89). Only Pym, in her authorial role, comments immediately ‘Nobody did and there was a brief silence. It seemed difficult to follow such a stunning bit of information’ (AFGL, p.89). Adam Prince at last rejoins with the stock phrase ‘How fascinating’ (AFGL, p.89). Pym’s ironic comment on the ‘soft to-and-fro of the conversational pat-ball’ (AFGL, p.165) confirms the process through which Pym uses conversation in A Few Green Leaves to provide both a familiar and comforting setting while also using it to question perceptions. More explicitly, the snub Daphne suffers in the church leads to her thinking that ‘she hated flower arranging [...] Sometimes she hated the church too, she wasn’t sure she believed anymore, though of course one didn’t talk about that kind of thing’ (AFGL, p.75). In contrast, the outsider Terry Skate has no such qualms. He talks about the church, the mausoleum and, eventually the disappointments he has found in religion (AFGL, p.177).

Linked to the use of language in A Few Green Leaves is the way in which it contributes to Pym’s examination of age and ageing. Pym scrutinises the way in which language produces a veneer of respect. “Venerable” as a comment on age is questioned when Pym describes Miss Vereker, an elderly woman, as ‘held in superstitious veneration’ (AFGL, p.183) because she is ‘the favourite sister of her nephew’s dead mother’ (AFGL, p.183). The statement is indubitably an anthropological reference. Because in earlier novels anthropological statements such as these are a source of fun, it appears that Pym is questioning “veneration” and its application. This is confirmed when

678 Pym notes ‘the country seems so tame yet it has its sinister side not mentioned by Wordsworth’, MS Pym 26, fol. 17.
she shows how significant language is in its application to the elderly when Miss Vereker collapses in the woods. Dr Gellibrand suggests that she needs psychiatric help. However, there is a physical, rather than mental, cause of Miss Vereker’s impairment. The suggestion that she is “wandering” implies that Dr Gellibrand is right. Miss Vereker is alert to the assumptions made about ageing women and well aware of the implications of incompetence to be found in “wandering” (AFGL, pp.199-200). Her competence is confirmed, if by chance, when she finds the deserted medieval village, for which Tom has searched fruitlessly (AFGL, p.207).

When Pym suggests that old age is a “sacred category” she is also being ironic in a context in which Dr Shrubsole’s preference for geriatrics is based on ‘the neat rows of meek old people in the hospital where he had developed his interest’ (AFGL, p.19). The image suggests that the doctor’s preference is for people who cannot assert any authority, who cannot question him, and for whom he will be a saviour. The images are familiar from Quarter in Autumn where Marcia’s non-conformity is paralleled by her hero-worship of Mr Strong. In this village setting, designed to undercut comforting images, the reality in the surgery is quite different from Dr Shrubsole’s expectations. The elderly in A Few Green Leaves highlight the limitations of stereotyping. For example, one ‘elderly village eccentric’ (AFGL, p.18) asks for sleeping tablets to restore her interrupted sleep caused by fleas brought in by the animals she harbours. The one concession to her individuality is made after her death when her strong personality is reflected in the hymns Tom chooses for her funeral service (AFGL, p.205).

Other middle-aged, older middle-aged or elderly women feature in the novel: Miss Olive Lee with her sympathetic recollections of the family at the manor and Miss Grundy, younger but still of an “uncertain age”. Although she is only a background character, Tom’s reflection that she might be capable of
growing “mummy wheat” (AFGL, p.181)\textsuperscript{579} is reminiscent of Pym’s comment on Jessie Morrow, suggesting that she is also a strong character.

Two middle-aged women are also a source of concern to Dr Shrubsole, demonstrating the young doctor’s inability to discard his assumptions about what he perceives as old age. Daphne Dagnall, a woman of fifty-five, troubles him. Her enthusiasm for Greece and the implications of “foreign travel” outside the confines of the village destroys the idea that she should join the meek geriatrics. The doctor mentally attempts to confine her when he speculates that her annual Greek holiday with a female friend presents the possibility she is ‘a frustrated lesbian’ (AFGL, p.21). Pym undercuts his professionalism, rather in the manner in which she questions anthropologists’ capacity, by referring to his supposition as ‘moving on somewhat conventional modern lines’ (AFGL, p.21).

Daphne’s exuberance on the annual walk makes Dr Shrubsole want to curb her. In beating at the undergrowth with his stick, he behaves ‘as if violent action could keep Daphne under control’ (AFGL, p.10). Failing physical control of Daphne’s freedom to express herself ‘He felt that the drugs prescribed to control high blood pressure should also damp down emotional excesses and those fires of youth that could still – regrettably – burn in the dried up hearts of those approaching old age’ (AFGL, p.10).

Dr Shrubsole’s public difficulty in dealing with middle-age is replicated in his private transactions with his mother-in-law. Magdalen quietly defies the strictures her son-in-law tries to impose. Dr Shrubsole’s concerns for her health are genuine. However, Pym’s stark commentary on his dissatisfaction with her provides an alternative view of the way in which the young might view their older relatives. Dr Shrubsole considers that letting Magdalen eat what she wants might shorten her life (AFGL, p.51). Dr Shrubsole’s reaction

\textsuperscript{579} Pym also refers to “mummy wheat” in reference to Jessie Morrow (Chapter 2). She was clearly interested in the connection between the inner strength needed for such an accomplishment and wanted to appropriate it to two quite different women.
to age is negative and based on assumptions that encourage him to adopt set responses to human problems.

The debates raised about human ageing are replicated in debates about history and the past. Pym establishes that veneration for the past, rather than a given, is something to debate. The discussion of the nature of history resonates with Carr’s impact on historiography during the 1960s. Pym’s secondary characters are as keen as Carr to challenge the traditional view of history and emphasise the need for history to be politically relevant and about more than important people and their activities. Pym was aware of the shortcomings of Trevor Roper’s traditionalist approach to history through the debate in Africa. Although Tom Dagnall is a somewhat sympathetic character, he delivers the traditional view of history with his belief that the 17th century is the only aspect of the past that can be construed as history. Pym likens his supporters to ‘animals crowded together in a kind of shelter in a field’ (AFGL, p.109). The simple interpretation of this image is that Tom and his supporters are like sheep, following traditional views. However, members of the group also express divergent opinions about the nature of history and Pym gives them a hearing. Together with Pym’s advocacy of the questions they ask about Tom’s version of history is her recognition that while elderly people need a haven, they pay a high price for protection.

Tom’s obscure interest in burials in wool is a reflection on traditional historians. His rumination on Miss Lickerish burying a hedgehog in a woollen garment bought at a jumble sale provides a source of comic comment. But what burial in wool means in the social sense is never explained.

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681 In 1975 Pym refers to enjoying Trevor-Roper’s work in the *Times Literary Supplement*, MS Pym 161, 18/1/1975, fol. 55-70. Although she does not mention him in any other notes, it is possible that the debate he began in 1963 about the value of African history before the advent of European colonisation started her thinking about what makes history, particularly as anthropologists became involved. Trevor-Roper’s work was criticised by anthropologists working in Africa. The debate centred on what qualifies as history.
682 The Acts for Burying in Wool were in place from 1666 and enforced until 1818. The law was a restriction of trade that was economically advantageous to Britain as it was aimed at
Deserted Mediaeval Village, another of the rector’s historical passions, is exposed as a mound of rocks found by chance and is similarly reduced by Emma’s memory of TPV, a meat substitute when the full term for the village is reduced to the “DMV” (*AFGL*, p.10).

Both villagers and the group members question Tom and his version of what is history with various levels of derision. Some critics are crude in their reactions to him, but their decisions about what is important in the past, or as they so often refer to it, “the old days” are not for that reason alone discounted. Nearly every character in the novel refers to an alternative history. However, they use the terms “the old days”, “the past”, “olden times” rather than “history”. Pym shows that everyone feels that they have a valid sense of history, articulated through Miss Lee’s attitude ‘Yes, we have been talking about the past,’ said Miss Lee, ‘something we all remember’ (*AFGL*, p.59). But her tone was slightly defiant and Tom knew that by “the past” she did not quite mean what he did.

*A Few Green Leaves* justifies Miss Lee and her companions in their interrogative attitude to Tom’s version of the nature of history. In doing so, Pym starts the reader on a journey of exploration of traditional values and expectations. She encompasses the minutia of fictional village life and the questions it raises about the treatment of age and ageing into a broader question about time-honoured values and their continued relevance in a changing society. It appears that when Pym chose her own village as the site of her “imaginary” village she did not relish the idea of her last home being a cozy place where what happens is merely the small everyday things. Rather, she did what she always does, used familiar events to tell a story with wider ramifications.

As part of her debate on established views and practice, Pym considers the relative value of old and new medical practice and compares the status of church and medicine. Dr Gellibrand is described as ‘heading the practice’

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preventing the use of any textiles from other sources than England for burials of everyone other than those who died from the plague. Some exceptions were made on the grounds of poverty.
(AFGL, p.8) and has the comfortable diminutive, “Dr G” (AFGL, p.8). Emma refers to him in her sociological notes as “the old doctor” – “beloved in the village”, but not very efficient’ (AFGL, p.40). He provides a comfortable comparison with ‘the junior doctor’, (AFGL, p.8) Martin Shrubsole. Dr Gellibrand is also critically assessed. Despite his being the senior doctor and a person of some note through his wife’s formidable presence, he is a source of comic comment. His refrain about walking, although now recognised as invaluable, is judged an example of medical laziness when juxtaposed with his disinterest in checking blood pressure. In contrast, he reflects some of the most modern views on medicine when he refuses to see medication as a panacea. He provides a marked comparison with the younger doctor’s enthusiasm for complying with his patient’s wishes and providing them with prescriptions (AFGL, p.21).

An unnerving comment on the older doctor is Pym’s association of him, through the appellate, “Dr G” with “Father G”, Edwin’s friend in Quartet in Autumn (AFGL, p.160). The link between the brothers creates an association with Pym’s stronger reflection on the problems of ageing and death in Quarter in Autumn. The connection is further evidence that the village also harbours the realities expressed so starkly in the earlier novel. Tom Dagnall constantly thinks about deaths, albeit as part of his historical interest in burying in wool (AFGL, p.25). His wife’s death is recalled several times (AFGL, p.21, p.26 and p.174) as is Beatrix Howick’s widowhood (AFGL, p.93). Miss Lickerish dies (AFGL, p.203) and an unnamed woman contemplates what might happen after death (AFGL, p.186), an unnamed man is part of a rambling story about death (AFGL, p.101 ), Miss Clovis’ death is announced and funeral recorded (AFGL, p.133 and pp.135-136) and Fabian Driver’s death is announced (AFGL, p.190). Another connection with Quartet in Autumn is the depiction of professionals as demonstrably lacking in insight. Replicating the overt caring but real neglect associated with Marcia Ivory’s death (QA) an unnamed elderly woman (possibly Barbara Pym) questions Dr Shrubsole’s professionalism. His pride in his honesty in telling an elderly person ‘that her days were numbered’ (AFGL p.186) is undermined when she questions him about life after death. His work
does not extend to providing comfort or a response to her question. Indeed, he is indignant that she does not react as he expects.

Pym’s binary feminist approach is a feature of the treatment of several men in the novel. Their personal and professional failings are highlighted, although unusually unconnected with women’s accomplishments. Emma and Tom’s shortcomings are observed. Tom’s neglect of customary behaviour between a clergyman and his putative, but not necessarily actual, parishioners is unobserved by Emma. By underlining her observational qualities, Pym questions Emma’s anthropological professionalism as well as Tom’s clerical failures. Emma’s lack of perception leaves the hidden features of the village and its characters (AFGL, pp.40-41) for the readers’ knowledge alone.

Both Tom and Emma are humbled by the literary connection she makes to his name. In associating him with “Poor Tom” from King Lear (AFGL, p.40) Emma acknowledges that she is wrong about his status, which she had supposed superior to that of the doctors. Daphne’s confirmation of Tom’s ineffectiveness is portrayed through verse when she refers to “poor Tom” from a children’s rhyme (AFGL, p.49). Tom’s domestic and personal relationships continue to be a source of humour. The vision of his being shrouded if he does not leave his study so that it can be cleaned (AFGL, p.28) is suggestive of his lifelessness. His willingness to accept Daphne’s arrival after his wife’s death and then departure as something he cannot influence (AFGL, pp.122-125) shows his lack of energy in arranging his own life. Tom is kindly, but depicted as everlastingly ineffective.

The likely partnership between Emma and Tom, and their joint failures are a departure for Pym. However, she returns to familiar territory when they are contrasted, to their disadvantage, with Daphne. Daphne dreams of freedom from the village, the rectory and Tom. Her dream includes rejecting the past or any reminders of it (AFGL, p.109). Daphne has all the outward appearance of the stereotypical spinster. However, her character, although not central to the novel, bears further examination. By the end of the novel Daphne achieves her aim. She is independent of the village rectory and decides that she will holiday alone in Greece. Greece is Daphne’s abiding interest and Bruce, the dog, her domestic affection (AFGL, pp.216-217). Daphne’s ownership of Bruce is not a
replacement for the affection usually associated with a husband or children. A comparison between the two childless women with animals, Daphne and Sophia (AUA) supports this view. Sophia’s attitude towards Faustina is overstated in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, suggesting it is significant in her portrayal. Sophia’s life almost revolves around the cat, to the extent that she wonders about its well-being while she is in Rome (AUA, p.137). In contrast, Daphne is frustrated at Bruce’s needs and she contemplates her holiday to Greece without reference to the dog.

Unlike the other brother and sister relationships in Pym’s novels, Julian and Winifred in *Excellent Women* and Edwin and Daisy Pettigrew in *An Unsuitable Attachment, A Few Green Leaves* shows a relationship in which the woman’s independence is manifest. Winifred despairs when she thinks she might lose her home at the vicarage. In contrast, Daphne chooses to leave the rectory. While she is there, she is critical of the residence and her brother. She clearly regrets having hurried to his aid as community values dictated when his wife died. In this instance, she is juxtaposed against Daisy Pettigrew’s position of satisfied helpmate to her brother after his wife’s departure. Unlike Daisy, Daphne does not want to remain his helpmate and leaves.

The other professional men are referred to as childlike. Graham Pettifer, an academic, is depicted ‘childishly “dragging his feet”’ while walking with Emma. Dr Gellibrand complains about the food at the Hunger Lunch, asking for another slice of bread he originally dismissed as “pappy” (*AFGL*, pp.142-143). The Hunger Lunch brings out the worst in the men, with the older doctor’s querulous behaviour; the young doctor’s having opted for a hearty casserole at home (*AFGL*, p.142) and the rector refusing to provide a “pious bromide” in agreement with Miss Lee’s statement that people cannot always have what they want (*AFGL*, p.143). The women, in this rare case adopting nurturing qualities, deal more easily with a charitable event that depends on their own restraint.

The clash between Tom Dagnall and Dr Gellibrand over the right to visit the mausoleum highlights a central theme, the relative status of medicine and religion. Neither is a new “fad”, such as anthropology or sociology with which Pym has dealt in earlier novels. However, Pym suggests both are inadequate.
The mausoleum is the most significant symbol of the class differences in the village and connection with a romanticised past. The rector and doctor’s competition over access symbolises the professions’ desire to fill the vacuum left by the absence of the family from the manor. Their competitiveness relinquishes the mausoleum from its previous unique association with the manor, contributing to the overall theme of the novel in which the deification of the past is challenged. When the florist wears pink plastic gloves to visit and pronounce on the mausoleum the associations rather than estimable, become comical. The status of past hierarchies and its representatives are further undermined.

Skate’s platitudes upon what flowers should adorn the mausoleum (AFGL, p.61-62) supplements the way in which class consciousness associated with the manor is disparaged. The mausoleum also provides physical cover to the images of death in the novel, the decorative exterior contributing to the theme of the hidden unpleasantness in a village. Skate’s advice to hide a broken statue in the church under a flower arrangement carries the idea of hidden unpleasantness into the church and involves him in the historical theme of the novel. Emma, caught up in Tom’s historical interests, disagrees, asserting that ‘one must remember that it was history’ (AFGL, p.77). Her comment suggests that history needs no adornment. However, it also suggests that history can provide excuses for any damaging event. Adam Prince’s preference for hiding the past when he says ‘No good can come of all this delving’ (AFGL, p.89) also suggests that the past may be unpleasant. Most graphically portraying past events as a possible assault on the senses is the smell of a former poultry farm which brings a romantic walk to a dreadful halt (AFGL, p.155).

The relationship between Magdalene and her daughter again undermines assumptions about women and nurturing. Avice exhibits no filial feelings towards Magdalene who is a noticeable source of irritation to her. Magdalene fills the same role as a governess when she is expected to care for her grandchildren under circumstances that curtail her social activities (AFGL, p.108). Financial dependence also restricts Magdalene. Both women suffer because their only activities are domestic or voluntary; Avice Shrubsole is no longer a professional social worker. Emma makes a direct statement that
reflects Pym’s 1970s preoccupation with women and their expanding and legitimate role in the workforce. She advises Avice that having ‘a kind husband and successful children do not necessarily fill a woman’s life (AFGL, p.194). Avice has no response to this palpable truth as she has no options. The village environment presupposes a social worker would be an aberration; its supposed idyllic nature makes the work unnecessary. Avice is thrown into a role that does not suit her: helpmate for her doctor husband. His suggestion that she help Emma with her problems has turned the spotlight on her own difficulties. Emma does not willingly accept help, and Avice is reduced to slashing at the bushes683 (AFGL, p.195).

In contrast, Magdalen finds that her voluntary historical research provides some solace when she becomes one of Tom’s “history women” (AFGL, p.162-163). However, as the work is also voluntary Magdalen runs the risk of being patronised in her occupation as well as in her home. In the treatment of Magdalen, as well as the other older women in A Few Green Leaves Pym demonstrates that older people are not necessarily venerated or venerable. They are complex, defiant of the strictures others seek to impose on them because of their age and, realistic rather than cosy characters in an idealistic tranquil village.

In A Few Green Leaves Pym’s satirical eye is cast upon understandings about the reverential treatment of traditional values and knowledge, sometimes observed through the ageing people in the novel, at other times related to ideas and the physical environment. Pym introduces familiar topics, such as the professions of medicine and the church, and briefly academe, to expose their hypocrisies. The hypocrisy associated with “venerable age” is given greater attention than in previous work, and the nature and importance of history is introduced. Pym questions whether age should serve as a criterion of superiority and reflects upon traditional ways of looking at world events. Pym re-affirms her belief that fiction provides answers with Emma’s decision to

683 Pym’s use of irony is apparent in the naming of the Shrubsoles, both of whom attack foliage as a mark of their frustration.
discontinue her anthropological investigation into ‘something to do with attitudes towards almost everything you could think of in one of the new towns’ (*AFGL*, p.14). Her domestic anthropological study of the village and its inhabitants is pedestrian and short lived (*AFGL*, pp.39-42). Like Alaric Lydegate (*LTA*), she opts eventually to write a novel (*AFGL*, p.220). In her last novel, Pym endorses creativity as the peak of the hierarchy she established through her comparison of the spiritual and scientific worlds from early in her writing career.
CHAPTER 5

SIXTIES REJECTIONS: AN UNSUITABLE ATTACHMENT, THE SWEET DOVE DIED AND THE SHORT STORIES

One gets so tired of willing gentlewomen of uncertain age…

An Unsuitable Attachment p.49

It’s a cruel place. There’s a good deal of evil hidden away in the average English village and not always hidden, either.684

I

Pym is known most comprehensively through her published novels. She was also a prolific short story writer. The short stories reveal the social commentary that in Pym’s early novels was overlaid by the use of quotations, stock characters and the village settings discussed in Chapter 4. Some short stories were published in Pym’s lifetime in journals that ranged from major international magazines such as The New Yorker to The Church Times, the Anglican newspaper published in the United Kingdom (CS p.9). Others were published posthumously under Holt’s supervision in Civil To Strangers and by Cocking in Green Leaves. Short stories have also been adapted for readings685 at the Barbara Pym Annual Conferences. The remainder are accessible only to researchers through the Bodleian Library. In Pym’s 1960s novels, An Unsuitable Attachment and The Sweet Dove Died, expression of her feminist ideas draws closer to the way she raises her ideas in the short stories. There is little of the village cover in An Unsuitable Attachment and none in The Sweet Dove Died. They are the forerunners to Pym’s 1970s novels.

684 MS Pym 28, fol. 7.
685 The following short stories have been dramatised: “Across a Crowded Room”, “The German Baron”, “Mothers and Fathers”, “The Pilgrimage” and “A Sister’s Love”.

Both novels were published after Pym regained her reputation in 1975.\textsuperscript{686} The rejection of Pym’s work from the 1960s until the success of \emph{Quartet in Autumn} in 1977 is a source of debate. Barbara Everett\textsuperscript{687} speculates on the various ways in which Pym’s failure to publish could be interpreted. She includes accidental neglect, the inadequacy of publishers’ readers and real or imagined demand.\textsuperscript{688} Liddell claims that the publishers were mistaken about her market as when Pym’s novels were republished ‘people turned to her books in thousands’.\textsuperscript{689} Wyatt-Brown blames Pym. Wyatt-Brown’s psychological account of Pym has been noted. She builds upon this as the reason for Pym’s refusal to work with Curtis Brown claiming that it demonstrates Pym’s fear of failure and inability to accept support.\textsuperscript{690} However, the correspondence between Curtis Brown and Pym suggests that she eventually rejected the early American interest in her work because she did not want to alienate Cape. Pym’s account of the earnings Cape made from her novels show that they did not lose money on publishing them. Cape confirmed her assessment, acknowledging they ‘broke even’.\textsuperscript{691} At the same time as Pym was dropped, other significant writers also ‘disappeared from the scene’.\textsuperscript{692}

The most potent suggestion Everett makes about the rejection of \emph{An Unsuitable Attachment} relates to “real or imagined” market demand. More recently, Wallace asks a similar question.\textsuperscript{693} She speculates on why Pym’s work ‘fell out of popularity just as feminism was coming in’.\textsuperscript{694} She sees Pym’s women as independent and therefore relevant to an audience interested in feminist works. However, Wallace concentrates on characterisation in Pym’s

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{686} Liddell was adamant that \emph{An Unsuitable Attachment} should not have been published, ‘A Success Story’ in ed., Dale Salwak, p. 181 and Liddell, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{687} Barbara Everett, ‘The Pleasures of Poverty’ in \emph{JW}.

\textsuperscript{688} Everett, in \emph{JW}, pp. 9-10.

\textsuperscript{689} Liddell, p. 37.

\textsuperscript{690} Wyatt-Brown, “Ellipsis, Eccentricity and Evasion in the Diaries of Barbara Pym” in \emph{JW}, p.24.

\textsuperscript{691} Holt, \emph{ALTA}, pp. 194-198.

\textsuperscript{692} Holt, \emph{ALTA}, pp. 192-193. See the previous note on M.J. Farrell.


\textsuperscript{694} Wallace.
\end{footnotesize}
novels. Her fleeting attention to the narratives leads her to dismiss their feminist attributes. She refers to the “old fashioned” nature of the novels. Her paper highlights the way in which the novels were received, rather applying an analysis to the narratives, similar to the way she creates a new understanding of the characters. Nonetheless, Wallace makes a feminist point. She raises valid questions about why the women Pym depicted were not recognised as relevant to the 1960s market. By undermining convention, the women’s troublesome qualities made them entirely suitable in a period in which society was in a state of flux.

My thesis is that *An Unsuitable Attachment* was rejected because of its overt social commentary on women and men’s relationships in a class driven narrative. Pym’s response to the rejection of *An Unsuitable Attachment* is instructive. She had been disappointed with *No Fond Return of Love*. It is the last of a particular style of writing that had served Pym well. Her suggestion that she might not write again after *An Unsuitable Attachment* was rejected was short lived. However, she did respond by attempting another different approach. She had abandoned the attempt to write a romantic novel, demonstrated by her rejection of the initial notes relating to *No Fond Return of Love*. She was dissatisfied with that novel, even in its final version. It was the last of a style that had been successful for her from the publication of *Some Tame Gazelle*. Pym was ready to begin a new approach. Over the next two years she continued redrafting *An Unsuitable Attachment*. She began writing *The Sweet Dove Died* in 1963. In both novels she continued her active interest in recording, and reflecting upon social change in a way that is familiar from her early work. An added dimension was her beginning to pare away the devices she had used from the first: stock characters; multitudes of quotations; and overtly comfortable settings.

*An Academic Question*, started in 1970, is relevant to the discussion about perceptions of Pym’s work. The novel has an *overtly* feminist theme, a 1970s topic. It compares markedly with Pym’s previous academic novel, *Crampton Hodnet*, written between 1939 and 1940 where her feminism is overlaid with what I refer to as the village cover. When she became dissatisfied with her 1970s academic novel Pym began *Quartet in Autumn*. The novel resonated
with 1970s concerns. She also goes further when she unashamedly defies the
culture in which ‘the position of an unmarried, unattached, ageing woman is of
no interest whatever to the writer of modern fiction’ (QA, p.3). Throughout her
writing career Pym shows a strong preference for tailoring her novels to the
period. Until An Unsuitable Attachment she also maintained the comforting
hallmarks of her work.

In retrospect, Larkin and Pym conjectured that the rejection of An
Unsuitable Attachment occurred because the novel did not suit the spirit of the
times. Pym’s dismissal of didactic social commentary could be responsible
for such speculation. An alternative explanation for the publishers’ decision
not to publish An Unsuitable Attachment may have been that its strengthened
social commentary made it appear unsuitable for Pym’s typical readers (or
what was seen as Pym’s typical readers). As discussed in Chapter 1 Liddell
was loath to read any social commentary into Pym’s work; Larkin found Pym’s
most enduring and forthright commentator on gender relations, spinster Jessie
Morrow, unlikeable. There is no information about the Cape Readers, apart
their being male long term employees. Whether they had dealt with Pym’s
novels previously is not clear. As noted in Chapter 4 Tom Maschler later
regretted Cape’s decision. The ideas in An Unsuitable Attachment are
unambiguous. Where a middle-class spinster decides to reject the socially
accepted signs of “unsuitability” in a man and marry him Pym is making the

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695 Barbara Pym Conference discussion based on the Larkin comments referred to in this
chapter.
696 There is no specific information available on Pym’s audience. Reviews, their authors and
sources, provide some idea of the audience to whom the work was expected to appeal, and
examples of these appear in Chapter 1; the BBC’s choice of Pym works for the Women’s
Session which at times read or dramatised her novels and short stories suggest that a BBC
considered her suitable for their listeners; letters to Pym, although few in number, provide
some more clues to the type of people who read her books and were interested enough to write
to her or her publisher (including critics such as a Mrs Macintosh who decided not to buy
Pym’s book as it was ‘vulgar in its mention of a Ladies Room and toilet paper’, MS Pym 113,
note in envelope from Cape); Boots lending library stocked Pym novels (AUA, p. 8). Holt
refers to Pym’s audience as ‘middle-class and middle-brow’, ALTA, p. 194 and her novels were
Book Society Choices, ALTA, p. 16.
697 Larkin, Required Writing, p. 242
698 John Challow’s shoes, manners, job, language and behaviour are the outward signs Pym
employs to establish him as unsuitable.
trenchant point that what 1960s middle class society deemed “unsuitable” may be suitable in a changing world.

After Faber’s rejection in 1965 Larkin wrote to Monica Jones:

Faber don’t want *An Unsuitable Attachment* [...] Charles was adamant – he clearly didn’t think it was good, not as good as E.W., & not really any advance. I don’t know that I danced up and down in its defence [...] but I tried to convince him it was suitable to his list – not successfully I’m afraid. Oh dear. I can see what he means – it’s not really a book of its kind, even.699

To Faber he wrote:

It is good of you to write so extendedly concerning my plea for Miss Pym’s latest book. All you say is quite sensible and I accept it. I think where we differ is that I should like to see a not-so-good novel by Miss Pym published, whereas you wouldn’t regard it mattering if it weren’t. In all her writing I find a continual perceptive attention to detail which is a joy, and a steady background of rueful yet courageous acceptance of things which I think more relevant to life as most have to live it than spies coming in from the cold.700

Larkin’s letters are instructive. In the period immediately associated with the rejection, he and the publishers acknowledged that *An Unsuitable Attachment* was different. However, rather than explore the differences, the novel was dismissed as a poor reflection of Pym’s past work. Larkin’s later statement in the Foreword to *An Unsuitable Attachment* includes some criticisms, speculation that it was rejected because ‘it did not suit the spirit of the decade’ (*AUA*, p.8)701 and positions it as the last of Pym’s early work. He writes:

701 There is no evidence in the letters the exchanged between Pym and Larkin that either considered this possibility at the time. The correspondence from Cape and Faber does not refer to Larkin’s later conclusion that the work was unsuited to the spirit of the times. Pym
An Unsuitable Attachment [...] clearly belongs to Barbara Pym’s first and principal group of novels by reason of its undiminished high spirits. For although the technique and properties of her last books are the same, there was sombreness about them indicative of the changes that had come to her and her world in fifteen years of enforced silence. Here the old confidence is restored (AUA, p.6).

In this chapter it is argued that An Unsuitable Attachment is the beginning of a new period in Pym’s writing. It was the first of Pym’s novels in which she attempted the bold treatment of social issues typical of the short stories. An Unsuitable Attachment questions convention, class as a regulator of human affairs and discrimination based on gender, as well as dealing with cultural change. The novel is a 1960s response to 1950s patterns of behaviour in which social mobility and gender equality are suspect. It is therefore surprising An Unsuitable Attachment was rejected so abruptly in the 1960s, a period of cultural change. Where An Unsuitable Attachment possibly falters is in the form in which Pym presented her ideas. Although largely eliminating the village cover and introducing characters which stand out from her past depictions, the parish setting and characters such as Sophia Ainger, introduced on the first page as ‘the vicar’s wife’ (AUA, p.13) resonates with past work. In this context, it is possible that Pym’s novel fell between the overtly comforting work of the past and a consistent connection with her new approach. In her next novel, she changed the form and by the 1970s form and content were consistently modern.

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speculated in that Cape was: ‘possibly just accepting writers such as Ian Fleming’ (MS Pym 162/1, fol. 29). It was not until the late 1970s that Pym referred to the swinging sixties as the cause of the rejection (MS Pym 96, fol. 101). However, she omits the term from the published version in Civil To Strangers, “Finding A Voice”, pp. 408-416, recorded in 1978. She refers to one publisher who felt there was ‘an old fashioned air about it. Another thought it wasn’t the kind of book to which people were turning – I wasn’t sure what he meant by that—while a third said curtily that their fiction list was full’ (CS, p. 412).
Cape did not identify the possibilities of the 1960s audience which by 1967 was reading Fay Weldon’s *The Fat Woman’s Joke.* Weldon’s first novel paints a potent challenge to the shibboleths associated with marriage and class in its portrayal of the end of a marriage. A middle class wife leaves her home and defies her friends’ attempts to bring her back into the fold. Her change in financial status is graphically described in her new approach to food and culture. As a consequence, she loses the attractive image that her friends believe she, as a woman, should embrace. A publisher accepted Weldon’s depiction of a character who rejected gender and class roles. Ianthe also rejects gender and class roles in a community also newly dealing with such issues.

*An Unsuitable Attachment* cannot be considered in isolation from *The Sweet Dove Died.* Pym wrote the novel between 1963 and 1969, overlapping for two years with her rewriting *An Unsuitable Attachment.* Pym did not stop writing, or being heard. Her diaries are replete with ideas for novels and include notes such as ‘An old woman living in a village with her two husbands (a modern instance of polyandry)’ Pym’s notes suggest that her interest in social commentary was unabated. She sold her play “Something to Remember” to the BBC for 30 guineas and *No Fond Return of Love* was

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702 Fay Weldon, *The Fat Woman’s Joke* (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967). The novel is, of course, a sharper and harder work defying convention then anything Pym could or would accomplish. However, it was published at the end of the 1960s, Pym’s attempts to publish *An Unsuitable Attachment* ranged from 1963 to 1965.

703 These are the mores that control Leonora Eyre’s life as depicted in *The Sweet Dove Died.*

704 MS Pym 56, fol. 11.

705 MS Pym 56, fol. v1. Pym records that ‘A man, dealer in antiques (perhaps like Andrew) goes to a jumble sale in search of Victoriana and there gets involved in things he would rather not have experienced? Meets two sisters; MS Pym 58, Notes for *The Sweet Dove Died*; fols 7- fol. v7 ‘Marcia should go on rather about some man where she works -now getting past the age for loving detachment gradually hardens into hostility so that she now dislikes and avoids men, is annoyed if one comes and sits by her in a bus’; fols 9 - fol.v9 ‘Would Leonora be the sort of woman who would receive a lover in the afternoons (did people normally) and would she be working in an office – dictating to her secretary, editing manuscript, writing an advertisement, or classifying pottery. Drafting a minute or a memo – a vendue in a greater house – or doing good works’; MS Pym 6, fol. 1. Leonora note; fol.v2 Phoebe notes; MS Pym 63, fol.12 “The Flying Termites”; fol. v1 - fol. 2 notes for *Quartet in Autumn*, MSS Pym 31 and 32, fols iv-78.

706 MS Pym 96, fols 1-26, fol. 1. The play was sent on the 22nd June and accepted by 20th July. “How I distempered a room” was sent to Woman’s Hour and although there is no information on its fate, “Parrots Eggs” was rejected in this period.
serialised as the Women’s Hour Serial, by the BBC in 1965. Pym’s original description of An Unsuitable Attachment as ‘a comedy of manners, set in a shabby but “coming up” district in North West London suggests that Larkin is right about the provenance of the novel (Preface, AUA). In its early iteration, An Unsuitable Attachment fulfilled his claim that it was high spirited. The final version only partially fulfils that vision in cameos of Nicholas buying fish and chips (AUA, p.15-16) and Faustina’s peregrinations (AUA, pp.18-19). However, after going through the process of major redrafting the novel finally moves into very different territory. An Unsuitable Attachment establishes the marriage of Ianthe Broome and John Challow, a couple with palpably dissimilar backgrounds. Larkin suggests that the couple are not central enough to the story. Yet both he and Liddell believe that the novel would have been improved if Ianthe and John’s relationship were not central. Liddell suggests that Sophia should have had that place, ‘Ianthe a back ground role and John jettisoned.’ However, after listing numerous titles Pym chose one that concentrated on the theme of the novel eventually published. She chose to concentrate on Ianthe and John. The title she chose supports the theme of the novel and one of the alternatives, “The Canon’s Daughter”, makes it clear that Pym’s chosen focus was Ianthe. Other proposed titles make a less palpable connection with Ianthe but are not suggestive of a novel that eliminated Ianthe and her decision. Pym’s notes make it clear that Ianthe and John were her interest, although she found it difficult to bring John within her compass.

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707 MS Pym 96, fol. 1-26, 20-26. The novel was abridged and transmitted on 6th October 1965.  
708 Pym and Holt, AVPE, p.213  
709 MS Pym 21, fol. ii.  
710 Larkin, Preface An Unsuitable Attachment, p. 8.  
711 Liddell, p. 106.  
712 MS Pym162/1, fol. 26.  
714 MS Pym 20, fol. 4.
The community, which confronts Ianthe's unsuitable attachment, comprises the vicar and his wife, Mark and Sophia Ainger; the vet and his spinster sister, Edwin and Daisy Pettigrew; Sister Dew and another newcomer, the anthropologist, Rupert Stonebird. Ianthe is also part of a community in her workplace, which includes Mervyn Cantrell, head librarian; and Miss Grimes whom John Challow replaces. Penelope Grandison is a regular visitor to her sister, Sophia. In each community there is a single man who would meet community expectations of suitability. Each also considers himself suitable. However, despite their common interest in the library Ianthe refuses Mervyn's proposal which appears to be based on his desire for her suitable house and furniture (AUA, pp. 201-203). Rupert also considers Ianthe as a possible partner throughout the novel and is shocked when she declines (AUA, pp.215-216).

In its published version An Unsuitable Attachment became the first of Pym's work to expose conventions about class and gender to unmasked questioning. In her notes Pym refers to 'Somewhere in the past where the emancipation of women was just about to start' suggesting that a feminist theme was in her mind for the novel. Ianthe, around whom most of the narrative revolves, has a superior education, class background, work and financial status to the man she wants to marry. John's characterisation also undermines gender expectations. His only appeal is his conspicuous sexual magnetism. In An Unsuitable Attachment Pym has crafted a novel that, while retaining some aspects of her earlier works, focuses overtly on social commentary. Pym's stock in trade, the spinster, the parish and bachelors are adapted to produce her first direct assault on the mores she questions more subtly in her previously published work. Pym uses a superficially acquiescent woman to illustrate the social foment of the 1960s where gender expectations are questioned, alternatives presented and radical choices made.

715 MS Pym 54, fol. 4.
The novel changed during redrafting. Uncharacteristically one draft features familiar romance devices: misunderstandings, jealousy, competitiveness between women, and women and men using each other. Three romantic triangles are created at the library between John, a young co-worker with whom he wants a “light-hearted flirtation” and Ianthe and Mervyn Cantrell, the Librarian, Ianthe and John. Typical of the romance novel, Ianthe wants the younger woman punished ‘because she is pert and lazy’. She also refers to young women as competitors. Another characteristic of the romance novel is portrayed in Mervyn’s gossip about John’s flirtation. When Ianthe rejects him in favour of John, he retaliates with an account of a woman in her forties whose much younger lover spent all her money. Ianthe and John’s charade of indifference, pretence that they have other romantic interests and distress when they feel their relationship is over are archetypal features of romantic novels. So too is the technique where other characters are drawn into the morass of jealousy and duplicity. Atypical is Ianthe’s proposal to John. Only the irony associated with a secondary couple is evocative of Pym’s usual style. With minor changes this typical scene remains in the novel (AUA, p.253).

Some characters have more clearly defined roles in the early draft. Pym’s notes include comments on Penelope. She originally sees ‘Sophia’s sister to be a kind of female Lucky Jim. She has reached an age when she was looking for a husband rather more systematically than one did at nineteen or even at twenty-five’. The statement about age suggests that Penelope was to be an older spinster, possibly closer in age and behaviour to Prudence (JP).

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716 MS Pym 21, fol. 72.
717 MS Pym 21, fols 197-204.
718 MS Pym 21, fol. 199.
719 MS Pym 21, fol. 219.
720 MS Pym 21, fols 197 -198.
721 MS Pym 21, fols 210-212.
722 MS Pym 21, fol. 212.
723 MS Pym 21, fols 201-204.
724 MS Pym 21, fol. 232.
725 MS Pym 21, fol. 270.
726 MS Pym 19, Notebook 5, fol. v28.
However, in the published novel she is twenty-five, and surprisingly for Pym’s spinsters, anxious to marry.\textsuperscript{727} Penelope’s possibly partnership is a continuing story line but is juxtaposed with Ianthe’s relationships rather than standing alone. The romance of a twenty five year old, dressed in attire to suit the sixties and a beehive hairdo to match could have been drawn upon to produce an effective novel for the period. However, Pym ensures that Penelope does not deflect attention from the unsuitable attachment of Ianthe and John.

Sophia is critical about Ianthe and John’s relationship in the final version (\textit{AUA}, pp.225-226). She also wishes that something dramatic had occurred to stop the marriage (\textit{AUA}, pp. 252-253). Sophia is even more proactive in the draft where she takes a detective-like role, Pym noting ‘S feels bound to investigate John’.\textsuperscript{728} She successfully detects John’s questionable origins.\textsuperscript{729} One draft suggests that I编程le leaves John for Rupert, an overtly suitable choice. Pym usually forswears romantic techniques (although \textit{No Fond Return of Love} has some romantic elements they are minor) and it is worth considering why she considered writing such a novel at this time. In Chapter 3 the shortcomings in \textit{No Fond Return of Love} are discussed. Under those conditions, it is likely that Pym tried a different approach to her next novel. She contemplated writing a romance\textsuperscript{730} and apart from a few incomplete short stories, the early draft of \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment} is the only example that suggests that she did. Her connection with the Society of Romance Writers, including reading novels for a major award given by the Romantic Novelists Association, appears to begin in 1974.\textsuperscript{731} In despair over the romance version of the novel, Pym wrote ‘this is not the way to do it – not even for a romantic

\textsuperscript{727} MS Pym 19, Notebook 5, fol. 28
\textsuperscript{728} MS Pym 19, fol. 14.
\textsuperscript{729} Pym had some difficulties with developing John Challow, noting: ‘How can I bring such a person within my range?’; MS Pym 20, fol. 4. John’s background is obscure, ranging from living with a male friend, to being an embezzler. As in the final version he is about ten years younger than I编程le; MS Pym 20, fol. 4.
\textsuperscript{730} MS Pym 76, fol. 6 Pym notes ‘Doing romantic novels again – perhaps it would be better if I tried to do one myself’, 19 September 1976.
\textsuperscript{731} MS Pym 159/1, fols 19-33, fol. 115, typewritten claim for payment for expenses for returning books read for the award. Letters and her commentary related to the award appear at MS Pym 159/1, fols 134 - 49.
novel’. Her notes include some Mills & Boon type of material but none appears in the published work.

Pym’s commentary on ethnocentricity, examined through anthropological investigation is familiar in her previous novels. She also conflated English customs and those of the societies studied by anthropologists to demonstrate the universality of behaviour rather than its particularity to a race in novels such as *Less Than Angels* as discussed in Chapter 3. However, in the draft of *An Unsuitable Attachment* Pym placed the competition between High and Low church practices and their adherents in a racial context. Mark and Sophia are forced by a Jamaican parishioner recognise their unembellished church and practice as inferior. Mark thinks about his critic unfettered by concerns about being considered racist ‘It was almost a relief to admit that one could dislike a coloured woman, and for the same reasons for which one could dislike a white one. Mrs Jameson was smug, bossy and uncharitable — qualities unfortunately sometimes found in church workers of any colour’. Pym addresses racial issues less confidently than relationships between women and men and this incident does not appear in the published novel. Nonetheless, her grappling with the consequences of immigration in the 1960s demonstrates a conscious concern with racial discrimination. She also wrote about the way in which her “typical” characters dealt with changes in language and culture in the 1960s.

In addition, Pym considers the ethical struggles of a community in a time of change in a discussion about European investigators in emergent nations. This debate appears in the published novel in a sanitised version, in a reference to anthropologists and their effect on the societies they study (*AUA*, pp.40-41).

II

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732 MS Pym 172, fol. 83.
733 MS Pym 21, fol. 83.
734 MS Pym 21, fol. 23.
735 MS Pym 21, fol. 23. The role of anthropology was a topic of discussion with Richard Roberts, “Skipper”, who commented: ‘the new nations are simply not willing to be guided by patterns of culture of which they are alarmed’, MS Pym 159, fol. 22.
In the published novel the unsuitable attachment, without the extraneous detail associated with secondary characters, racial debate\textsuperscript{736} or romantic devices takes centre stage. The clarity with which her social commentary is delivered takes Pym into different territory from her previous work. The village image is less apparent, although the community is close-knit and likely to have projected the same comfortable images as Pym’s former pseudo-villages. The ideas Pym expressed subtly in her previous work are unambiguous. The Reverend Mark Ainger’s parish and its close knit, middle class parishioners in the better part of the parish confront the gender and class issues that were resonating in the wider community. Pym’s description of the North West London parish and its inhabitants is not a story of churches and spinsters, although they appear.\textsuperscript{737} Class issues are raised through the wider community and the library and its staff; and feminist concerns are dealt with through women’s work and their relationships with each other and the men in the community. Pym’s overarching theme of the conflict between the scientific and imaginative worlds is replaced by a contemporary theme, post war change and the rejection of 1950s behaviour in the 1960s.

Pym’s observations on the geographical aspects of class distinctions are given a new focus in this novel. The tone of Mrs Grandison’s expression of disappointment at Sophia’s address is familiar: ‘much too near the Harrow Road and North Kensington to be the kind of district one liked to think of one’s daughter living in (\textit{AUA}, p.19). However, in \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment} some class distinctions are entirely lacking in humour. Early in the novel, Pym uses the detached manner of the anthropologist to draw attention to class by describing the differences that occur in Mark’s parish. The vicarage is in the best part of the parish ‘on the extreme eastern boundary’ (\textit{AUA}, p. 16) together

\textsuperscript{736} Pym links her main characters’ behaviour and anthropological study when she likens Sophia and Penelope’s shopping to ‘early travellers taking presents to the natives’ (\textit{AUA}, p.14) and possible debates on race in South Kensington (\textit{AUA} p. 85).
\textsuperscript{737} There is a church bazaar but even it features Ianthe’s unsuitable attachment in a central role as Mervyn and John from the library attend. Two additional church activities are mentioned; the group that goes to Italy is a church group. However, the focus is on Ianthe and her yearnings for John with only asides to the tourist locations.
with the modernised terrace houses. All the social activity takes place there, or on the trip to Rome on which only selected members of the parish venture. The vicar’s occupation provides the only link between the part of the parish he lives and the different types of housing which designate the social groups potentially part of his congregation. The area in which Mark buys fish and chips is in one of the poorer parts: ‘The very fringe of his parish, that part that would never become residentially “desirable” because it was too near the railway, and many of the big gaunt houses had been taken over by families of West Indians’ (*AUA*, p.16). Sophia has accompanied him on at least one occasion, leading her to assume that what she sees in an unfamiliar ‘street, with its brightly – almost garishly – painted houses’ (*AUA*, p.16) are ‘exotic tropical fruits in one of the windows, only to realise that they were tomatoes put there to ripen. “Love apples”, she had said to Mark, and the words “love apple” had somehow given a name to the district, strange and different as it was from the rest of the parish’ (*AUA*, p.16). In itself, Sophia’s comments emphasise the differences between Jamaican culture and the main protagonists in the novel. Another area is ‘over the other side of the main road, far from the railway line. Here the houses were less colourful, drably respectable but hardly elegant’ (*AUA*, p.16).

Pym also uses food as an important indicator of class, similarly to the way in which Weldon uses her character’s penchant for greasy meals in her new persona. The Reverend Mark Ainger’s purchase of fish and chips serves a similar purpose in Pym’s novel. Pym uses two devices to show that this meal is out of keeping with the Ainger’s status. Firstly, Mark purchases the fish and chips in a poor area. Secondly, Sister Dew assumes that the meal is for the cat (*AUA*, pp.17-18). Fish and chips also feature in *Jane and Prudence* in the clandestine meals Jessie Morrow has with Fabian Driver. Jessie’s love of tomato sauce with her chips is highlighted, asserting her

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738 Solow provides a convincing discussion of the use of tea as an indicator of class in Pym’s novels, pp. 131-133.
comfort with departing from the social mores associated with Fabian. His meals, such as casserole of hearts, are cooked for him by a woman who comes in for that purpose (*JP*, p.35). In *The Sweet Dove Died* James and Phoebe choose a cafe that Leonora would snub but is enjoyed by Phoebe. Like Jessie, Mark, Sophia and Faustina she likes fish and chips. James enjoys the experience but ‘Afterwards he would be ashamed of having tea with her in the Leopard Dining Rooms (*TSDD*, p.57). Fish and chips and James’ embarrassment is only an incident in *The Sweet Dove Died*. In *An Unsuitable Attachment* the class difference between the Aingers is an issue about which Mark feels embarrassment and Sophia, resignation (*AUA*, p.19-20). Only the couple’s status through the church and length of time in the community moderates the influence of class in this 1960s novel in which class is a focus.

Mark wants the West Indians to participate in church activities but acknowledges that bringing together English culture with that of the more “exotic” of his parishioners will be neither simple nor speedy (*AUA*, p.16). Later in the novel, experience of cultural difference is limited by Sophia’s decree in Rome that the church group should have tea in an English environment (*AUA*, p.143). That the travellers are attracted to the proposal immediately upon arrival in Rome demonstrates that Pym’s characters have difficulty in accepting cultural difference. However, rather than endorse her characters’ concerns Pym questions them through her ironic gaze. Pym’s comment on cultural differences raises the perplexities that were part of 1960s thinking, as notions of equality and expectations that differences should be embraced, rather than rejected as inferior, permeated social thought and commentary. On what seems a lighter note, Pym (like Weldon, later) also connects easily to the 1960s environment by introducing the symbol of popular culture: television. The touch of modernity also differentiates between the classes, and more particularly, Ianthe and John. Ianthe and the Aingers have

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740 Solow’s commentary on xenophobia suggests that she reads Pym’s work differently, p. 20.
no television (AUA, p.31). In contrast there are several in the accommodation in which John rents a room (AUA, pp.111-112).

A stark comparison of Ianthe and John’s economic positions is made through their housing. Although Ianthe is ‘a stranger to this rather doubtful neighbourhood’ (AUA, p.25) she is reassured by a conversation with ‘somebody whom her mother would have described as a “gentlewoman” (AUA, p.25). As the recent beneficiary of her deceased mother’s will, Ianthe owns a restored terrace house⁷⁴¹ in the best part of the parish. Her home is furnished with antique furniture admired and openly coveted by Mervyn (AUA, p.68). To compound the difference between Ianthe and John’s standard of living, Ianthe meets her former dressmaker near his home (AUA, p.108). John’s significantly inferior economic position is starkly made through the lengthy description Pym gives of his living arrangements.

John lives in a lodging house with:

a narrow hall, with a bicycle propped against one wall and stairs leading down to a basement. The floor was littered with paper coupons – offering “3d off” soap powder and frozen peas, and literature about television insurance and reconditioned sewing machines – which had evidently been thrust through the letter box. There was no sound in the house, apart from what might have been the twittering of a caged bird coming from one of the shut doors on the ground floor. Then a muffled kind of shouting could be heard somewhere underneath them, as if someone was having a fight or an argument (AUA, p.110).

When she finally gets into his room, where John is sick in a badly made bed she sees:

⁷⁴¹ The portrayal of John, after their betrothal, building shelves in Ianthe’s house emphasises his lack of property. The example also shows his preparedness to fulfil a conventional domestic role that is unconventional for Pym’s other male characters. He is the one male character who is portrayed as active. Ianthe is the source. As she has the status of a central character, although John’s behaviour is not observed, it is likely that it occurred.
In the corner [...] a sink and a gas ring, partly hidden by a screen, a pile of unwashed crockery on a small table and a red plastic bucket filled with empty tins, tea leaves and broken egg shells (AUA, p.114).

Ianthe’s empathy with John under such conditions challenges the class based nature of her acceptance in the parish community. Although she is a newcomer, she is readily accepted because she appears to conform. She is introduced to the reader and the Reverend Mark Ainger through Sister Dew, a tedious but substantial parishioner, as “sweet” and ‘just the sort of person we want at St Basil’s’ (AUA, p.18). Mark recalls her as ‘a nice looking youngish woman who had been to church the last two or three Sundays’ (AUA, p.18). To complete the introduction, she is the daughter of a canon. The shoe theme, which is used to symbolise John’s unsuitability, is introduced early in the novel. However, unlike John, Ianthe passes the test. She wears ‘ladylike stockings with seams, in a colour described in Marshall’s hosiery sale as “medium beige”, and end[ing] in brown court shoes of good leather with a sensible heel’ (AUA, p.25). Ianthe is socially acceptable. Sophia and Mark visit her with the understanding that she is ‘someone of their own kind’ (AUA, p.31).

Where the depiction of Ianthe departs from the ladylike image of the churchgoer and wearer of acceptable shoes is that she works full time. Pym places her central character in a library as a professional librarian. While the story revolves around Ianthe’s work as much as the parish, Pym does not immediately signal the possibility that being in full time work makes Ianthe likely to defy other gender bound conventions. She is in what her mother perceived as ‘a ladylike occupation [...] and one that would bring her daughter into contacted with a refined, intellectual type of person’ (AUA, p. 25). In contrast with her mother’s imagination, Ianthe is ‘handing out books to the ill-mannered grubby students and cranks of all ages who frequented the library of political and sociological books’ (AUA, p.25). Idealism about Ianthe’s work amongst books is a further source of irony when the unsuitable John begins to work in the library in close and continuing proximity to her. Ianthe’s comment that the young man envisioned by Mervyn as a replacement for Miss Grimes might be ‘quite unsuitable’ (AUA, p.28) and her ‘half hoping he would be’
(AUA p.28) is ironic when John does prove to be unsuitable and arouses her interest. The irony is compounded when Miss Grimes does not fulfil Ianthé’s expectations of the way in which a pensioner should behave (AUA, pp.74-75).

Ianthé’s superiority to John is emphasised through their work. She is a trained librarian; John, unlike his putative competitor Mervyn, is a new employee and has few professional skills. That he is not a qualified librarian was an essential of the plot from the first drafts. Ianthé’s status is enhanced because she has won a coveted position in one of the few professional occupations open to women. John’s status is diminished because he is entering a profession which is no longer reserved for men, unlike the church or politics, both of which feature in Pym’s novels as masculine vocations. In addition, John is in an inferior position in the library. Emphasising his lowly position, he replaces a woman from an inferior social status to Ianthé (AUA, p.28).

Although Ianthé is consistently described as a gentlewoman, with a pleasantly attractive, but conventional appearance, her interest in John is unlike that of a stereotypical spinster. She is financially independent, like most of Pym’s spinsters, and has no need to marry. She is aware of John’s magnetism from his ‘confident, charming laugh’ (AUA, p.45) and ‘brown eyes [that] looked at her in a way she found slightly disturbing, though this was not the kind of thing she would admit to anybody but herself’ (AUA, p.45). By the time John returns from lunch after their first meeting Ianthé found herself studying him and taking in the details of his appearance. She could find no fault with his dark grey suit, red patterned tie and white shirt. Only his shoes seemed to be a little too pointed – not quite what men one knew would wear’ (AUA, p.49). His ownership of a poetry anthology and dexterity in quoting from it, suggests to Ianthé that there may be more to John than superficial

742 MS Pym 21, fol. 237.
743 Ianthé’s suitor is placed in an inferior position within An Unsuitable Attachment as well as in comparison with men in workplaces in Pym’s other novels. Most men are clergy, from the Archdeacon to the curates. Even they are afforded respect. The male anthropologists are professionals. Where men work in clerical jobs they are placed in offices (E W) and (QA). A young man who is: ‘a sort of research assistant’ (JP, p.38) has his own office. Piers from A Glass of Blessings is obviously an unsatisfactory employee but has a defined occupation.
appearances. However, Pym does not expand upon the opportunity to develop this dimension of John. John’s leading role is as a partner in an unsuitable marriage chosen by Ianthe, a woman typical of the gentlewomen who people Pym’s novels. Ianthe’s visit to John is disingenuous. Her claim that she is merely a concerned work companion is undermined by the strength of her feelings when she sees him. ‘Indignation surged up within her – that he should have to live like this’ (AUA, p.114). John’s wounded role in a poor environment makes vivid the distinction between the two while showing that Ianthe is sexually tempted. The visit builds upon Ianthe’s initial response to John which suggests that her interest is more sexual than she acknowledges. The relationship is developed in sexual terms, with little of the comedy that accompanies Pym’s earlier depictions of what would conventionally be romantic events.

The focus on Ianthe in breaking down conventional attitudes to class, gender and marriage is an important pointer to the spirit of the novel, and indeed, the spirit of the times. Ianthe’s marriage takes place, contrary to the expectations of her work companions and friends. In placing a gentlewoman in the central place in her novel Pym amplifies her use of the troublesome woman. Despite appearances, Ianthe is as capable of defying expectations as any other woman in the Pym lexicon. Although surrounded by her contemporaries in Italy, including suitable Rupert, Ianthe determines to marry the unsuitable John. The community, which Ianthe must persuade to accept the unsuitable attachment, is middle class. Her decision is influenced by neither Sophia’s suggestion that she should not marry, nor on her return, her clerical family’s disapproval (AUA, pp.220-224). Ianthe and John’s marriage is in keeping with the destabilisation of hierarchy typical of the 1960s. Pym reprises her devaluation of anthropology in her depiction of Rupert’s failed performance as an observer. His anthropological training is useless in identifying the fractures in the social pattern around him. He is as disconcerted

\[744\] Ianthe carries the story line when she reads Tennyson, recalling John having quoted from him early in their relationship (AUA, p. 86).
by Ianthe's decision as any layperson. He does not anticipate her choice to confound class bound expectations, despite the way in which class is used as a defining characteristic in his discipline.

Sophia's concern about Ianthe's choice of partner brings her own marriage and husband under scrutiny. The Reverend Mark Ainger is the only husband in the novel.745 He is discounted in a throw away utterance by his sister-in-law (AUA, p.14) and, further, as unreal (AUA, p.15). Although he comes from a good clerical family Sophia 'in a sense had married beneath her, for [...] he was without private means' (AUA, p. 19). By the time the novel commences the marriage is seen by the parish as "suitable". However, Sophia is dissatisfied. Several narrative details indicate that "suitable" need not mean "entirely happy". Sophia's sight of flowers in a funeral director's window reminds her of 'the reality of her life in North London' (AUA, p.14). Her despair at Mark's self-sufficiency (AUA, p.98), general sadness (AUA, p.206 and pp.214-215) and frustrated comment about the inevitability of tea in the vicarage (AUA, p.253) support Pym's depiction of Sophia's unhappiness. Sophia's dedication to Faustina746 symbolises a marriage which raises awkward questions in a community in which divorce is suspect (AUA, p. 52). Most importantly, Pym invites us to ask whether the one married woman in the novel against whose marriage Ianthe's "unsuitable" attachment can be measured has anything other than a "suitable marriage". Pym's question is an assault on the conventions articulated by the parish and support for changing the conventions she examines through the novel. She compounds her querying of the "suitable" marriage with irony. Penelope asserts that 'a wife should consider her husband's work before her own happiness' (AUA, p.69). Pym uses her authorial voice to challenge her statement when she describes Penelope ironically as 'having the right old-fashioned ideas about men and

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745 Edwin Pettigrew was married but his wife left him (AUA, p. 24).
746 The original notes include two children for Sophia and a cat, MS Pym 20, Notebook 1, fol. 2. Only the cat remains in the completed novel. Sophia refers to Faustina is 'all I've got' (AUA, p. 137).
their work' (*AUA*, p.69). In the context, it is apparent that Pym is ridiculing the notion of a "suitable marriage".

In *An Unsuitable Attachment* Pym presents a narrative and characters who, while adopting marriage as a goal, undermine the traditional expectations of that institution. "Suitability" is a prime definer in Pym's novels, and the idea reoccurs throughout the novel. The church Ianthe attends is suitable (*AUA*, p.31); the man Sophia seeks for Penelope 'must not be divorced or otherwise unsuitable' (*AUA*, p.35); Madeira is a suitable gift for Ianthe who is 'a respectable unmarried lady who might be visited by clergy' (*AUA*, p.73); Ianthe purchases "suitable gifts" for the retired Miss Grimes (*AUA*, p.73); and Rupert would like to have Ianthe in his house 'like some suitable decoration' (*AUA*, p.87). Ironically, Rupert's objectification of Ianthe does not undermine his suitability under the conditions assumed by the community that is critical of John. He is a man of property; as a professional man, he has a work status superior to Ianthe's; and he is the "right" age for her. Although Pym had speculated that Ianthe might renounce John in favour of Rupert these two "suitable people" do not marry in a novel that is *designed* to create a controversy in the small middle class part of Mark Ainger's parish.

III

*The Sweet Dove Died* is the first of Pym's novels in which she does not attempt to provide the cover of a village or pseudo-village setting. Leonora Eyre induces her small circle to believe the world revolves around her. "Interlopers", such as Phoebe and Ned, materialise for a limited time. Leonora’s world includes her elegant home, an antiques business and associated environs, places of entertainment of an elegant, but not necessarily "high" cultural nature and, under duress, a poorly appointed cottage. In Leonora Pym introduces a character whose egocentricity and callousness are glaringly apparent. Importantly in a feminist context, she is uncaring about her

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747 MS Pym 20, Notebook 1, fol. 25.
female friends and accepts male admiration as her due. Her obsession for a younger man is central to the novel is illustrated by her almost caging him when his attention wanders. Leonora’s guiding code is to maintain her facade by enhancing her ageing appearance with subdued lighting and large hats, and her home with beautiful accoutrements. Unlike central female characters such as Wilmet (AGB), she has no pretension to good behaviour or even good intention. Her one claim to kindness is written from her own perspective: ‘Leonora felt she had done some good, an unusual sensation for her and one she rather liked’ (TSDD, p.29). However, her base nature reasserts itself promptly when she thinks ‘It was more agreeable to reflect on how dreadful poor Meg had looked and to pity her unfortunate situation’ (TSDD, p.29).

Leonora is the most complex troublesome woman Pym draws. She gives full rein to the representation of negative feminine characteristics in a way that she does not replicate in any of her other work. Only Allegra Gray (EW) bears any resemblance to Leonora. In The Sweet Dove Dies, Pym rejects the concept of “sisterhood”: ‘Leonora had little use for the cosiness of women friends, but regarded them as foil for herself, particularly if, as usually happened, they were less attractive and elegant than herself’ (TSDD, p.49). Pym’s unrelentingly negative portrayal of Leonora is unique in her work. Her note that there is ‘something of me in her’\(^{748}\) suggests that there is more to Leonora than pure nastiness. It is unlikely that any character with whom the writer associates is devised to illustrate an entirely negative image.\(^{749}\) As Leonora has no obvious redeeming qualities it is essential to look beyond the surface representation of a non-feminist characterisation. An alternative judgment of Leonora’s characterisation is a feminist concern with women in a patriarchal society. Leonora is controlled by the traditional values which entrap women: concern with appearance; reliance on a man for status; rejection of what is observed as

\(^{748}\) MS Pym 173, fol. 61.
\(^{749}\) Pym’s relationship with a much younger man could have been partially responsible for Pym’s comment.
weaknesses in other women; and competition with them for the small rewards available to women under patriarchy.

Two early drafts of *The Sweet Dove Died* assist in discerning the progress of the novel. One draft maintains the small selection of characters that are in the published version; the other introduces another major character with a storyline. The warfare that develops between Leonora and Ned is moderated in the early versions. As with the published account, Leonora considers ‘reach[ing] a compromise whereby Ned could be woven into the fabric of their lives in such a way that he became an unobtrusive thread in the harmonious tapestry of the whole.’\(^{750}\) Ned’s characterisation as the victor when he kisses Leonora’s cheek after one meeting and ‘it occurred to her that when it came to weaving people into the fabric of one’s life he had perhaps stolen a march on her’\(^{751}\) is in both versions. However, unlike the published novel, the immediate outcome in the draft is benign.

The second draft version of *The Sweet Dove Died* has a multitude of characters and story lines. Leonora’s ability to control events is augmented and Phoebe and Rose Culver’s story lines are enhanced. As in the final version, Phoebe is writing a journal from a diary of a deceased would-be writer’s life in Italy during the last months of the war.\(^{752}\) Missing from the published version is typical Pym territory where her speculation about cause and effect is overtly humorous but has a serious intent. Phoebe suggests that the subject of the memoir, the army officer on whom so much affection had been lavished by the writer, might in civilian life, be a “chartered accountant in Peterborough” married with a family. She ponders the effect of publicising long ago forgotten days and wonders ‘if all the diaries of women in love were

\(^{750}\) MS Pym 25, fol. 106.
\(^{751}\) The published version omits the comic afterword that is so much Pym’s oeuvre, providing an example of her ability to pare back extraneous matter that deflects from her purpose.
\(^{752}\) MS Pym 28, fol. 5.
to be published, how many unlikely seeming men might find themselves immortalised — to their surprise and discomfort perhaps.\footnote{MS Pym 28, fols 5-6. Pym is also probably referring to her own diaries in which she wrote about her various love affairs, deleting only the pages that were, presumably, an embarrassment.}

James and Phoebe’s short lived affair is assessed shrewdly by Phoebe and Rose, denying Leonora the pivotal role she has in the final version. The women’s assessment of James is typical of Pym’s binary feminist approach. The women see James as one of a group rather than an individual. They observe that he is no different from any other man in his failings: ‘what exactly had he done? He had made love to Phoebe — one could hardly say he “seduced” her — he had lent her some of his furniture — he had gone away and neglected to write to her — he had caused the furniture to be taken back by another woman — and to crown it all, he had brought her nothing from his travels but a carton of cigarettes of a brand she didn’t care for, which he had posted to her with a brief unsatisfactory note’.\footnote{MS Pym 28, fol. 138.} In the final version, James similarly analyses his behaviour. The statement then becomes self-serving, further diminishing him. As in the final version, Phoebe rejects the country, returns to London and goes abroad.\footnote{MS Pym 28, fol. 138.}

A feature of the published novel is Leonora’s self-regard in comparison with other women. An early draft creates the possibility of Leonora as a less driven character. Her recall of Rose as a plainly dressed woman is at odds with the attractive woman who visits.\footnote{MS Pym 28, fol. 138.} Despite Rose assuming the appearance of a rival Leonora briefly sees her as a possible companion. While they wait for James, Humphrey, Liz and Ned, Leonora ponders the possibility of their all having been killed. She speculates about the possibility of her and Rose being left alone: ‘For a moment there was something restful and comforting about the thought of a life without men of any kind. But how bored one would be.’\footnote{MS Pym 28, fol. 153.
Leonora’s fleeting thought is totally at odds with the published version of the novel in which Leonora’s need for male admiration is inexorable.

In the draft Rose’s story revolves around romantic disappointment; confirmation of James’s devotion to Leonora; and speculation about Phoebe’s misguided interest in him. In this version Leonora is unsure about what she has achieved in the domestic idyll she plans for Ned and Rose. What she is sure about is that she and James have an ideal relationship. The only jarring note in the draft that does not appear in the final version is Pym’s thesis that a village might harbour nastiness, foreshadowing the theme of *A Few Green Leaves*.

Supporting the argument that Pym changed her approach to her writing in the 1960s the published version of *The Sweet Dove Died* is sharper than the drafts. Leonora cannot control Ned, unlike her resolute crushing of anyone else who might endanger her control of her life. The world she protects has diminished with her ageing. As the daughter of a diplomatic couple she lived overseas. However, even in a wider setting this offered, her dependence on men was as consuming. Her past has left her with nothing but recall of unsuccessful love affairs. They serve only to make her appear mysterious to unenlightened listeners or a source of boredom to others. The one occasion on which they provide some pleasure is when her and Liz’s exchanges are listened to by neither, and ‘each woman could feel a kind of satisfaction, as if more than just drink and food had been offered and accepted’ (*TSDD*, p.58). As Leonora’s main aim is to be attractive to men, such satisfaction is illusionary. She uses her financial independence to embellish a limited world: to choose to work or not; and most significantly, to purchase her own home and chose who should tenant her flat or whether she should do so at all.

The superficialities associated with Leonora are established early with Humphrey’s declaration at the start of the narrative that ‘The sale room is no

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758 MS Pym 28, fols 138-152.
759 MS Pym 128, fol. 158.
760 MS Pym 128, fols 158 and 159.
place for a woman’ (*TSDD*, p.7). His claim is predicated on the lack of expensive objects to be auctioned. In contrast with Humphrey’s concern, Leonora’s humility at having cast a bid for a book, (only established later in the text as something not quite worthy) amongst ‘The other bidders or spectators, mostly men, crowded on small chairs or standing in corners’ (*TSSD*, p.7) is sham. While the picture presented by Leonora is initially feminine enthusiasm and her reaction to her successful bid for a feminine acquisition is a genteel faint, this image is short lived. She is next seen in the context of Meg’s inelegant dinner and, at the end of the second chapter reiterating the theme from the first, that she ‘would do everything possible’ (*TSSD*, p.17) to control her environment. Leonora even contemplates controlling her death: ‘there was no reason why one’s death should not be as elegant as one’s life’ (*TSDD*, p.17). She finds even minor infractions over her command of her affairs unacceptable as shown in her annoyance at Humphrey who anticipates her decision to visit his antiques shop (*TSDD*, p.19).

Financial security is not enough for Leonora. She lacks the internal resources of Pym’s other spinsters whose quiet assurance makes them strongly independent. In comparison, Leonora is dependent on her ability to camouflage her age; male admiration; and hiding from herself any resemblance to her women friends. Her belief that they are figures of fun or pathos and that she is beyond even the most commonplace and inevitable physical connection with other women is essential to her well-being (*TSDD*, p. 149). When her emotional security is threatened, Leonora brings her indomitable strength to bear upon those responsible. The characters who might thwart her, innocent aged Miss Foxe, unsophisticated Phoebe Sharpe and unpleasant Ned depart. Leonora’s aim to replace Miss Foxe with James in the flat in her house is achieved; she forces Phoebe to relinquish James’ furniture thus severing her link with him; and she foils Ned in his desire to reduce her to tears at James’s betrayal. She denies Ned the ultimate gift of her tears and James’s similar attempt to rewrite a text that maintains his place in her life also fails. Steely Leonora refuses to be written into a relationship that reflects Meg’s dependence on Colin’s intermittent attention and foursomes with his mother and boyfriend. Although she would like to control Humphrey, he is not of
particular importance to her. Leonora’s life has always encompassed men such as him to take her to pleasant dinners and other outings and to present her with flowers.

However, Pym’s use of the flowers as a powerful image for Leonora also has feminist dimensions. At the end of the story Pym links them to Leonora’s ultimate weakness in a situation laden with patriarchal control. When Humphrey attempts to make love to her and only the interruption by a neighbour thwarts his violent overtures Leonora speculates that he might bring her flowers in apology. She then rewrites the scene ‘Anyway, what had he done that he should apologise to her? Only shown that he thought her attractive, and surely all women wanted that reassurance occasionally?’ (TSDD, p.86). Leonora’s physical and mental vulnerability is clearer in this situation than in any other scene in the novel. Only her ego and desperation affords her the ability to resolve her vulnerability to her satisfaction. However, Leonora has to acknowledge her lack of control. Humphrey is a threatening figure ‘his bulk looming over her’ (TSDD, p.83). Leonora does not want his attentions and yet is prepared to accept them. Although she can make him feel that he has been a fool (TSDD, p.86) it is unlikely that the Leonora finds the situation unique. Her only a protection is to find a way of making the scene acceptable so she can remain in an otherwise satisfactory small world. Like Pym with her writing, Leonora applies self-censorship. However, unlike Pym’s subterfuge, which enhances her ability to communicate with a wider audience, Leonora’s self-censorship is aimed at maintaining her place as the luminary in a limited environment. She is contentedly pseudo-cultural, cruel, cold, pathetic, strong and triumphant. Humphrey also continues doing what he has always intended and will remain part of Leonora’s life. He also rewrites his attack ‘He had never forced his attentions on her, Humphrey told himself, not without smugness’ (TSDD, p.91). The incident, because incident is what it becomes in an environment where women rewrite events to protect themselves

761 It has to be wondered whether the scene has its beginnings in Pym’s experiences at Oxford referred to in Chapter I.
from reality and men deny their actions are unacceptable is encompassed by Leonora’s statement of resolute egocentricity. She particularly admires ‘flowers [which] possessed the added grace of having been presented to oneself” (TSDD, p.188).

Leonora’s characterisation is the antithesis of a feminist construct. She depends on men’s attention for her self-esteem and she does everything to enhance her desirability. To her appearances are paramount. A physical attack becomes an act of desire; her female friends’ kindnesses are denigrated. Pym’s portrayal of the multifaceted troublesome woman creates difficulties for the binary feminism theorist. Virtue in The Sweet Dove Died does not divide on gender lines. However, Leonora is not simply nasty but a well-developed character. Her type of portrayal is familiar in 1980s feminist texts in which the politics of difference is recognised in feminist writers’ characters. Pym describes Leonora’s moments of weakness briefly but powerfully. As well as rewriting Humphrey’s behaviour, Leonora shows more observable signs of inability to cope with reality. Despite lighting, large hats or reflection in a complimentary flawed mirror Leonora concedes her age. When she recognises that ‘those brown spots on her own hands […] were surely a sign of age? The headache began to return and she lay down again, the tears trickling slowly down her cheeks’ (TSDD, p.74). In this moment of private reflection Lenora’s age is unconcealed.

Leonora’s motivation can be examined as the outcome of women’s limited canvas for action. At the same time, neither she nor her predecessor, Allegra Gray, evokes sympathy. Leonora’s cruelty to her elderly neighbour (TSDD, pp. 44-45) and Allegra’s insensitivity toward her fiancé’s sister (EW, pp. 189-191) are weapons in their fight to win a man. Leonora’s purpose is ownership and Allegra’s the more understandable need for status and economic sustenance. Such desires depart from Pym’s usual depiction of the relationships between women and men. Pym’s women characters are usually emotionally as well as financially secure. They usually demonstrate some facets of sisterhood. However, both Leonora and Allegra see other women as threats rather than companions.
While rejecting the feminist notion of sisterhood, Pym gives Leonora the determination, which when depicted in a feminist character, is used to challenge discrimination. Conversely, Leonora’s behaviour endorses patriarchy. In addition, Leonora’s use of other women to enhance her positive idea of herself is anti-feminist. However, a feminist writer does not use only feminist characters to produce a feminist narrative. Fairbairns’ Daphne Barclay who believes that feminist ‘ethics are a luxury, exclusive to those who did not have to struggle: those who lived in self-contained worlds whether of wealth or ideology’\textsuperscript{762} and Jo Toms whose determination to maintain her marriage is paramount\textsuperscript{763} are as determined as Leonora to protect their worlds and to use other women to do so. The portrait of Leonora, although developed by Pym in a very different era, can be linked convincingly with both characters. Each writer brings complexity to a situation in which a central woman character’s relationship with a man sharpens her resolve. Fairbairns’ \textit{Daddy’s Girls} undermines the identification with sisterhood when Jo uses her daughters to maintain her marriage; in \textit{Closing} Daphne uses Theresa and representatives of the women’s movement to win the approval of her omnipresent employer; in \textit{The Sweet Dove Died} Leonora ensures her comfort by denying women and esteeming men. Common to Leonora, Jo and Daphne is their ability to hide from themselves their exploitation of others.

Where two of the women differ is in Leonora’s overt self-confidence in comparison with Jo’s overt self-deprecating behaviour. However, Daphne’s arrogance is very similar to Leonora’s in its self-protective manipulation of events that impact on her positive self-assessment. Leonora and Daphne both believe that they can do no wrong. Leonora’s suffering when she loses James is controlled, as is Daphne’s acceptance of her loss of her business and prestige. Daphne’s dream of her own company becomes an opportunity at an outpost in Africa; Leonora returns to her life of beautiful accoutrements, male companionship and women friends to whom she feels superior. Like Jo and

\textsuperscript{762} Fairbairns, \textit{Closing}, p. 418.
\textsuperscript{763} Fairbairns, \textit{Daddy’s Girls}. 
Daphne, Leonora is a difficult character to assess, opening up a range of questions about the place of such women in feminist work. Leonora’s sexual experience with Humphrey makes a feminist argument which is lost in an otherwise unsympathetic portrayal. Nonetheless, it is an example of Pym’s willingness to deal with complexity in this novel, largely dispensing with her familiar binary feminist approach. Leonora’s characterisation gave Pym the opportunity to deal with complex feminist issues. She took the opportunity and anticipated the work of feminists that was developed in the climate of the 1980s.

IV

The unpublished short stories are examples of Pym’s social commentary unembellished and hidden. Spinsters remain important characters and their behaviour is at times bizarre and even less conventional than that in the novels. Pym’s use of the shorter form of her work for social commentary links Pym with Austen. Their short stories are remarkably similar in the strength with which they enunciate simple manifestos about human relationships. Most often, these are interaction between women and men; however, families are not exempt from either’s caustic pen. Several of the short stories demonstrate Pym’s concerns with women’s economic need to marry; others demonstrate the lack of romance in marriages where there is no such motivation.

Pym wrote her short stories over the same period as she wrote the novels. The short stories chosen by Cocking for publication in Green Leaves, and translation into dramatic readings include, “An Afternoon Visit”, The

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764 The “rejected” spinster in “The German Baron” actively wishes her friend ill. While potential murder is averted and relief and abasement overwhelms the erstwhile murderess, it is a dramatic solution to competition over a man. In “Mothers and Fathers” the possibility of murder is also raised, a mother-in-law and then her daughter dying in dubious circumstances. These stories also have their comic moments, in keeping with the novels in which serious events are treated side by side with comedy.

German Baron”, “The Pilgrimage” and “Poor Mildred”. Holt’s choices in *Civil to Strangers* are, “So, Some Tempestuous Morn”, “Goodbye Balkan Capital”, “The Christmas Visit” (published in the same year in the *Church Times*) and “Across a Crowded Room”. The volume, listed below, suggests that Pym’s interest in writing short stories was not limited to her early efforts, and perhaps advisedly so as “Across A Crowded Room” was published in 1979 in *The New Yorker*.


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767 *GL*, 8 2, 2002.
768 *GL*, 10 1, 2004.
769 MS Pym 96, fols 216-217. Accepted by the BBC, produced by Hugh Stewart and transmitted 1/2/1950.
770 MS Pym 163/1, fol. 4 “Jumble Sale” was sold to *Women and Beauty* for £4. It was renamed “The White Elephant” as the former title had already been used by another writer.
Termites” and “Tariff of Malpractice”, notes) and additional notes and drafts for short stories.\footnote{MSS Pym 92-94, Miscellaneous Literary Papers, fols 1-300.}

It is worth asking why Pym’s other short stories were not published. They have not been afforded the generosity that led to publication of Austen’s unformed collection, Love and Freindship. Pym also referred to her short stories as “juvenilia” which suggests that she recognised them as youthful pieces rather than fully accomplished works. With this background, Pym might not have been averse to letting them become public. Austen’s are also simple stories and Pym’s make a satisfactory comparison. However, one reason not to publish hinges on the belief that to do so will harm Pym’s reputation.\footnote{Cocking, personal communication.} Another issue is whether the stories are able to stand the test of time. There is some validity in these concerns. On the other hand, some of the stories are of historical interest as they demonstrate Pym’s development of ideas which are relevant today. Others are of literary interest because they encompass some of the ideas Pym produced in a modified form in her novels. Where the short stories are incomplete there is reason to let them remain unpublished. However in relation to the completed works, and in particular those she chose to send to publishers, Pym’s novels establish her as an author of merit, well able to surmount any imperfect writing from her past. One possibility for the works remaining unpublished and of particular interest in relation to this thesis is that nowhere else does Pym so robustly expose some of the concerns that are dealt with more subtly in the novels.\footnote{Anthony Kaufman, article, untitled and undated, MS Pym 96, fol. 18 ‘And don’t we, men and women, abandon each other – a kind of mutual throwing out.}

Four short stories provide an example of the way in which Pym treated familiar themes from her novels in her short unpublished works. “A Letter from My Love” depicts the relationship between an engaged couple. Despite the woman’s misgivings, she will marry to conform to the “norm” Catherine Oliphant refers to in Less Than Angels. “A Vicar Floating By” is also seemingly familiar territory with its vicar and spinster sisters. The resolution
of the plot takes place in a different manner from any envisaged in Pym’s novels. The strongest social commentary is in two 1950s short stories, “The Funeral” which reflects 1970s feminist values and “The Rich Man in his Castle” 774 which deals compellingly with class issues.

“A Letter from My Love” depicts the discordant relationship between Margaret and her fiancé, Geoffrey. Their choice of a holiday destination illustrates their unsuitability: Margaret is in Budapest and Geoffrey is holidaying with his family in ‘the usual place in Wales for a fortnight’. 775 The binary feminist position that Pym adopts in her novels is immediately apparent through the juxtaposition of the inert man and active woman. The presence of two spinsters establishes a comparison of single life with Margaret’s life as preparation for marriage. The spinsters’ enjoyment in writing letters to friends compares positively with Margaret’s reluctance to correspond with Geoffrey. Pym makes two points about marital status. The spinsters have multiple correspondents and full lives. In contrast, Margaret has only one correspondent, whom she finds “tiresome”. Margaret’s life is already confined and unsatisfactory in comparison with the spinsters’ example. Convention decrees that Margaret marry but her rumination that writing ‘to one’s devoted fiancé should be a delight’ 776 suggests that convention can be a duty and serves women badly.

Heightening the impact of Margaret’s disillusion with the inevitability of her marriage is her attempt to escape. Her freedom is illusionary because it relies on yet another man for its fulfilment. She has an affair with Miklas, a guide. Although Catherine Oliphant and Tom Mallow have an unmarried sexual relationship (LTA), it is sanitised in comparison with the sexual encounter inferred in this short story. The married Miklas, rather than being

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774 Reference to the hymn which is the focus of the short story is made by Dulcie Mainwaring in No Fond Return of Love. She prepares to conduct such a debate with herself over the iniquity of the hymn’s theme while waiting for the offending lines during a church service. She is thwarted as they do not occur (NFRL, p. 27).
775 MS Pym 92, fol. 263.
776 MS Pym 92, fol. 268.
the rather dull Tom (LTA), or 'the sandy haired and rosy faced Geoffrey'\textsuperscript{777} is an overtly sexual being. He 'is so dark, so sunburnt, and had such flashing white teeth, and such a charming foreign accent'.\textsuperscript{778} Margaret's observation that Hungarians are untroubled by infidelity is countered by Miklas's criticism of the English as unromantic. The 'romance' being debated is not romantic allusions and imagery, both of which are familiar in the novels. However, the outcome confirms bleakness of the reality of a sexual liaison which is more attractive than the proposed marriage.

The "romantic" interlude in a holiday destination of her choice behind her, Margaret confronts the married life she will live with Geoffrey. His 'patronising manner towards her'\textsuperscript{779} suggests that although he discounts Margaret's story about the romantic encounter, he recognises that she has no alternative to marriage. Margaret's individuality is undercut when Geoffrey begins to call her "dear". Pym is more explicit about the affect this has on Margaret than when she refers to Alan Grimstone ushering Caro through the door to the Maynard's party (AAQ). Both men are showing their ownership of the women; both men are also conducting themselves in a manner considered an accepted way to treat women. The men's behaviour, seen through a masculine gaze or that of an anti-feminist, who promote appearance over reality in male/female relationships is caring and acceptable. However, to Margaret the comfort of conventional behaviour deprives her of her freedom 'Margaret felt suddenly miserable again [...] It was all so unlike Budapest'.\textsuperscript{780}

Even more explicit is Geoffrey's "chatter". The stereotypical feminine image confirms his lack of physical presence and Margaret "freezes inside". She is now as bereft of feeling as her fiancé. Her attempt to create some emotion in the relationship is misguided and unsuccessful. When Geoffrey does not respond to her "provocative" account of her affair, she reflects "How

\textsuperscript{777} MS Pym 92, fol. 265.  
\textsuperscript{778} MS Pym 92, fol. 267.  
\textsuperscript{779} MS Pym 92, fol. 273.  
\textsuperscript{780} MS Pym 92, fol. 273.
could she marry a person who didn’t even understand her? confirming her lack of options margaret marries geoffrey but ‘as it was she would have to spend the rest of her life trying to convince a fiancé and then a husband that a hungarian had made love to her. it was a very dreary prospect’. margaret’s statement fulfils the same purpose as the images of dissatisfaction pym draws in the married lives of women in the novels. however, in the short story the statement about marriage is unambiguous and the narrative unembellished with cozy images.

contrasting with margaret’s acceptance of events is the behaviour of two spinsters in one of the more comical and unique unpublished short stories. “a vicar floating by” features pym’s usual vicar, church fundraising and spinsters but the relationships are a sharpened version of the way they are observed in the novels. the spinsters are successful surreal artists. paintings replace pym’s familiar territory of literature and religion to focus on spiritual and speculative ideas. the tangibility of the anthropologists’ ideas, a familiar counter point in the novels is absent. pym concentrates on the spinster artists, their work and their control of the narrative.

the pinnacle of the women’s artistic success features a floating vicar and a stove embedded in a mountain. the image combines familiarity with exotica, with the connections between the church and domestic life placed in a far from domestic environment. when the sisters’ artistic popularity wanes, they produce work that is even more outrageous. eventually ‘they thought nothing of making pictures of holy things and lavatories and nude torsos’. becoming aware of the pernicious influence of chasing popularity through producing increasingly bizarre paintings, they return home. pym’s notes suggest that initially she considered the using the vicar’s illness as a reason for the sisters’ return. unlike the novels in which the more radical ideas in the drafts are pruned, in the short story pym discards the conventional outcome. it is

781 ms pym 92, fol. 274.
782 ms pym 92, fol. 276.
783 ms pym 99, fols 24-38.
784 ms pym 92, fol. 41.
supplanted by the sisters’ self-realisation, placing their feelings as well as their actions at the centre of the work. They are presented as original and strong. Pym makes the sisters’ decision, rather than compliance, the focus of the narrative.  

“The Funeral” is another short story that appears to cover familiar territory with its central characters of two spinster sisters. However, this narrative uses the spinsters’ personalities and life styles to make two explicitly feminist arguments. One theme questions the claim that women are inherently nurturers. However, the point is made that the proposition that they are domesticated is attractive to men. The other feature of the story is a direct attack on one of the features of a nurturing role. The comfortable image of domesticity, a house, is the focus. Pym has referred to the problems associated with a conventional domestic life in Less Than Angels when Catherine can adapt herself only for two weeks to the Swan household. The seeming comfort of family life is a trap Catherine has to leave to keep her independent personality intact. More explicitly, she can only keep her economic independence by being free to continue writing her stories.

In “The Funeral” Meg has remained in the family home, caring for her father. She has adopted a traditionally female role by accepting being housebound in conciliatory circumstances because of her sense of duty. “The Funeral” focuses on a woman’s imprisonment that is the outcome of her accepting the role of nurturer. Her sister, Helen, has had no family responsibilities because she escaped overseas. However, her elegance and independence is weakened by her need for men’s approval. Her freedom has not given her complete satisfaction, connecting her with Margaret in “A Letter from My Love”. Their father’s funeral brings the sisters together in one locale.

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785 The sisters in Some Tame Gazelle, while unconventional are limited to dealing with corsets, hiding knitted underwear and appearing in Celanese underwear.
786 MS Pym 92, fol. 217.
787 Such a technique is familiar as a catalyst to bring disparate family members together and to project a different future for them.
The assumptions made about women’s inherent suitability to a domestic role are drawn through Helen’s adoption of the role to repel an admirer. His increased attraction to her demonstrates the value he sees in a woman as a nurturer. Meg plans to leave the house she describes as ‘a sort of monster to be cared for and propitiated’.\textsuperscript{788} Pym’s occasional articulation of simple feminist understandings, such as her reference to the double standard in \textit{Less Than Angels}, is used in this story. Meg declaims ‘Whoever designed this house never thought of the women who’d have to toil in it’.\textsuperscript{789} She is pleased to be ‘free to live my own life. I’m very lucky, some women don’t ever have the chance, or when it comes, they’re too old to be able to take it’.\textsuperscript{790}

In ‘The Funeral’, the death of the patriarchal figure gives Meg the economic and emotional freedom to leave the tyranny of domesticity. Meg articulates the problem for women under patriarchy and her commentary undermines the comfortable version of fathering and home.\textsuperscript{791} The theme is typical of 1970s concerns about patriarchal control over women’s lives. Helen’s storyline also challenges the assumption that women have inherent qualities that suit them to domesticity. Her rejection of those qualities as dull and unappealing leads her to believe that by adopting them she will protect herself from unwanted male attention. She is wrong, as in keeping with patriarchal convention, a man is attracted to her because of the image.

Underlying the two domestic narratives is Pym’s attention to women’s reality. Women are alone, as recognised by Letty (\textit{QA}) and need to take responsibility for themselves, as articulated by Marcia, also in \textit{Quartet in Autumn}. All the women in the two short stories battle with their need for approval, whether they are conforming or trying to escape gendered expectations. The potential bleakness is similar to some of the images in the Weldon and Fairbairns works. Patriarchy forms the foundation for the

\textsuperscript{788} MS Pym 92, fol.222.
\textsuperscript{789} MS Pym 92.
\textsuperscript{790} MS Pym 92.
\textsuperscript{791} Pym’s ironic eye although cast often upon men, rarely includes fathers.
women’s struggle to find value in themselves and potentially limits their ability to do so.

“The Rich Man in his Castle” is an undeviating rebuttal of the class and economic differences that normally serve as an undercurrent in Pym’s novels. Although Pym’s concern with class is more explicit in An Unsuitable Attachment than her previous novels, in this short story class is the central issue. There is a final version and two drafts, each with some modifications, suggesting that Pym treated the theme with some of the same meticulousness with which she approached her longer works.792 The source of the title is the hymn “All things bright and beautiful”. The lines, omitted from the version sung in No Fond Return of Love, ‘The rich man in his castle/ the poor man at his gate/ God made them high and low/And order’d this estate’793 provide the catalyst for a debate about class conducted in the past, and a reminder of the past in the present. The major debates in the past focus on the immutability of class, the moral imperatives which support hierarchy and class collusion. In the present a tourist couple at the castle, which is also the setting for the past, debate what one sees as a positive Victorian morality while the other lays bare its injustice by reference to the hymn. Two drafts emphasise the religious beliefs which support class differences. In one draft class barriers are breached by the romantic liaison between a couple from different backgrounds.

The final version features a debate around the different outcomes that the children of a deceased clergyman794 and earl can expect. Fanny, one of the Earl’s daughters, makes the argument that moral behaviour has a part in establishing a person’s class and she uses the sentiments in the hymn to support her case for class difference.795 Fanny buttresses her belief in her family’s morality through her familiarity with their generosity in the village.796 However, conflicting with her statement is the reality that ‘The Earl has a

792 MS Pym 94, Notebook, fols 76-110.
794 MS Pym 96, fol. 80.
795 MS Pym 96, fol. 80.
796 MS Pym 96, fol. 87.
mistress in a villa on Lake Como’. Although Fanny only fleetingly recognises the difference between public and private morality, Pym makes the point that what appears to be affirmative behaviour, can hide an unpleasant reality.

Pym’s irony is apparent in her treatment of virtue as a factor that entrenches class differences: the Earl’s infidelities are the catalyst for his daughter’s growing friendship with Edward, an unsuitable marriage prospect. Pym’s description of Edward as attractive and unlike James’ other friends who were ‘nearly always blue-eyed and ruddy-faced, interested in nothing but horses and hunting’ creates a negative impression of the suitable attachments Fanny might make.

Fanny’s argument that class is immutable is strained by changes in in the family’s economic position. The Earl’s descendants now reside in one wing of the castle that featured as the family home in the past. The alteration in the owners’ circumstances, reflecting changes in society, is emphasised when the tourist couple wonder ‘If the rich man in his castle does teas?’. By placing the descendants at the castle, albeit in only one wing, Pym questions whether class differences are immutable. On the other hand, she also makes the point that changes take place slowly. Pym uses the same modest approach to the difference between Fanny from the castle and Edward, the son of an Oxford Professor. Pym avoids both the heavy handedness of choosing a stock character and, significantly, rejects one of the strategies she uses in the novels to make her arguments more acceptable.

In an alternative draft, “All Things Bright and Beautiful” is sung at a church service. When Edward does not join in, the debate ends with Edward’s

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797 MS Pym 96, fol. 87.
798 MS Pym 96, fol. 81.
799 The suitable and unsuitable attachment is a familiar theme through the novel of that title, but also in additional short stories, such as “The English Ladies” where a spinster decides she would like to adopt an orphan, MS Pym 92, fol. 135-159; “Mothers and Fathers”, a farcical story which includes a father and, unknown to them, his daughter, who plan to marry, MS Pym 94, fol. 1-30; and “The Day the Music Came” in which a romantic moment is superseded by a dull marriage, MS Pym 92, fol. 93-126.
800 MS Pym 96, fol. 89.
strong statement: ‘You can’t really think that God made them high or lowly and ordered their estate’. Fanny’s rejoinder ‘We are put on earth to do our duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call us. You know that Edward’ is counteracted by Edward’s scepticism about her family’s show of social concern. He is unimpressed by in implications of ‘the bowls of nourishing soup, the red flannel petticoats, the Christmas tree for the tenants’ His statement confronts the noblesse oblige that denies classes of people their rights: ‘The whole system is wrong’.

A conversation between the governess and her employer demonstrates another issue associated with debates about class: complicity in maintaining the dominant view. Fanny’s mother and Miss Venables agree that ‘These people like being crowded together’. Miss Venables supports the theme of the hymn by reinforcing the sentiments ‘There will always be rich and poor.’

The narrative in the present provides a link with the complicity exhibited by the governess in the past. One tourist exclaims the ‘Victorians were good in a way we don’t understand now’. Like Edward, her companion disagrees ‘It’s no good being sentimental about them [...] You think of it all as being like a cozy Victorian novel. Don’t you remember that hymn?’

The short stories demonstrate Pym’s preparedness to commentate on gender and class issues, and in the instance above, religion as the foundation for inequality. They also demonstrate a general freedom not found in her early novels. Some of the issues, treated without the village cover in the short stories, appear in a low-key form in the novels. The similarities between the strength of the way in which Pym dealt with gender and class are more apparent in An Unsuitable Attachment and The Sweet Dove Died until she wrote the 1970s novels. These two, initially unsuccessful novels, have been described as unsuitable for the swinging sixties market. At the time, the closest

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801 MS Pym 96, fol. 83.
802 MS Pym 96, fol. 83.
803 MS Pym 96, fol. 84.
804 MS Pym 96, fol. 86.
805 MS Pym 96, fol. 88.
any commentary comes to such an assertion is that Cape decided that *An Unsuitable Attachment* might be uncommercial. In 1963, it is questionable that the term “the swinging sixties” had been so well established in the literary world that there was a need to dismiss a novel that met at least one of its tenets: a narrative that questioned conventional behaviour and attitudes. Pym acknowledges that at the time she had no understanding of the reasons for the rejection. Pym’s disappointment with *No Fond Return of Love*, which depended so precisely on her experiences, possibly led her to adopt a different approach to the novel she began in 1960. She was prepared to try something different, to suit her needs. She did not want to continue writing the same sort of novel, despite recognising that readers so often want such certainly.\(^{806}\) She was dissatisfied with the romantic approach and it seems possible that her search led her to working with the type of material she found suitable for her short stories. Pym’s attack on convention, although apposite to the 1960s, did not do well without the village cover familiar from her earlier work. It is possible that the publishers found a lack of connection between the content and form. In the 1970s in which feminist ideas abounded Pym dispensed with her old form as well as the village cover. *An Academic Question* was not completed but *Quartet in Autumn* was designated not only suitable for publication but short listing for the Booker Prize.

\(^{806}\) MS Pym 96, fol. 101.
CHAPTER 6

SEVENTIES SUCCESS: AN ACADEMIC QUESTION AND QUARTET IN AUTUMN

This is the morning Arthur picked (if that is the word) four enormous pumpkins, one of which was so big that Sid could hardly stagger along with it. These would be for the competition at The Plough—a real test of Male Chauvinist Piggery.\textsuperscript{807}

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*An Academic Question* and *Quartet in Autumn* were written and set in the 1970s. They continue Pym’s change in approach begun with *An Unsuitable Attachment* and *The Sweet Dove Died*. She sharpened her argument by largely omitting quotations;\textsuperscript{808} introducing central characters overtly modern in outlook; minimising description; and wholly dispensing with a village or village-like environment. Pym’s feminist argument is enhanced by her reduction of the material to the kernel of her concerns. Although both novels reflect briefly on racial issues, her overarching theme of scientific versus imaginative thought appears only briefly in Emma’s decision to renounce anthropology in favour of writing a novel (*AFGL*, p.220). The form of the novels is ideally suited to the content, overcoming the problems with *An Unsuitable Attachment* where ideas and form engage awkwardly. In particular, *Quartet in Autumn* is desolate in content and austere in form.\textsuperscript{809} Although *An Academic Question* portrays a younger, more financially secure and well educated group, in execution it is closer to *Quartet in Autumn* than it is to Pym’s previous work. Both novels focus on contemporary and complex topics

\textsuperscript{807} MS Pym 82, Diaries, September 1979, fol. 4.
\textsuperscript{808} Pym’s decision to dispense with quotations is her last link with the feature of her work that met with Liddell’s unstinting approval.
\textsuperscript{809} *Quartet in Autumn* shows evidence of meticulous editing as demonstrated by Pym’s page by page notation of what she has included and queries to herself about whether there is too much information, MS Pym 33, fols 2-12.
and provide no light-hearted asides to challenge the focus on Pym’s feminist ideas. The few seemingly distracting devices in *An Academic Question* contribute to the feminist narrative. Pym’s rendering of what it is to be a married woman who questions her role in *An Academic Question* is Pym’s most direct interpretation of Friedan’s feminist concerns. The novel is Pym’s acknowledgement that the issue deserved an exclusive narrative. There are also no distractions from the intensity of *Quartet in Autumn*’s portrayal of unmarried working women of retirement age. Writing at the beginning of the decade, Pym took full advantage of the environment which gave 1970s writers the imprimatur to write more openly about the discord in women’s lives.

The cultural atmosphere of the 1970s was also more hospitable to bolder language which was largely adopted by Weldon. However, modern feminist debate provided the background to Weldon and Fairbairns’ first novels and Pym’s last novels. While the debate began with Friedan whose 1960s work provided much of the impetus for the sort of ideas expressed in Pym’s early work, she wrote *An Academic Question* when a plethora of writers from Britain, America, Australia and New Zealand began articulating feminist concerns. The 1970s theorists also concerned themselves with marriage, paid work and economics. These writers included women such as Robin Morgan, Juliet Mitchell, Germaine Greer, Kate Millet and Sheila Rowbotham. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, first published in 1949, was reprinted in 1972. Some men were also interested in feminist topics, for example, Ross Davies published *Women and Work* in 1975 and Richard J. Evans produced a wide-ranging history of women’s movements, *The Feminists* in 1977.

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Fairbairns took particular interest in the political debates, but both she and Weldon understood and took advantage of the feminist framework articulated in the period. They used their understanding to make their observations about marriage, infidelities and sex outside marriage unambiguously feminist. They developed narratives that challenged weddings as a fairytale ending but a difficult beginning to relationships between women and men. Weldon articulates the burden marriage can place on a woman with a character saying ‘Marriage is too strong an institution for me [...] It is altogether too heavy and powerful’. In a very modest way, Pym’s married women suggested that marriage was confining, and spinsters such as Catherine Oliphant actively avoided entrapment in any domestic situation. However, in comparison with the feminists who began publishing in the late 1960s and 1970s Pym’s work had clouded her characters’ negative responses to marriage. In A Few Green Leaves, written during the late 1970s Pym acknowledges that marriage problems are ‘very commonplace and predictable – the kind of thing that was happening all the time’ (AFGL, p.39).

In writing her 1970s novels, it is possible that Pym did not respond directly to the feminist ideas that were by then a natural part of the writer’s milieu. However, there is no doubt that the ideas permeate her work. By dispensing with her self-censorship and the village cover Pym produced essentially feminist novels, dictating her feminist ideas through characters, narratives and, most significantly, contemporary settings. Her feminism drives from observation rather than a theoretical framework but that does not detract from her feminist approach. Pym continued her pattern of giving women central roles in the narrative; destabilising the notion that women were inherently nurturing; and introducing binary feminist comments. The two novels discussed in this chapter explicitly question women’s worlds. The domestic and academic feature in An Academic Question and the workplace in Quartet in Autumn.

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817 Female Friends, p. 9.
Although Pym’s work is quite different from the trenchant nature of Weldon’s novels and the political debate of Fairbairns’ the difference in tone and style does not obscure the similarity of important aspects of the content. In one respect, similarly to her work on spinsters, Pym was in advance of Weldon and Fairbairns. Older women retiring from the workforce are largely ignored in their 1970s work. Weldon’s first novel to concentrate on women, ageing and eccentricity is *Rhode Island Blues.* Fairbairns’ inclusion of an older woman working to support herself is only one aspect of one theme of her saga, *Stand We at Last.* Muriel Sparks’ *Memento Mori* is sometimes associated with Pym’s *Quartet in Autumn.* Its concentration on older people being reminded of death covers one aspect of *Quartet in Autumn.*

Publication of Weldon’s *Down Among The Women* coincided with Pym’s writing *An Academic Question.* Both novels deal with patriarchy and within it, women’s dissatisfactions in marriage; treatment of children; and the parasitical nature of some married women’s lives. In *Down Among The Women* the central women are spirited, amoral and given to over-dramatised behaviour and reactions. The novel places women in the workforce and challenges the assumption that they should nurture children or partners. Weldon is harsh in her treatment of the children in *Down Among The Women.* They are abandoned, neglected in favour of partying, mistreated, moved from place to place according to their parent’s whims, and their absence is rejoiced in. Marriage is dealt with as an ever changeable commodity. Conversely, women find it financially and emotionally crucial. Infidelity is an essential aspect of the work and unfaithful women experience violent rejection, cruelty or economic disadvantage. Only a woman who is part of the authorial

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819 Fairbairns, *Stand We at Last.*
821 Morgan.
822 Weldon, *Down Among The Women,* p. 5.
voice stays in her marriage despite her husband's infidelity. Fear of financial loss and the status of marriage impede her: 'What else could she do? She is fifty, intelligent, and nice, but she is fifty. She has been trained to behave well, and not to shout, scream or murder'.

Fairbairns' *Benefits* combines a satisfying narrative with a political debate that examines assumptions about women's nurturing qualities. The impact on the birth rate of women's freedom of choice is debated within a discernible feminist framework. Fairbairns addresses abortion as a broad political issue, demonstrating its universal importance by introducing a political party's campaign to procure a higher birth rate as "for the good of the nation". The debate approaches a topic that Pym had long considered through her overtly milder work, with its interrogative stance on whether women are necessarily nurturers and child bearers. Fairbairns adds to the complexity of the argument by giving it a personal dimension with a central character's mixed feelings about pregnancy. Fairbairns' narrative explicitly rejects a conservative party leader's declaration that 'the true liberation of women will never come about until proper respect and value is placed upon their role as nurturers'.

Weldon and Fairbairns dealt with complex ideas from the position of familiarity with feminist theoretical debate. Pym dealt with the same complexities at the same time as she found the women's movement 'strident'. Although she read Weldon's *Female Friends* in 1978 there is no evidence that Pym became a reader of feminist theory. However, her innate understanding of justice and sound observations were a robust substitution for a feminist framework. She wrote *An Academic Question* between 1970 and 1972 but did not complete it. Pym told Larkin that her attempt written in the first person was 'too cosy to have any chance of being published in the unsympathetic climate of the day' (*AAQ*, Note). Her second attempt aimed at

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830 Fairbairns, *Benefits*, p. 39 and Fairbairns, "How Do You Pronounce Nulliparous?"
831 Holt, email, 8 January, 2012.
832 MS Pym 145, Diary, 1978, fol. 66.
making the novel ‘more “sharp” and “swinging”’ (AAQ, Note). Pym lamented her inability to produce a ‘Margaret Drabble effort’ (AAQ, Preface). However, only the nuanced way in which Pym writes about the complexities of the period separates it from other novels that debate the changes to women’s position. Notably Pym modified her endorsement of Drabble’s novels after her self-confidence was restored in 1975. 833 Before her success with Quartet in Autumn Pym considered herself from the perspective of an experienced writer whose first assertively gender and class driven work was rejected. Despite negative experiences over the succeeding ten years, Pym maintained one of the identifying features of her work, her contemporary observations. She dealt with topical issues in the 1970s using her familiar skills while adapting her tone and content to the period.

Holt smoothed together the two drafts of An Academic Question to accomplish the published form ‘very unlike her other novels’ (AAQ, Note). The novel was published posthumously in 1986. Unusually for Pym, she had not selected a title. Holt chose “An Academic Question”, quoting from a phrase twenty pages from the end of the novel (AAQ, p.162), and based on her understanding that the novel was inspired by an academic wrangle in Africa (AAQ, Note). Holt’s choice suggests that she saw the papers as the crux of the novel. 834 Also, Pym said that ‘the idea […] was inspired by that business […] in Africa’. 835 Despite her choice of title and editing of the material Holt intruded in no important way in what became Pym’s exploratory, but thoughtful,

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833 In her diaries March 1979 - Sept 1979, after Quartet in Autumn was published Pym questioned whether The Ice Age was a ‘good read […] or a marathon?’ fol. v11. In the same diaries she also comments ‘She [Margaret Drabble] gives one almost too much – but I give too little – laziness and unwillingness to do “research” which doesn’t seem to fit into my kind of novel’, MS Pym 81, fol. v13.. Pym’s detailed notebooks belie that claim that she did no research.

834 Pym referred to An Academic Question as her ‘novel about a provincial university’, Note, AAQ. Jane Potter’s Presentation, ‘Publish or Perish: Ambition, Rivalry and Plagiarism in An Academic Question and Beyond’ put the theft of the Stillingfleet papers into a stark academic perspective. Pym was investigating the moral compass of academic life as well as the marriage of Caro and Alan. Her paper, like Stratton’s comment on the burning of anthropological notes (FN) brings a desirable academic approach to matters to which Pym demonstrates a humorous, but somewhat cavalier approach.

835 Holt, ALTA, p. 227.
account of a woman trying to make sense of her life in the 1970s. The theft of the Stillingfleet papers became an adjunct to Caro’s relationship with her husband, her voluntary work and the university. The novel thus created, the most overtly feminist of Pym’s work, is her own. Caroline Grimstone’s characterisation reflects Friedan’s description of the ennui experienced by housewives: ‘buried, unspoken […] a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction […] As she made the beds, shopped for groceries […] she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question — ‘Is this all?’

In An Academic Question Pym’s feminist ideas emerge in the environment of a provincial university. Unsurprisingly it contrasts with her two previous works in an academic environment: Crampton Hodnet, set in North Oxford in the 1930s, and the short story “So, Some Tempestuous Morn” (CS, pp.353-367) a rewritten extract from the novel. Jessie Morrow’s role as an unconventional spinster in Jane and Prudence was discussed in Chapter 2. Pym used her 1930s academic novel to introduce her as a new type of troublesome women. Pym’s 1970s An Academic Question also introduces a different aspect of the troublesome woman. The academic novels were compared briefly in Chapter 4 where Pym’s use of the village cover in her 1930s novel was examined. In this chapter the two novels are also compared, contrasting Pym’s accomplished introduction of a different type of troublesome woman into her work, locating them seamlessly into the different academic environments conjured up by the 1930s and 1970s.

Crampton Hodnet combines domestic and academic scenarios, beginning with preparations for tea for selected Oxford students and finishing with the same event a year later. Despite being a companion and ‘looked upon as a piece of furniture [...] hardly a person at all’ (CH, p.17), Jessie controls the narrative as observer and commentator. In contrast with her description as ‘a thin, used-up-looking woman in her middle thirties’ (CH, p.2) she brings ‘the sinful brightness of a continental Sunday’ (CH, p.2) to North Oxford through

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Radio Luxembourg. Although the downtrodden companion is evoked by her hand ‘on the switch, ready to fade out this unsuitable noise should the familiar step and voice be heard before their time’ (CH, p.2) the image is promptly dispelled. Jessie is described as ‘a woman of definite personality’ (CH, p.2). Miss Doggett’s ignorance of Jessie’s activities (CH, pp. 91-94) demonstrates her autonomy, foreshadowing her greater deception in Jane and Prudence.

Jessie, like the authorial Pym, watches with sardonic amusement the reactions of Miss Doggett and her companions to the affair between Barbara and Francis and the behaviour of the curate, Mr Latimer. Miss Doggett’s snobbery is laid bare through Jessie’s ruminations (CH, p.26) and her sardonic voice and internal musings question convention and subject predictable phrases to scrutiny (CH, p.30). Jessie’s rejection of the curate’s marriage proposal undermines Miss Doggett’s recurrent suggestion that she is inexperienced. Her understanding of partnership is finer than the young curate’s, the “victim” of interested women (CH, p.21). Unlike the Bede sisters’ refusals, which are sources of comedy (STG), Jessie’s judgment of what a marriage should be (CH, p.93) also highlights the shameful behaviour of the two central male characters (CH, p.64; p.86; pp.90-94; and pp.90-91).

Crampton Hodnet introduces feminist points in a range of situations, but does not expand upon them. For example, Lady Beddoes, widow of an Ambassador, exemplifies the insubstantial nature of women’s status achieved through marriage. She is not ‘important enough by herself” (CH, p.109). Her son’s negative commentary (CH, pp.107-108) confirms her lack of status. The vicar’s wife is an unconventional figure in a conventional role (CH, p.16) but her husband’s lack of perceptive qualities compares poorly with her understanding of parish matters (CH, p.62-63). A tutor ignores a female student’s ability to take a First and imagines her adopting a domestic role in his life (CH, p.102). It is assumed that another young woman will be successful if she can marry a suitable man. Both assumptions are challenged. Binary feminism is apparent in Margaret Cleveland’s expectation that her husband will behave in a child-like manner (CH, pp.14-15), his conforming to her low opinion (CH, pp.48-50) and his incompetent conduct of a putative affair (CH, pp.186-189). The curate’s farcical explanations for his absence from Evensong
(CH, pp.39-43 and (pp.44-46), distress that he might be expected to do his duty
(CH, p.153) and need for a woman to help him do it (CH, p.157) are also
examples of Pym’s comic approach at the expense of men.

“So, Some Tempestuous Morn”, written in the 1950s, focuses on
Jessie’s strengthened character and juxtaposes her with Anthea Cleveland,
daughter of Oxford English Professor, Francis Cleveland. Contrary to class and
gender politics, Anthea’s advantages of youth, attractiveness, wealth and
education have little impact on the narrative. Anthea’s role is predictably a
simple romantic account with only a minor attempt at rejecting convention (CS,
pp.365-367).

Pym’s concern with giving status to the older, disadvantaged woman is
confirmed by the role she gives Jessie. She is a dissident voice in an
establishment setting, providing a subtext of successful noncompliance. In
contrast, Miss Doggett’s conformity is highlighted. Alongside her ignorance of
Jessie’s behaviour and snobbery associated with Anthea’s love affairs, Miss
Doggett is the vehicle through whom Pym shows the sexism inherent in the
treatment of a spinster as “past it” and a bachelor in his “heyday”. She
articulates the gender discrimination apparent in the notion that while Jessie
and her admirer are the same age it is ‘quite the prime for a man, though it
could be many things for a woman and none of them the prime’ (CS, p.356).

*An Academic Question* adopts some of the strengths of the short story by
developing the most significant and sustained feminist arguments through the
central character. Caroline, known as Caro because of regretted teenage
romanticism (*AAQ*, p.4) carries most of the feminist debate through her
activities, judgments and emotions. Her narrative is more thoughtful than her
earlier counterparts’ reactions to unsatisfying marriages. At twenty-eight Caro
is chronologically younger than most of Pym’s other central protagonists. She
is unique amongst Pym’s troublesome women as a married woman who
actively seeks change. Unlike Wilmet (*AGB*) who adapts to her traditional

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837 Holt in *CS*, p. 351.
marriage, Caro assumes she must find activities outside her marriage to justify herself. Her emotional tentativeness inside her marriage and in public does not prevent her from contemplating a range of opportunities for herself. She questions her value as a woman who is not in the workforce (AAQ, p.5) and seeks a solution. Caro is not as confident in her role as the indifferent mother of Kate (AAQ, p.5) and wife to Alan whose career has precedence over his domestic life. Caro personifies the dilemma of a woman’s understanding about her place in a world in which feminist ideas have gained currency: ‘Fiction, journalism and the conversation of other university wives, some of whom had part-time jobs, tended to make me see myself as a frustrated graduate wife’ (AAQ, p.4).

A.S. Byatt considers Caro an unsympathetic character, and pronounces her ‘just plain horrid’. The dislike for Caro is almost the response articulated by Wolf to women who believed that they were entitled to more than marriage to an unpleasant man, or even a pleasant one. Criticism of Pym’s treatment of Caro’s relationship with Kate also suggests resistance to Caro’s legitimate understanding of herself in the world as an independent woman seeking fulfilment. The feminist issues Pym raises fit neatly into the feminist ideologies associated with the 1970s. In her portrayal of Caro, she removes the village cover and some of her readers do not like what they see. Pym is clearly immune to the idea that she must justify Caro’s position. In her depiction of Caro, in contrast to similarly dissatisfied married women in the

838 Byatt, Passions of the Mind, pp. 266-267.
839 Some conference participants were resistant to the argument I presented the Barbara Pym Conference in Oxford in which I defended Caro Grimstone with a feminist reading of her character. The discussion was heated at times, some people remaining unpersuaded that Caro has reasons for her behaviour, although others found a different reading of the novel made them more sympathetic to a work they had found inferior, Editorial, G.L., 15.2, 2009, p. 1.
840 Naomi Wolf.
841 Sally Duncan, Interview with Barbara Pym, “The two lives of Miss Pym”, Oxford Times 26 May 1978, in which Pym says: ‘I did attempt a Margaret Drabble-type novel, writing about a young married woman with a child. But it wasn’t very successful because I haven’t been married and haven’t children. I showed it to a friend of mine who was married and had child. She said I made the girl much too detached about her child. She didn’t have the sort of feelings that a woman with child should have. She was much too casual about it. Apparently you can’t be detached about your children’, p. 18.
pre-1970s work, she appears to take the stance that the position for some
married woman is unsustainable. In An Academic Question Pym echoes
Jenkins' refrain: 'There is a very great deal to be done'.\(^{842}\) Like Jenkins'
Imogen and the women portrayed in Quartet in Autumn, Caro must make her
own decisions and initiate her own transformation.

In comparison with her omission of any overt defence of Caro's
behaviour, Pym briefly responds to the anti-feminist complaint that proposed
changes to women and men's relationships through feminism will undermine
men's polite treatment of women. The vehicle she uses is Alan's public good
manners and private lack of concern for Caro (\textit{AAQ}, p.13). In public, Alan
ushers Caro ahead of him at the Maynard's party (\textit{AAQ}, p.7). When they
return home Alan 'went into his study, saying he would do a bit more to the
article he was writing' (\textit{AAQ}, p.13). Observable good manners are assumed an
example of thoughtfulness that non-feminist literature and argument suggests
are lost in a feminist environment. Feminist literature suggests that men's
incongruent public and private behaviour is a palpable part of patriarchy. Pym
has presented Alan Grimstone as the archetypal patriarchal male who as a
professional sociologist could be expected to be aware of feminist ideology.
However, his behaviour shows that he is at least unaware, or resistant to,
understanding the impact of his behaviour on Caro.

Alan is not one of Pym's nastier men; the Archdeacon (\textit{STG}) and Adam
Marsh-Gibbon (\textit{CS}) have that place. However, he plays an active part in his
wife's unhappiness. Pym's description identifies Alan's self-satisfaction and
innate belief that the world, even if it is the minor one of a provincial
university, should belong to him (\textit{AAQ}, p.20). He sees Caro's role as designed
to make his way easier. However, there is no reciprocal arrangement; Caro
demonstrably lacks Alan's support. Privately, Caro has no or little role in her
husband's life. He has moved out of his class, is university educated and has
married "upwards". His gender has overcome class as a criterion for

\(^{842}\) Jenkins, p. 252.
success.\textsuperscript{843} Alan’s success and interests are linked inevitably to his work. Consequently, he ignores his wife sexually and intellectually. Caro retires to bed, but Alan remains in his office typing. He appreciates Caro’s theft of the Stillingfleet manuscript at his request only fleetingly, promptly going to his office to read it (\textit{AAQ}, pp.41-44). Alan’s career rests on his making use of the manuscript against his academic competitor and thus has priority. Caro’s status as a person alone is emphasised: she is left alone in bed; “alone” watching television with Alan’s mother; or “alone” at a party (\textit{AAQ}, p13; p.27; p.28; and p.84). In her notes, Pym is more explicit: ‘Caro wishes that Alan would make love to her instead of writing to undermine someone else’.\textsuperscript{844}

A non-feminist reading of Caro’s life would blame her for her situation. Despite having the educational opportunities typical of her class, Caro has had “no proper job” and no interest in any career. She married straight from university and had a child. Her attention to her domestic role is lacklustre. Caro cooks, but in a reprise of Rowena’s frustration with her attempt to introduce different culinary approaches (\textit{AGB}), Caro’s attempt to make cookery an art is thwarted by Alan’s preference for traditional meals (\textit{AAQ}, p.17). However, although she aims to introduce meals that are more exciting she is unlikely to gain the same thrill that making perfect ravioli gave Belinda (\textit{STG}, p.230). The connection that can be made with Belinda’s pleasure and its association with her rejection of a marriage proposal points to the value of being alone. Caro is ‘conscious of lacking any special maternal feelings’ (\textit{AAQ}, p.5) and disappointed about feeling unfulfilled. However, rather than address a problem with Kate, she retreating to prepare for her evening outing. Kate and Inge, the au pair, remain in the kitchen in companionable stolid solidarity (\textit{AAQ}, p.3). Caro has no comfortable and fulfilling place in the domestic environment. In the past domesticity was an identified role in which

\textsuperscript{843} The role of gender and class in this 1970’s novel demonstrates a continuation of Pym’s approach to class as exposed in the 1960s \textit{An Unsuitable Attachment} and a more overt approach to gender issues.

\textsuperscript{844} MS Pym 31/1, fol. 4.
a woman knew what was expected. It was problematic as Pym implies in *Jane and Prudence* and states clearly in “The Funeral”. In *An Academic Question* Caro treats domestic life as an arena in which her resentments are fleetingly assuaged when she suggests Alan make his own cup of tea (*AAQ*, p.5). Pym’s depiction of women rejecting domesticity in her previous novels reflects the feminist refutation of the argument that women have inherent nurturing qualities. In *An Academic Question* Caro’s relationship to a domestic role is more complex.

Caro’s statement ‘I’m bored and frustrated and nothing interesting ever happens here’ (*AAQ*, p.61) is a perfect example of the dilemma of which Friedan wrote. There is more to Caro’s distress than her inarticulate riposte to Alan’s query about her well-being. Caro appears to be in a better position than Friedan’s housewives, with her domestic help, feeling of achievement at having borne a child but having few of the responsibilities in raising her, the recipient of a private income and living in a university environment where it might be expected that women could flourish if they wished. As a younger wife, she is encouraged to feel she is an attractive woman as well as Alan’s wife at university parties (*AAQ*, p.7). She is also supported in her role as a volunteer reader in a nursing home (*AAQ*, p.24). She has a social group separate from the university. However, none of the accolades or activities provides a remedy for Caro’s feelings of worthlessness. Caro feels, like the women in Friedan’s case studies, disappointment with her life and herself.

Caro is a more layered character than the typical woman described in the binary phase of feminist ideology. Although she is not in the workforce she is not the woman of Robin Morgan’s feminist text: ‘A woman who stays at home, caring for children and the house lead[ing] an extremely sterile existence [...] as a satellite to her mate.’[^845] Caro is not dependent on Alan’s interpretation of the world or ‘reduced to only a biological function’[^846] Rather, she has some of the benefits associated with her class, education and

[^845]: Morgan, p. 383.
[^846]: Morgan.
societal changes. The novel highlights the dilemma for a woman who feels entitled to equality but in many ways does not know what she wants, how to achieve what she might want and who has limited tools to make changes. Caro’s dilemmas partially arise from apparent choices. Caro has to make a decision to change her life in an environment where the debates about feminism have their corollary of an incentive to return to a mythically comfortable past.\textsuperscript{847} However, she is no longer an excellent woman who shares in her husband’s work by typing or preparing an index. Her domestic and mothering responsibilities are restricted by the expectation she will do more than nurture her family.

Caro has some financial independence from an inheritance left by her grandmother. Like so many of the spinsters in Pym’s earlier novels, the Bede sisters (STG); Catherine (LTA); Ianthe (AUA); Leonora (TSDD) and Mildred (EW), she contributes to the household income. Unlike the spinsters she shares Alan’s income and her own, but feels guilty about spending it. Alan also makes her feel guilty about smoking (AAQ, p.4), and she regrets the expenditure she has made in the house. Her financial contribution is unacknowledged. Alan’s greatest feeling of satisfaction with Caro results from her lavishly, although accidently, covering herself with scent he bought her, imagining that would ‘add to his prestige in some way’ (AAQ, p.7). Caro’s characterisation does not rely on Pym to make the authorial point that in this situation Alan’s sense of ownership is paramount.

The familiar options available to Caro are established through other women in the novel. Her possible role models are the excellent woman, her mother; Margaret Maynard, the older traditional wife who types her academic husband’s work, has four children, is an accomplished housekeeper and is a contented grandmother (AAQ, p.7); Kitty whose limited world revolves around herself; Dolly, her unadorned and active sister who has abandoned humanity in favour of animals; Heather Armitage, a part-time worker in the library who

\textsuperscript{847} Fairbairns briefly introduces this feature of the combination of feminism and pastoral theory in \textit{Stand We at Last}. 
feels that she should be doing something more prestigious (AAQ, p.8) and the two women who conform most closely to a feminist image, Susan, Caro’s sister, and Dr Iris Horniblow, Alan’s co-worker.

Susan lives with her partner and has no intention of marrying. She is in the full time workforce. She dwells on subjects such as abortion in uninhibited conversation.\textsuperscript{848} Evidence that Pym was comfortable with the issue is her engagement with the topic to the extent that Susan expands upon the conversation: ‘one shouldn’t bring a child into the world just because one’s been careless in one’s private life’ (AAQ, pp.70-71). Although Catherine lives with Tom (LTA), their sexual relationship is only implied. Susan’s statement makes her relationship, and the assumed sexual relationship of other unmarried couples, an important part of the 1970s narrative. When Caro speculates that Susan might be ‘putting a brave face on things’ at not being married (AAQ, p.73) the inconsistencies in Caro’s position are identified. However, they do not challenge her essential dissatisfaction with her own marriage.

Dr Iris Horniblow is another overtly feminist creation. Pym’s notes refer to her interest in creating a woman who has rejected her husband, noting that she ‘used him and then passed on. So often one sees men doing this it is heartening, encouraging and refreshing when a woman does’.\textsuperscript{849} Dr Horniblow is Alan’s co-worker at the central location of the novel. In conflict with the setting, and emphasising Caro’s lack of place in a changing world, is Caro’s role at the heart of the novel but peripheral place at the university.

\textit{An Academic Question} is located at a new university and the academic protagonists are sociologists. Iris is the only woman referred to as one of the academics. The newness of women to the university in such a capacity is suggested by her being the first woman to present the Dabbs Memorial Lecture. She presents a paper that Caro initially thinks will be interesting as it is about ‘patterns of neighbourhood behaviour’ (AAQ, p.77). However, Caro

\textsuperscript{848} Also, see a draft of \textit{An Academic Question} MS Pym 24, second page numbered 10. Note Holt has left the material intact.

\textsuperscript{849} MS Pym 69, fol. 4. Pym also expresses similar sentiments in notes in her notebook, MS Pym 26, fol. v15.
recognises that ‘the dead hand of the sociologist’ (AAQ, p.77) has created a paper that will do no more than persuade other, predominantly male, academics that Iris is one of them. Her use of the expected jargon, “interaction”, “in-depth” and “grass roots” confirms her place in the faculty, the male world, but she has forfeited her own voice in doing so. Iris’s paper demonstrates her preparedness to adhere to the dominant culture to advance herself academically. She also uses her femininity to maintain her success. Iris’s post lecture flirtatious behaviour is that of an insecure young woman seeking approval (AAQ, p.79). Iris’s behaviour suggests that even in the 1970s a professional woman cannot entirely dispense with traditional ways of behaving. Pym’s portrayal of Iris is a sharp reminder of women’s dependence on such attributes and provides a link between the professional woman and Kitty Jeffreys who overtly are opposites.

Iris is shepherded to dinner by Alan in a similar way to which he ushered Caro into the Maynard’s party. Each woman is an adornment to Alan in the two worlds in which he moves, professional and domestic. He is superior to the women in each world and has a similar lack of interest in both of them. The women are portrayed as if they are in conflict, ironically in competition in Caro’s view, for Alan. Caro is established in public as a wife and mother and is assumed to fit established ideas about what an academic wife should be. Caro briddles at Iris’s categorisation of her as a mother. Caro interprets her comments as derisory, reinforcing the 1970s position that women should be more than a wife and mother (AAQ, p.30). Ironically, Caro’s maternal shortcomings are uncensored, because her public image fits that of wife and mother: she is married. In comparison with Caro’s undeserved “Madonna” image, Iris is seen as flawed. As a single divorced parent she does not fit into the Madonna role, although its opposite, the whore image, is not seriously invoked. When Caro wonders about the rose in Iris’s cleavage and about whose hand might have placed it there, the sexual image is overshadowed by the naïve behaviour Iris projects. However, Iris’s private life is censured, and her child’s difficulties are assumed to be the result of his coming from a “broken home” (AAQ, p.46).
Caro misunderstands Iris’s unsophisticated behaviour after her lecture, which is designed to maintain her professional position. Caro’s naïve reaction to the professional woman suggests that she is aware of her own professional shortcomings. Caro is also naïve about Iris’s embrace of 1970s sexual freedoms when she believes that Iris’s affair with a young lecturer will “leave her in tears”. Caro is applying her own unformed, but developing, beliefs about relationships to a woman whose expectations are very different. Coco apprises Caro of her miscalculation when he tells her that although Iris conveys the impression she has been deserted, she ‘left him and took the children with her [after having] used his influence to get a research grant and on the strength of that she got her job [at the provincial university]’ (AAAQ, p.170). Pym addresses Iris’s situation in the novel but significantly does not censure her for her ambition. Firstly, she uses Coco, a character given to exaggeration to convey the information. Secondly, the depiction of Iris’s former husband is uninspiring as he is ‘a rather meagre man in a suit’ (AAAQ, p.170).

As a professional, Iris represents the woman to which 1970s ideology suggests Caro should aspire. In her original notes, Pym has Alan suggest that Caro should also be a professional of some sort ‘But you can’t make a career in junk [...] You ought to be in an executive position’. However, Iris’s experience exposes the difficulties of such a choice just as Caro’s experience exposes the problems for the married woman without a job. Although Iris has more opportunities than those available to Pym’s earlier women characters, gender remains crucial in the workforce. In simple terms, she does not receive equal pay. As a professional woman, she is censured for seemingly rejecting the nurturing role to which her gender is assumed to suit her. She continues to rely on traditional feminine behaviour to ensure her success.

Patriarchy explains Caro’s unease in Iris’s company. Where men have most of the benefits and power, women are forced to defend the little they have. A woman accustomed to gaining her power through a man naturally

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850 Pym 35/1, fol. 3.
resents his attention to another woman, seeing it as a diminution of her status. Rather than rejoicing in Iris’s success in “a man’s world” Caro is concerned about her own smaller world and how she will fare if another woman has success in male terms as well as depriving her of her symbol of success, a committed husband. Significantly, when she realises that Alan does not love Iris, Caro sees it as an opportunity to befriend her (AAQ, pp. 139-40).

Integral to the 1970s woman is the choice of paid work as an alternative to being a wife and mother. Caro has no financial incentive to join the workforce. She also lacks personal incentive. Alan is scathing about her preferred occupation, working in Dolly’s bookshop (AAQ, p.13). Caro initially vetoes his preference for her working in the university library. She claims to be afraid of the librarian and is dismissive of Heather Armitage’s library work (AAQ, p13). Her assessment of the work is justified as when she does start work at the library her task is one that her five year old daughter would find simple (AAQ, 136). Constantly aware of her inadequacy, Caro recognises her occupation and the skills she uses would not qualify for the academic accolade of “able”. Caro’s one satisfaction is in joining Heather in drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes in defiance with ‘almost an air of women’s liberation in the air’ (AAQ, p.144). Whether this transitory activity will be enough to satisfy Caro is questionable. Her satisfaction in dealing with the Stillingfleet papers, the excitement of the fire or even the developing relationship between her and Heather are short-term solutions. She is likely to persist in her quest for a different life. In the meantime, Caro, representing women whose domestic lives have ceased to be their reason for being, languishes in unfulfilling work. The feminist question this novel poses is whether there are there other possibilities in the public world for her and women like her.

Alan’s disapproval also affects Caro’s participation in the social community. Dolly is an independent older woman whose friendship Caro relishes and she ignores Alan’s attempt to curtail the relationship. Dolly undermines Alan’s feeling of superiority. He is ‘a little afraid of Dolly. He mistrusted her preoccupation with animals and her interest in the problems of loneliness, while her sardonic attitude towards academics and particularly those in the new universities made him uneasy in her presence’ (AAQ, p.15). Dolly’s
contribution to dispelling Caro’s boredom and her recognition of her abilities and needs, although oblique (AAQ, p.139) is important to Caro.

Coco and Kitty are also friends of whom Alan disapproves. Coco is an academic studying the Caribbean community. He fits uneasily into the university milieu with his lack of application, singular style of dress and overwhelming interest in his appearance. He and Kitty present Caro with a picture of how a fully indolent life can be. They are physically attractive, “well preserved”, and spend their time conserving their beauty. They have long rests in preparation for a party and worry about nothing except their appearance (AAQ, pp.1-3). Coco describes Kitty as “splendid”, because of her ‘loving beautiful objects and surrounding oneself with them’ (AAQ, p.10). Kitty has only to admire an art piece to acquire it from her neighbour’s homes, so that her apartment is ‘an elegant clutter’ (AAQ, p.11). In using the term “splendid” to admire acquisition Pym is being ironic. Pym reserves the phrase for an excellent woman, and Kitty would not qualify.

The couple appear to be a diversion replicating Pym’s early use of a facade. Coco and Kitty’s serious discussion of the black pearls with which the narrative begins, provide a seemingly comic reflection on the couple’s overwhelming emphasis on their appearance. However, the occasion also supports the feminist theme of the novel in its introduction of feminist theory about the “parasitic” woman. Morgan refers to this type of woman in the following terms:

The ideal model [in a male dominated society…] for woman is to be surrounded by hypocritical homage and estranged from all real work, spending idle hours primping and preening, obsessed with conspicuous consumption.851

Kitty is a consumer whose femininity is paramount. The accoutrements of wealth which surrounded her in the Caribbean (AAQ, p.3) were brought to England after her husband’s death and the election of a new government (AAQ,

p.2). In England, only her wealth and beauty routine recalls her past. She laments the loss of accepting champagne from the butler and walking in her garden where the peacocks wandered for her entertainment. Kitty’s “parasitic” role is further acknowledged though the conversation between Caro and Coco:

I can’t imagine your mother actually working in the garden. No, but she liked to sit in it and walk around it and watch the peacocks. Did I tell you once how one of the peacocks got shut up in one of the smaller greenhouses? (AAQ, pp.36-37).

Although Coco is a fellow perpetrator, his uncertain masculinity does not detract from the exposure of Kitty as a likely candidate for Morgan’s assessment. Because Kitty and Coco are an attractive diversion from Caro and her angst, familiar ground in Pym novels, it is counter intuitive to accept her as a “parasite”. However, Pym confirms her focus on Kitty and Coco as more than a pleasant diversion, as they feature in her debate about racism. Kitty’s distressed reaction to the visit of black relatives from Jamaica raises racial issues (AAQ, pp.32 -33). Her husband’s family are descendants of slaves and their past contrasts with the life Kitty has led and regrets losing. Pym presents Kitty’s reaction as a shock rather than shame, an observation that while questionable is not unique. Pym’s authorial voice acknowledges the paternalism of the society the Jeffreys have left (AAQ, p18). She links Kitty with a Jamaican woman, depicting them as equals at church (AAQ, p.18). She addresses the racism inherent in Coco’s concern that Kitty’s husband was unfaithful with ‘some of the women who were black’ (AAQ, p112) with Caro’s unresponsiveness. Caro’s recognition that the couple is decorative but

852 Mrs Beltane (NFRL) is also depicted as a woman who has not worked for a living and again her indolence is illustrated through her sitting, rather than working, in her garden. Dulcie Mainwaring, who is in paid work, offers her plums grown and picked by her which later she will stew for a meal. In comparison, Mrs Beltane sits ‘in a flowery canvas chair from Harrods, watching her hose watering the lawn with its special spray attachment’ (NFRL, p. 33).
insubstantial and that she is ‘wasting time’ \((AAQ, \text{p.56})\) identifies her evolving desire to create a more substantial existence for herself.

Caro responds to her uneasy self-knowledge by returning home. However, when Alan admits his infidelity with Cressida she finds the warm notion of family as a viable choice is also false. Initially Caro clings to a trifling criticism ‘With name like that’ \((AAQ, \text{p.99})\). Her serious response to Alan’s affair is infused by 1970s values that complicate her decision-making. Caro could ignore the transgression like Weldon’s woman who has been taught not to “shout, or murder”. \(Crampton Hodnet\) depicts such a reaction in Margaret Cleveland’s restrained response to Francis Cleveland’s behaviour. Her strongest feelings are reserved for her dislike of the gossip and realisation that some people are not entirely displeased about the infidelity. Miss Doggett’s sense of satisfaction about deflating a wife’s assumed smugness is replicated in Coco’s reaction to Caro’s astonishment at Alan’s behaviour.

Pym could also try to counteract the criticism she believed was aimed at \(An Unsuitable Attachment\). She could have depicted Caro’s response to reflect the sexual mores of the “swinging sixties” with a retaliatory affair. Alternatively, Caro could ignore such ideology and object to Alan’s infidelity with fully justified anger, as her sister later suggests \((AAQ, \text{p.123})\). Caro is unable to make a decision. She has imagined that Alan is having an affair with Iris and her mistake as well as confirmation that her marriage is not intact disconcerts her. The situation does not fit into her understanding of herself and her place in society. To Alan’s suggestion their marriage could be improved by his infidelity she acknowledges her confusion ‘there seemed nothing I could say in reply that would not seem false’ \((AAQ, \text{p.100})\). Her response to the reality, rather than the imagined affair, is subdued but nonetheless troubled. She gains no comfort from her early walk devised initially to get away from Alan, and on second thoughts she ‘wondered what she would do next’ \((AAQ, \text{p.102})\). Her conversation with Crispin Maynard about Alan’s paper confirms her as an academic wife. Dolly takes a 1970s perspective, echoing Alan when she suggests that the affair might even benefit the marriage. Caro feels ‘ignorant and unworldly’ \((AAQ, \text{p.105})\). Coco is more concerned about an insect on Caro’s “gown” than her “distressed state” \((AAQ, \text{pp.111-112})\).
Disappointed in her own reactions as well as those of her friends' and husband's, like the far worldlier Helena Napier (*LTA*), Caro goes to her mother. There she fulfils the requirements of an excellent woman by meeting the vicar and doing the flowers in the church (*AAQ*, p.120). She does not want such a life. However, its converse, which Caro experiences at Susan's, is also unappealing. Susan, the antithesis of the excellent woman, 'glories in the squalor of the neighbourhood in which she lives' (*AAQ*, p.123). A visit to confront Cressida is as unrewarding. Caro, still supporting Alan's interests, begins work in the library so that she can return the Stillingfleet manuscript.

Pym is unsure about what will happen to her 1970s graduate wife, the lack of resolution in the novel reflecting the uncertainties that she observes, as well as its incomplete condition. However, Pym's characterisation of Caro is developed throughout the novel to suggest that she is capable of adapting. Pym is less sure in her development of Caro than in her portrayal of Wilmet that suggests her sense of humour and grasp of the human frailty she observes in Father Thames, Wilf Bason and Keith will give her a satisfying inner life. Caro's inner life is elusive and could be the only time when Pym's use of observation desserts her. However, she does give Caro a narrative that rebuts her conclusion that she is "hopeless" (*AAQ*, p.99).

Caro manages a range of relationships outside her family, from dealing with Coco and Kitty's frivolity, friendship with the strong-minded Dolly, accepting her sister's loud discussion of uncomfortable issues, to reading to elderly people as a volunteer. She is perceptive about Iris Horniblow's paper, recognising that jargon defeats the honesty of a lecturer's relationship with her audience. She has none of the sociologist's desire to categorise people, deftly deflecting Iris's banal speculations about Coco and his sexuality (*AAQ*, p.65). The novel is full of her wry observations of human behaviour, such as her acknowledgement that 'We all like to hold the floor even if we have nothing of general or universal interest to say' (*AAQ*, p.8). She undercuts the ethnocentrism inherent in a conversation about Africans learning about their history from Professor Maynard. Her rejoinder 'A lot of English people don't know their own history' (*AAQ*, p.11) questions the establishment view. Caro conflates the sociologists' work with domestic experience offending their sense
of what constitutes academic endeavour (*AAQ*, p.79). She is an observer, like Pym, when she detects a young woman’s conversation with another lecturer is not entirely as it seems. Although it could be ‘love or even lust, [Caro notices] the girl’s left hand was absently toying with a small vol-au-vent as if impatient for the opportunity to carry it to her mouth’ (*AAQ*, p.8). Caro’s reflection on the group’s reactions to the library fire conveys Pym’s concern with superficiality ‘Some of us smiled uneasily, aware of the implications behind [Evan Cranston’s] thoughts’ (*AAQ*, p.173).

Caro also decides on her immediate working future by discounting Alan’s change of mind. She remains at the library despite his concurrence that now it is no longer necessary for his future. Caro appears to accept Alan’s suggestion that she perform the traditional role of an academic wife. However, Pym injects uncertainty in Caro’s response ‘I thought how “ongoing” life was and was at that moment glad of it. Later I might change my mind’ (*AAQ*, p.182). At the beginning of the novel Caro realised that as Alan did not want her assistance she would have to find other work. His decision to include her competes with experiences that have encouraged Caro to think of herself as an individual rather than a wife. She has reason to consider herself as a graduate and responsible for her own happiness. The articles she has read and the complaints made on her behalf have partly contributed to her realisation. She also has recognised from the moment of Alan’s confession that she is alone. She understands that she can rely on no one else for succour or inspiration and that this is not in surmountable. She does not want to choose any of the alternative possibilities exemplified by the other women with whom she compares herself. She aspires to ‘something unusual that I could make my own’ (*AAQ*, p.16). Although the more passionate exposition of feminist ideas articulated by Weldon and Fairbairns is absent, Pym’s novel of a woman in the 1970s coming to self-realisation is a feminist account.

III

*Quartet in Autumn*, begun when Pym put aside *An Academic Question*, revives her interest in spinsters. However, Pym’s 1970s portrayal is starkly different from her previous work. The protagonists are in their sixties and
therefore older than any other women she has depicted, apart from fleeting
glimpses of the Misses Bede in An Unsuitable Attachment. Marcia Ivory and
Letty Crowe are also in the full time workforce, except for lanthe (AUA) unlike
any of Pym’s earlier spinsters. In character they are vastly removed from the
contented Belinda and Harriet in their fifties (STG) and seventies (AUA), or the
self-motivated and busy Mildred or Dulcie, spinsters in their thirties in the
1950s and 60s. These earlier spinsters engage fully with their world. Their
activities are those of women who are economically independent and whose
paid work is only a supplement to their economic survival. They do not
conform, but the world to which they react is familiar if unsatisfying. Like
Caro, Letty and Marcia are in unfamiliar territory.

In her second 1970s novel Pym explores the consequences for two women
retiring from clerical jobs they started in the late 1920s. As women alone,
Letty and Marcia are unconstrained by marriage. They are also unprotected by
its status. Despite society being in a state of flux, marriage and the corollary,
men as “bread winners” retains an important place in maintaining economic
benefits to men in the workforce.854 In this novel, Pym contrasts Marcia Ivory
and Letty Crowe. Marcia is eccentric and Letty markedly conventional. Pym
explicitly chose to make the women’s experiences central to the narrative. She
notes ‘you have changes in the life of the women while the men remain the
same’.855 The women’s characterisation is developed in conjunction with their
male co-workers, confirmed bachelors. For both Marcia and Letty retirement
provides a catalyst. For Marcia Ivory it is death; for Letty Crowe it is a grim
reappraisal of what means to be a single middle-aged woman with few
economic and emotional resources. Marcia articulates the status of an

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854 The Equal Pay Act 1970 did not come into force until 1975. The Act is only a contributing
factor to the economic status of women and men. However, it is probably this Act that Pym
was considering when she refers to “women’s” and “men’s” work in her notes, MS Pym 70,
Diaries march 1972, fol. 11.
855 MS Pym 33, fol. 19.
unmarried woman when she decides ‘Women alone had to make their own way in the world’ (QA, p.60).856

Marcia is like most of Pym’s central spinster characters in that she owns her house, left to her by her mother. She is unlike them in that her life is circumscribed by her physical and mental health. Marcia’s eccentricity is predominantly observed through her recalling war restrictions or her recent hospitalisation. She prides herself on her stores of imperishable food. She is determined to ensure that she has milk bottles – a wartime requirement so that her milk will be delivered in exchange. Her preoccupation leads her into making a bizarre collection of bottles in her shed which becomes a source of comment by her young neighbours. Her consumption of sweetened tea and a biscuit also has its war connotations. One of her private refrains is ‘Biscuits keep you going, they used to say in the war’ (QA, p.29) but she is disinclined to eat anything else. Her public catchphrase that she has ‘never been a big eater’ (QA, p.132) hides from herself and her companions that she is starving.

Marcia’s life appears to be one of abstinence; her only indulgence is in her pursuit of Mr Strong, her surgeon. Pym’s notes suggest that Marcia’s pursuit was originally to be a source of trouble to her quarry. However, the “trouble” was to be observed unconventionally. Pym rejected using what she saw as the normal indicator of a woman’s interest, the application of eye shadow or wearing mauve hotpants.857 Pym maintains Marcia’s eccentricity in even the most banal circumstances. Marcia collects information about benefits but does not use it. She is determined to remain untouched by the welfare state and what she considers interference (QA, p.6).

The workplace provides Marcia with awkward but familiar companionship with the small disparate group of colleagues who accept her increasingly strange appearance and behaviour. Only Letty is critical, and her

856 The portrayal of Miss Embrey, Letty’s landlady, confirms her belief of the value of having a man in her life (QA, p. 56). That Pym does not necessarily agree is shown in Letty’s belief that Miss Embrey may have been organised into the home that she, Letty, has rejected.
857 MS Pym 35/2, fols 1-5.
criticism is that of a woman who follows conventional fashion rules (QA, p.130). Marcia has an uneasy relationship with her neighbours. They have moved into what has become a newly fashionable district. They live in refurbished houses; Marcia’s needs repainting and the garden tidied. The neighbours assume that their standards should prevail. Marcia also reacts acrimoniously to a social worker, Janice Brabner. Janice also feels that Marcia should accept her admonishments about a healthy lifestyle (QA, p. 62-63), with gratitude (QA, p.47). Mr Strong, Marcia’s surgeon, unlike the other people in her life, has assumed for her the status of a hero (QA, pp.11-12) since he performed her mastectomy. Marcia’s hero worship is shared ‘If the surgeon was God, the chaplains were his ministers, little lower than the housemen’ (QA, p.12). In this novel, the competition for status between the clergy and medical profession developed in detail in A Few Green Leaves is determined. Neither the church nor medical practice gives the women the sustenance they need. Pym briefly adopts her authorial approach to the church and science and pronounces them both flawed.

Marcia is the most complex character in the novel and raises the most difficult questions. She is a troublesome woman in the simple sense in that she fits uneasily into her domestic, work and public landscapes. Marcia is also troublesome in the complex sense because she exhibits a strong and legitimate sense of personal privacy and space which disturbs the people around her. Pym’s notes include the description of Marcia that ‘She seemed at once above and below any of the topical issues – even that convenient category “the old” could not contain her’. Although Marcia’s behaviour could be referred to as dementia, Pym wants her character to escape such labelling. Her notes state that ‘she becomes more and more eccentric’. Her reference to Marcia only as eccentric, suggests sympathy with the middle-aged woman’s refusal to conform. Marcia’s depiction is that of a woman demanding legitimate independence. While Marcia is eccentric, she is also a woman pursuing an

858 MS Pym 72, fol. v 9.
859 MS Pym 33, fol. 19.
independent way of living, a reasonable aspiration for a woman in her sixties. Pym’s portrayal of Marcia mounts a strong defence of a middle-aged woman’s right to autonomy while illustrating the problems she may experience because of her decision. Her neighbour’s speculation on how much easier it would be to deal with Marcia if she had been ‘that much older, really ancient’ (QA, p.86) describes the problems for the people with whom Marcia interacts. Pricilla’s comment is an acknowledgement that a middle-aged woman’s independence, a refusal to conform and eccentricity, is a difficult amalgam. Pym is not only articulating the crucial elements in Marcia’s portrayal but in any woman who rejects conventional behaviour. In the 1970s, Pym is enabled in exaggerating Marcia’s lack of conformity and its outcome. Marcia is shown to be not only difficult for amateurs such as her neighbours and work colleagues; she presents problems for the systems designed to help. Marcia’s behaviour is compounded by errors by the caring professions – in this instance the medical and social services whose actions are either insensitive or neglectful.

Pym’s treatment of Letty contrasts with her portrayal of Marcia. Letty willingly fulfils society’s expectations as far as she is able. She dresses appropriately and neatly, replenishing her clothing and searching to find the right colours for an outfit (QA, p.115). Where Marcia spends lunchtime in the library, concealing rubbish she has declared unsuitable for the bin (QA, p.3) Letty shops in Oxford Street (QA, p.70). She offers Marcia small signs of friendship, an invitation or offer to make her a cup of tea (QA, p.10). When her long-term friend, Marjorie, is attracted to the Reverend Lydell she listens to her youthful enthusiasms. She accepts that he should ride in the front of the car and have one of the two picnic chairs. Letty sits in the back of the car with the Sealyham and at the picnic, on a blanket below the couple (QA, pp.43-44). When their engagement is announced Letty accepts the plan that she and Marjorie should share the cottage on her retirement is no longer feasible. Letty also fulfils the conventional requirements for dealing with retirement by retaining links with the community through her library membership and going to church. She also attempts to maintain her work contacts by corresponding with Marcia and the alacrity with which she responds to her male colleagues’ invitation to lunch. She continues to accept the friendship offered by the
unreliable Marjorie, visits her cousin and watches television with Mrs Pope, her landlady.

Pym introduces her familiar irony through Letty with her wry recall of governesses seeking a room in a stranger’s home. She emphasis the changes which have taken place: ‘[Letty’s...] particular situation had hardly existed in the past, for now it was the unattached working woman, the single “business lady” of the advertisements, who was most likely to arrive at the house of strangers’ (*QA*, pp.77-78) there was now ‘no prospect of a romantic attachment to the widower master of the house or a handsome son of the family’ (*QA*, p.77). Letty’s interior life is detailed in comparison with the other characters and contrasts with her modest exterior. She dwells on life and her own mortality (*QA*, p.17) but ‘lived very much in the present, holding neatly and firmly on to life, coping as best as she could with whatever it had to offer, little though that might be’ (*QA*, p.25). She ‘had never had anything much. Yet, sometimes she wondered, might not the experience of “not having” be regarded as something with its own validity?’ *QA*, p. 25). She ponders ‘the strangeness of life, slipping away like this’ (*QA*, p.27). Letty’s failing is an inability to enter into casual social discourse ‘Only Letty remained outside’ (*QA*, p.67).

Her financial situation circumscribes Letty’s autonomy. Letty’s dependence as a member of the workforce compares poorly within the novel and with spinsters in the other novels. However, she has a quiet sense of self-worth, despite her lack of worldly success and enforced changes to her retirement plans. Her one rebellion is to refuse to enter a retirement home when Marjorie proposes it as an alternative to their failed plans. By the end of the novel Letty realises that, if only in a small way she can make a choice about where she lives. With the failure of Marjorie’s relationship, the cottage is again available and her landlady wants to keep her tenant. Letty’s conventional behaviour fulfils expectations of women in their sixties. The possibility that she will move beyond such expectations is raised through her acceptance of young people’s behaviour in the park (*AAQ*, p.36). Through this image, Pym suggests that Letty is unconfined by a mean-minded morality that imposes sexual restrictions on others.
The women are juxtaposed with the men with whom they work. The conventional Edwin has married, been widowed and now, if in a low key way, performs the minor social niceties that follow the women’s retirement. Norman has none of the gloss associated with Edwin. He has a passionate hatred of cars, and expresses it in vulgar language. He finds himself in the museum looking at sharks and at a girl’s sporting activity with uncomfortable thoughts. Both activities appear to rank similarly in his mind, alongside the efforts he makes to elude any responsibility for social involvement with his colleagues. His conversation is littered with insensitive and sometimes, antagonistic, statements. Norman is most comfortable when he is in his smart dressing gown eating a “fry up” on the first day of his holiday (QA, p.51). However, even Norman has a humanity that surmounts the uncomfortable nature of his exterior.

Pym’s portrayal of Edwin and Norman\(^{860}\) is a departure from the treatment of men in her other novels. While Quartet in Autumn manifestly concentrates on the changes that take place in the women’s lives, Pym also infers that working together changes women and men’s relationships. Edwin and Norman’s inner thoughts are part of the narrative. In this, they are unlike most of Pym’s male characters. In previous novels, only Nicholas Cleveland expresses any sensitivity toward women’s situation when he recognises his wife’s despondency (JP, p.131). Although Edwin and Norman lack his acute understanding of their companions, they attempt to manage their feelings about them under new circumstances. When the Letty and Marcia cease to be co-workers, the men find their feelings difficult to manage, bursting into inappropriate laughter when talking about them. Pym does not criticise the men’s inability to articulate their feelings, in particular, they do not become the butt of her familiar binary feminist commentary. Pym is commenting on a

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\(^{860}\) Larkin appreciated the character of Norman, suggesting that he identified with him in some ways, MS Pym 151, fol. 115. Larkin uses one of Norman’s derogatory phrases about cars (QA, p.14) in a letter, after Pym used it in QA (First Boredom, and then Fear The Life of Philip Larkin, Richard Bradford, Peter Owen Publishers: London and Chester Springs, 2005) p. 224.
relationship between women and men that is different from the ones she has fictionalised in previous novels. Like the women who are in new territory, first in the workplace and then in retirement, the men have been changed by the experience. Pym suggests that the men are conscious of responsibility toward their former co-workers but, as with any new experience, find it complicated. Norman, for example, refers to Marcia and Letty in one conversation as ‘the girls’ \((QA, p.114)\) and later as ‘old dears’ \((QA, p.127)\). Both are stock phrases, used as devices to modify his emotions about the women. Pym makes an important point when she portrays Edwin and Norman grappling with their feelings. She suggests that the changes in women’s lives foster changes in men’s responses to them.

Letty and Marcia regard the men as ‘part of the office furniture and not considered worthy of comment unless they did something surprisingly out of character’ \((QA, p.9)\). The authorial statement is similar to the way in which Jessie Morrow is regarded as a companion and reflects the neutrality Pym suggests occurs in an office. The almost, but significantly not, tenderness Marcia felt towards Norman is temporary \((QA, p.23)\); their shared tin of coffee is based on economics rather than affection \((QA, p.5)\). The case that there is no love interest between any of the co-workers is carefully constructed to demonstrate Marcia’s will, leaving her house to Norman, is not a romantic gesture. She believes she has no responsibility towards Letty. Through her will Marcia merely confirms her opinion expressed when Letty needed a room, that women understood they were alone and responsible for themselves. Her financial decision, confirming her belief that a man has a right to property, is Marcia’s only conventional act.

The 1970s provides neither woman with a social environment that replaces their lack of family or strong personal friendships. The church has no place in their lives until Letty uses it unsuccessfully in her efforts to become part of her community. Her experience is inadequate ‘sitting rather far back, trying to discover what church-going held for people, apart from habit and convention, wondering if it would hold something for her, and what form this would take’ \((QA, p.142)\); joining two or three women on an icy morning ‘shuffling around the Stations of the Cross’ \((QA, p.143)\) and in church thinking of her future
rather than Christ. Religious observance appears as a source of preoccupation rather than devotion to Edwin (QA, p.34); a cause of superiority for Mrs Pope (QA, p.112); a visit to Marcia in the hospital from a minister of the wrong denomination (QA, p.19); and unfamiliar Nigerian exuberance in Letty’s former dwelling (QA, pp.65-66). Reverend Lydell finds it more harmonious talking of holidays in France and Italy with Marjorie and Letty than fulfilling his religious responsibilities (QA, p.42). The church lacks the fervour of the Anglo-Catholic debate described in Pym’s early novels although Pym continues her observation of the introduction of new ideas and new styles of clergy (QA, pp.14-15).

The social welfare system provides a possible substitute to the church in its provision of voluntary visitors and community events. However, the 1970s alternative lacks the universality typical of access to the church that it replaces. Marcia’s operation brings her to the attention of the system and she becomes a victim to what she considers ill-informed interference. Pym has referred briefly to the welfare system in previous novels. Pym’s negative portrayal of Janice Brabner is similar to Weldon’s criticism of the “deities” of the 1980s and 90s, the plastic surgeon, psychiatrist and psychologist.861 Janice’s unsympathetically observed character anticipates Pym’s challenge to professionals’ provision of unthinking solutions to complex situations in her depiction of Dr Shrubsole (AFGL). Janice’s responses to what she sees as Marcia’s problems are a combination of her limited understanding of a woman in her sixties and her misplaced self-assurance. Her lack of insight into Marcia’s needs, apart from the obvious physical nature of her requirements, mirrors the young doctor’s failure to deal with even those. Janice Brabner’s refusal to acknowledge Marcia’s right to autonomy is an essential feature in an ageing person’s life. Janice’s belief, fostered by her supervisor, that her status is based on superior knowledge and understanding of what a person should want undermines her capacity to deal with Marcia’s eccentricity. Marcia’s

general practitioner comfortably sheds responsibility, deciding that ‘No doubt Strong’s boys would suggest something’ (QA, p.153). However, Mr Strong has limited accountability for his former patient and the next time he sees her she has been admitted only to die. Marcia, as Pym suggests in her note for Quartet in Autumn, is determined to be independent.

Although the novel predominantly focuses on Marcia and Letty’s response to retirement, Pym continues writing about racial issues. In doing so, she demonstrates Marcia and Letty’s willingness to grapple with contemporary a world beyond the office. Marcia notices and wonders about the implications of racially vilifying signs (QA, p.20), recalling her experience with a kind hospital orderly ‘bearded and with a remote, dignified beauty’ (QA, p.21). Norman’s fulminations ‘about “the Blacks”’ after Eulalie the ‘young black girl, provocative, cheeky and bursting with health’ (QA, p.8) attempts to circumvent office routine are disapproved by his co-workers. Marcia ‘closed her eyes wearily’ (QA, p.9) and ‘Letty tried to change the subject, for it made her uneasy to criticise Eulalie or to be guilty of any unkindness towards coloured people’ (QA, p.9). Although Edwin does not respond, Pym’s description of his decapitation of black jelly babies, as having ‘nothing racist about [it]’ (QA, p.4) suggests that she is signalling that only Norman has racist views.

Pym also features the immigration of Nigerians to London in the 1960s to deal with racism in a wider context. Letty experiences the situation at first hand when the house in which she has her bedsitter is sold to a Nigerian. Letty’s response to Mr Olatunde’s loud and lively church services conducted in what was a familiar dull home (QA, pp.65-67) is twofold. Initially she is disturbed and accepts Edwin’s assistance in finding her different accommodation. Her first reaction is predicated on her uncomfortable experience with Eulalie whose exuberance in the office is disturbing because she ‘felt in contrast to be greyer than ever, crushed and dried up by the weak British sun’ (QA, p.9). Letty’s feelings of inadequacy are amplified when she asks that the Nigerian church services be quieter. She compares the Anglican Church, a ‘grey, formal, respectable thing of measured observances and mild general undemanding kindness to all’ (QA, p.66) with ‘the hymn singing and joyful shouts’ (QA, p.65) of a different type of religious service. Later she
compares the life affirming Nigerian behaviour with the dreary Christmas she spends with Mrs Pope. Her new landlady’s discourse on the excessive amounts of food people eat (QA, p.89) make her realise that had she been prepared to accept difference and been more outgoing she would have been included in the Nigerians’ “jolly” Christmas (QA, p.89). Letty realises that her colleagues might have been able to foster a relationship with the Nigerians, unlike herself who ‘failed to make contact’ (QA, p.4).

*Less Than Angels* provides a precursor to Pym’s work on her work on women retirees in the 1970s. Alaric is a cheerless character but satisfying options present themselves. For the male retiree the possibility of a relationship with a woman as eccentric as himself, destruction of his stultifying anthropological papers and the possibility that he might write a novel give him an optimistic future. However, he is a part rather than whole of the novel. In comparison, *Quartet in Autumn* gives a central place to the way in which retirement affects two women and their male co-workers. The prospects for all of the characters have little of the optimism associated with Alaric’s future. Pym’s solutions for the women make no judgement of Letty’s willingness to conform, or Marcia’s rebellion against convention. Marcia’s death takes place in circumstances that she finds satisfying, she rides in an ambulance and Mr Strong attends her. Although Letty realises that her life has ‘infinite possibilities for change’ (QA, p.218) they revolve around Marjory’s romantic notions and while gratifying are not momentous. However, Letty shows what is possible to accomplish as a lone woman through dealing with disadvantages in a quiet and thorough way.

The two novels written in the 1970s adopt some of the bleak characteristics exhibited by feminist writers in their exposure of what it means to be a woman, whether young and married or middle aged and unmarried. Economic independence is set against economic dependence. The role of a wife with no economic incentive to join the workforce is compared with women in an ill paid and unsatisfactory occupation. Pym’s questions about women and marriage and women and retirement show an understanding of the feminist issues debated in the period. Pym was successful in her realistic rendering of people in their sixties and women’s retirement. Pym’s assured
approach to the material in *Quartet in Autumn* compares with the unease of its readers. Pym was less successful in her introduction of a graduate wife through whom she worked with 1970s feminist ideas. However, while the novels reaffirm Pym’s observation that women are alone, whether married or single, in the workforce or not, they also demonstrate that, rather than being a continuing source of distress, women are able to take responsibility for their own lives in the expanding roles available to them in the 1970s. On her affirmation of women, both novels present a feminist outlook, in keeping with other feminist work of the period.
CONCLUSION

I

Scholarship on Pym has considered the autobiographical aspects of her work and it has concluded, unsurprisingly, that her experiences appear in her work. The extent to which they have been considered a dominant feature of Pym's fiction has at times created an environment in which other aspects of her work have been neglected. Emphasis has been placed on Pym's failed relationships with men to argue that writing was her way of exorcising the unhappiness caused by her relationships through rewriting their pain into comedy, proposing the superiority of women over men or using characters who adopt her humiliation and suffering and weave it into an acceptable form. Hazel Holt, Pym's friend from the late 1940s and literary executor, concentrates on Pym's relationships with men and their portrayal in her fiction in A Lot To Ask. She has overlooked Pym's engagement with a wider world and broader debates. Wyatt-Brown also ignores Pym's attention to debates about gender relations, class and racism, suggesting that Pym's family relationships are the crux of her novels. Other commentators have looked at Pym's years at the Africa Institute as a source for her inspiration. However, it is argued in this thesis that Pym's experiences provide only a start for her novels and short stories. Pym constantly engaged with the contest of ideas. Most significantly, she engaged with feminist ideas as


863 Halperin refers to women's superior strength that is used unkindly, 'Barbara Pym and the War of the Sexes' in The life and Work of Barbara Pym, pp.88-100; Epstein, in 'Miss Pym and Mr Larkin', argues that Pym creates an imbalance between women and men, based on women's perceived superiority.

864 Wyatt-Brown, A Critical Biography and, although less pejoratively, Salwak suggests that A Few Green Leaves is a review of Pym's life and its accommodations in 'A Few Green Leaves as Apologia' in The World of Barbara Pym.

865 Peter Lloyd, for example, suggests that Tom Mallow rather than Catharine Oliphant is the central character in Less Than Angels 'Barbara Pym and Social Anthropology', Presentation, Barbara Pym Literary Weekend, St Hilda's College, August, 1993 and GL, 11 2, 2005, (5-8); Clare Hanson defends Pym's work against the charge of triviality, "'The Raw and the Cooked': Barbara Pym and Claude Levi-Strauss, in Women's Writing.
Rossen says, 'before feminism became fashionable.' In almost all of the novels Pym's central women characters directly or indirectly engage in her overarching theme, in which she debates the relative value of scientific thought and the world of imagination. Pym also used women characters to grapple with the social and religious issues of the time. In her last novel she also brought to fruition her preoccupation with the debate about what is history. Her 'research into the lives of ordinary people' became part of the debate she realised obliquely in novels such as Some Fond Return of Love, and fully in A Few Green Leaves.

This thesis contends that feminist ideas pervade Pym's fiction and reflect her acute engagement with her contemporary social milieu from the 1930s to 1980. In Pym scholarship attention has already been given to Pym's manifest concern with relationships between women and men. Some commentaries approach aspects of Pym's work from a feminist perspective. However, there has been resistance to Pym as a feminist writer. A.S. Byatt regards “academic feminist” study of Pym and writers like her as almost a travesty. Pym's friend and confidante Liddell, who had intimate knowledge of Pym's years at Oxford, rejects the notion of her as a social commentator. Holt is adamant that Pym would not consider herself a feminist writer, saying that 'she found the movement disagreeably strident'. Other commentators express a qualified view. Marian Curran, a researcher corresponding with Hilary Pym, accepts that Pym was to some degree a feminist writer. She wrote 'I am trying not to be too extreme about your sister's feminism. It seems to me that her attitude was that of an individualist rather than a militant feminist'.

To compound the problem there is no evidence that Pym referred to herself

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866 Rossen in JW, p. 2.
867 Dulcie used the term in No Fond Return of Love (p. 13).
869 A.S, Byatt, Secrets and Writings Passions of the Mind (1986)
870 Liddell, p.8 and p.89.
as a feminist writer or would have considered calling her novels feminist. Her reticence is more likely during the earlier period in which she wrote but no other description would be so appropriate for An Academic Question. While Holt’s opinion on how Pym perceived the women’s movement is not particularly surprising, it is also instructive. While other women of Pym’s age and education joined the women’s movement in the 1970s, it was a movement also seen as “strident”. In some respects it was. The 1970s women’s movement found it essential to make its opposition to discrimination against women abundantly clear. Janet Radcliffe Richards has argued convincingly that some aspects of the movement created antagonism amongst possible supporters. She suggests that the ‘strong fundamental case [for supporting feminism is that] women suffer from systemic social injustice because of their sex’. She discards many of the notions believed essential to feminism. She suggests that her philosophical definition allows discussion of feminist ideas without erecting barriers that create the “stridency” that Holt suggests concerned Pym. Most importantly, such a view of the movement does not necessarily preclude some engagement with its ideas.

Feminist novelists in the 1970s, accepting that women suffer social injustice because of their sex, mounted challenges to patriarchy theorised by writers such as Simone de Beauvoir through their characters and narratives. Two feminist writers who fictionalised women’s case for equality are Fay Weldon and Zoe Fairbairns. Much of their work could be described as “strident”. However, stridency is not an essential aspect of feminist writing. Reiterating Richards’ definition, a writer who acknowledges that systemic social injustice occurs because of gender has a feminist understanding. Writers who have such an understanding of women’s inequality and use it as the foundation for their work write feminist fiction. I argue that, while the

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873 Betty Freidan wrote the seminal feminist work in the time. She was born in 1921 and wrote The Feminist Mystique in 1963.
874 Richards, pp. 13-14.
875 Richards, pp. 13-18.
876 The Second Sex (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1974).
877 Richards, pp. 13-14.
social climate between the 1930s and 1970s influenced the expression of her 
feminist ideas, Pym recognises that women suffer discrimination based on 
gender. Further, her acknowledgement of such discrimination informs her 
work.

With Richards' definition as a useful starting point, I compare Pym's work 
against that of acknowledged feminist writers. When measured against the 
feminist features in Weldon and Fairbairns' early novels Pym's work stands the 
feminist test. I argue that Pym's work meets three essential feminist criteria: 
centering women in non-romantic texts; challenging the idea that characteristics 
are gender specific, inherent and should limit women's experiences; and using 
binary feminist ideas. I also maintain that her writing has some elements of 
1980s politics of difference theory. Moreover, Pym's preparedness to validate the 
concerns of spinsterst and retired women places her in advance of some of the 
feminist debates in Weldon and Fairbairns' work. At the same time, it is 
recognised that their arguments, developed in a feminist framework are 
comprehensive and unambiguous.

I found the following problems in mounting the case that Pym is a feminist 
writer. Firstly, Pym used no discernible feminist framework. Only a weak case 
can be made for her feminism through the few direct references she makes to 
feminist ideas in her diaries. However, intermittent references to male chauvinist 
piggery,878 her possession of the feminist iconic poem, 'When I am Old I shall 
Wear Purple',879 her use of the phrase, 'long before women's liberation began',880 
and her criticism of Milton's treatment of women 881 show that feminist ideas 
were not entirely remote from her thinking. More importantly, in the life of a 
writer is Pym's attention to acknowledged feminist writers and writing. Pym 
wanted to write like Elizabeth von Arnim, in particular referring to The Pastor's 
Wife. Pym's appreciation of other authors such as Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth 
Jenkins demonstrate her interest in novels that considered women and men's

878 Quoted on p. 234. 
879 MS Pym 173, fol. 215. 
880 MS Pym, fol. 215. 
881 Quoted in Liddell, p. 32.
relationships and, in Richards’ terms, mounted feminist arguments. Elizabeth Bowen, Rosamund Lehmann and Elizabeth Taylor were her contemporaries and she read their work as well as corresponding with Taylor. She read Weldon’s *Female Friends* in 1978. In the same period, she expressed a preference for reviewing Shirley Hazzard and Virginia Woolf’s work.882

In the catalogue of Pym’s library, assembled by Hilary Pym, there is no evidence of feminist theory, although her reference to Caro’s reading demonstrates Pym’s interest in the debates that took place in the 1970s while she was writing *An Academic Question*. After all, as she reminded herself, she was a writer, not a polemicist. It is in that context I approached her work. Pym’s reading listed in the late 1960s to 1979 diaries includes writers such as Janice Elliott whose accounts of the externally perfect marriage in contrast with its internal problems883 resonates with Pym’s accounts of the negative features of marriage. Both writers also recognise the value of women’s friendships and their resilience while men find it difficult to act. Another listed writer, Edna O’Brien, also takes a strong approach to women’s relationships with men, recognising their devastating effect on women. Other writers to whom Pym refers include Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble, A.S. Byatt, Elizabeth Jane Howard, Alison Lurie, Olivia Manning, Doris Lessing, Katherine Mansfield and Beryl Bainbridge. Penelope Lively, who considers Pym a feminist writer, also features.884 Such writers do not comprise a reading list for a conservative woman who chose fiction that supported discrimination against women and sustained patriarchal institutions.885

Most important is Pym’s statement that one ‘can learn a great deal about a writer from their fiction, not necessarily from autobiography’.886 Therefore, this thesis has concentrated on Pym’s novels and short stories to sustain the

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884 MS Pym 140, Diaries 1962-1978, ‘Books I read this year’, lists on the pages at the back of each diary.
885 The list is very similar to an undergraduate Women’s Studies Course, at the University of Queensland in 1974, personal communication with Dr Rosemary Campbell, March 16th 2012.
886 MS Pym 98, fol. 62.
argument that Pym is a feminist writer. Pym’s work is measured against the following criteria. First, a writer whose works can be designated as feminist places women at the centre of non-romantic fiction. Second, feminist writers give women self-determining roles who often exhibit what can be described as gender inappropriate behaviour under the conditions described by Butler. Third, feminist fiction depicts women characters who can be relied upon to question the value of conformity. Fourth, a feminist writer will often draw her women characters outside the confines of the domestic world.

Pym’s Oxford experience, her preparedness to placate critics such as Liddell and her penchant for dissembling encouraged her to use a model for her work which provided a familiar environment for her expression of feminist ideas. She used a village or pseudo village setting, quotations from poetry and hymns, stock characters and the reintroduction of characters in her novels. Pym’s early success encouraged her to maintain the model, with some changes in the 1960s, until the 1970s made open advocacy of feminist ideas acceptable. The penetrating ideas expressed in the short stories emerged in a low-key form or in the comforting village carapace in her novels. She began dispensing with some of these covert strategies in her 1960s work, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, and it is argued that this contributed to rejection of the novel by publishers. Her second novel in the period, *The Sweet Dove Died* was also rejected. Ironically, the novel that made her a Booker Prize nominee and led to her short listing dispensed entirely with the comforting mode of her early work. However, Pym’s note about *Quartet in Autumn* bears repeating: ‘Don’t let it become too much of a polemic! Prune and tone and reduce and refine’.

Pym not only adopted the village carapace but also admonished herself against allowing any didacticism in her work. The novels, which contain elements of comfort with the provisos referred to by Rossen and quoted above, resulted.

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887 Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble*.
888 MS Pym 32, fol. v5.
889 See Rossen’s quote, p.
I argue that Pym’s writing style always had an element of self-censorship. She was a social commentator from her first published novel. However, from *Some Tame Gazelle* to *No Fond Return of Love* she disguised her “polemic”. Although the only reference to her apprehension about polemic is in her diaries, her early work demonstrates her desire to work with subversive ideas while maintaining her anthropological detachment. In her later work, she heeded her admonition to herself about *Quartet in Autumn* and toned down her polemic while openly writing social commentary. In *A Few Green Leaves* Pym acknowledged the hidden unpleasantness of the most enduring of the devices she used in her process of disguise, the village cover. Her use of the village images parallels Austen’s use of the drawing room and other comforting techniques which similarly conceal her social commentary.⁸⁹⁰

Pym’s commentary on women and men’s relationships adopted feminist ideas. She valorised spinsters’ independence; questioned institutions such as marriage, work and the church and the unequal role of women within them; and conflated domestic and professional activities to demonstrate women’s proficiency in both. The troublesome woman, troublesome because she questioned women’s role through speech, action and the dual voice, is an essential character in Pym’s novels. She is most often, although not always, a spinster. She is considered troublesome because she asks difficult questions about the patriarchal nature of society, rebels against its conventions and offers alternative possibilities for women’s behaviour and place in the world.

Pym’s middle class background could have resulted in her becoming a conservative writer. I argue that Pym’s closeness to her spinster aunts and her mother’s unconventional attitude towards domestic responsibilities and independent behaviour established her consciousness of an alternative perception of women’s role. Her family experiences also encouraged her to see herself as valuable. She was amongst female elite in achieving an entrance to Oxford. Unfortunately, amongst all the pleasure she found there were also

⁸⁹⁰ See Johnson.
experiences that had the potential to diminish the value she placed on her understandings of the world. At the same time, her Oxford experience showed her that women were unequal, in academe and at times in personal relationships. Her experience with Harvey undermined her feelings of self-worth and the relationship with Liddell enhanced his role in her eyes as a mentor. Counteracting these experiences was her sense of irony and comic perception which allowed her to use her experiences to advantage. The sharper Belinda that she envisaged in an early draft of Some Tame Gazelle, if portrayed in the published version could have presented a very different aspect of Pym from the one depended upon by commentators who see her novels as autobiography.

Pym’s women characters are central to her novels and short stories in that they both control the narrative and predominate in the debates she raises about broad social issues. Unlike romantic fiction in which women also control the plot, Pym’s women characters are unromantic, question romantic notions and defy the conventions that are typical of romantic works. Pym’s women characters enunciate binary feminist ideas through their assertions about men which diminish their individuality either through direct references to them as typical of a group or through allusions, which portray them as part of a group. Pym also develops characters whose behaviour takes issue with the assumption that nurturing should be the prime definer of women’s nature. In addition, Pym’s characters give voice to Friedan’s theory. Although this occurs with particular acuteness in An Academic Question, earlier novels such as Jane and Prudence show evidence of anticipation of the theory. In her negative depictions of Allegra Gray in Excellent Women and Leonora Eyre in The Sweet Dove Died Pym gives some attention to the politics of difference. Pym’s observations of anthropological work made two important contributions to her feminist approaches. She consistently conflates domestic and professional

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891 Rosser in TWBP, p. 21.
892 MS Pym 3, Notebook August 1945, fol. 3.
activity, a method that ensures that the nexus between domestic work and women is broken. Pym’s attention to the conflation of professional and domestic observation is part of her debate about the relative merit of scientific and imaginative thought. The observational acuity of the writer is pronounced superior, expanding the status of observation associated with the writer so that her observations are regarded as authentic.

Pym’s work amongst anthropologists enhanced the detached writing style which she adopted in Some Tame Gazelle and subsequent novels. Her close proximity to anthropological study from the 1940s also provided her with the multiple examples of ethnocentricity that sharpened her commentary on racial discrimination. Women are central to the debates, combining Pym’s concerns with broader issues and her attention to giving women a place outside the domestic sphere.

II

Pym’s splendid spinsters feature in central roles in all of her novels until the 1970s, a period that signifies the beginning of a different approach to her work. Pym’s treatment of spinsters contrasts with the misogynist treatment they commonly receive in non-feminist works as described by Rogers. Pym’s spinsters are not ‘depicted as a figure of fun, stripped of the sentimental chivalry with which other women were swathed, caricatured as ugly, disagreeable, and relentlessly in pursuit of men’.\(^{893}\) They do not seek to ‘justify themselves by being a wife or mother’.\(^{894}\) Instead, the spinster who resists conforming to the idea that they should pursue marriage predominates.

Observation is a key to authenticity in Pym’s work. It is particularly in evidence in Pym’s approach to spinsters. Pym shows them rejecting proposals of marriage, giving authenticity to their lack of interest in that option. Where a proposal is accepted, for example in the case of Mary Beamish, (AGB) it is

\(^{893}\) Rogers, p. 201.
\(^{894}\) Rogers.
unobserved by other characters or the reader, minimising the status of an event which is an essential feature of romantic works. Observation is also an important measure of spinster’s work. As argued in the introduction there is much discussion of spinster’s preparedness to accept various tasks to assist their male companions. However, they are not observed doing so, challenging the authenticity of the proposal.

Belinda Bede (*STG*), Mildred Lathbury (*EW*), Mary Beamish (*AGB*) and Ianthe Broome (*AUA*) provide examples of one manifestation of the Pym spinster with a central role in the narratives. Belinda, Mildred, Mary and Ianthe are most likely to be seen as the stereotypical spinster. Overtly they conform. Their dress is modest and their external demeanour is largely compliant. In contrast, Pym’s positive reception of the underlying reality, that Belinda, Mildred and Ianthe are troublesome women is provided through affirmative detail of their non-compliance. Belinda’s rebuttal of the stereotypical approach to unrequited love and her rejection of the Bishop’s proposal challenge the spinster stereotype. Her continuing reflections upon the Archdeacon’s weaknesses and, more broadly, the shortcomings of the church undermine the status of a patriarchal institution. Mildred’s dual voice is a significant aspect of *Excellent Women*, raising difficult questions about the church, relations between women and men and the assumed superiority of men. Ianthe confounds her community by rejecting assumptions about gender and class in her marriage to John Challow. Mary’s initial stereotypical portrayal shows the superficiality of the construct when she abandons it.

Another group of troublesome spinsters is represented by Harriet Bede (*STG*), and despite being much younger, Prudence Bates (*JP*) and Catherine Oliphant (*LTA*). Jessie Morrow (*CH, CS and JP*) has some features in common with Prudence and Catherine despite her lack of financial independence. Harriet, Prudence and Catherine are visibly troublesome. Harriet is unaffected by age or singleness, taking her place in the community with equanimity; conducting flirtatious encounters with curates and challenging the Archdeacon. Her imagination is unbounded after she hears of Belinda’s afternoon, unencumbered by a chaperone, with him. The questionable morality of being disappointed about Belinda’s caution and Harriet’s belief that Agatha’s death
would accomplish a perfect outcome is overlaid with humour. The impact of Harriet’s refusal of Mr Mold is amplified by Harriet’s comic approach, throughout the event and in its retelling.

Prudence and Catherine’s behaviour more directly questions the moral values of the 1950s in which the novels are set. Prudence prefers affairs to marriage and is amused at Jane’s tentative questions about whether she is a mistress. Prudence is uninterested in marriage, has a satisfactory full time job, which caters to her financial independence, and desires only romantic liaisons which come to no traditional conclusion. She has a flat that she prefers to any home she might share with a man. Catherine lives with Tom, unmarried and unimpressed with his family’s concerns about her morality. She finds her experience of family life in the Swan home stifling. As an unmarried woman she can escape. She is depicted as knowing that to thrive she must be alone, in her own flat and conducting her own life without ties. Catherine’s relationship with Alaric Lydgate is unlikely to impose any restrictions on her, as evidenced by her taking his lifelong project in hand and committing it to fire. She acts, where he has not dared, to release him from the restrictions of scientific thought, replacing it with an imaginative alternative. Her suggestion that he adopt her occupation by writing a novel to replace his anthropological study challenges the impact he might have on her life at the same time as augmenting the status of imagination and the writer.

As a companion, Jessie Morrow’s independence is curtailed by her financial and domestic positions. Unlike Mildred who at one level maintains her outward appearance of compliance but makes her independence clear through the dual voice, Jessie’s defiance of convention is conducted through public utterances couched in carefully contrived language. Her listeners are unsure of how unconventional Jessie might be, although they are suspicious. Miss Doggett and Jane Cleveland are both obtuse about Jessie’s plans. Miss Doggett’s adoption of the status and supposition of perceptiveness associated with a married woman (JP, p.144), and Jane Cleveland’s actual married status, undermine the value of marital perspicacity. Their knowledge of Jessie’s troublesome nature is clouded by their assumptions about her. She is never considered as a partner for Fabian, unlike their assumptions about Prudence
who is perceived as desirable: Miss Doggett and Jane see Fabian and Prudence ideally matched on the basis that both are attractive, from the same class and, seemingly available. In the development of Jessie Morrow Pym presents a spinster who, while conforming to the traditional ideal that a spinster should marry, does so in such a way that she cannot be described as a spinster stereotype.

Three central spinsters in the novels who stand out from the others are Leonora Eyre (TSDD) and Letty Crowe and Marcia Ivory (QA). Leonora, in particular, alone in the novels presents the most complex manifestation of spinsterhood and feminist ideology. She represents Pym’s grappling with ideas that became part of feminist ideology in the 1980s. Leonora’s negative characteristics need to be approached from that perspective. Leonora is a spinster whose complexities demonstrate Pym’s attention to feminist ideas beyond Friedan’s concerns and binary feminism. In The Sweet Dove Dies Pym also makes one of her strongest feminist statements about men’s sexual power over women in the account of Humphrey’s sexual advances to Leonora. Diametrically opposed to Leonora’s life of leisure and overt dependence on men’s attention are the lives of Marcia and Letty who are portrayed as men’s colleagues. The notion of sexual affection between them is only briefly considered and rejected. They demonstrate Pym’s attention to ageing and to the burgeoning of the welfare state which poses challenges for the church and to medicine.

In the short stories, the feminist case made through spinsters is more compelling. “The Funeral” is a critical statement of the control exerted by assumptions about women and domesticity. The “monster” house is at the centre of a negative image which contrasts with typical portrayals of a home as desirable. “A Letter to My Love” identifies the death-like existence Margaret expects from her marriage, contrasted with the comparatively full lives of the spinsters she observed. The artist sisters in “A Vicar Floating By” make choices unaffected by expectations associated with their gender.

Pym’s melancholy wives are characterised by Agatha Hoccleve (STG), Jane Cleveland (JP), Helena Napier (LTA), Wilmet Forsyth (AGB), Sophia Ainger (AUA) and Caro Grimstone (AAQ). Each wife’s narrative and
characterisation challenges the assumption that marriage is an ideal state for women. Wilmet, like Leonora, poses a more difficult problem for the feminist re-reading of Pym’s texts. Wilmet’s increased domesticity by the end of *A Glass of Blessings* appears to counteract the rejection of the nurturing implied in domestic work, although she is similar to the other wives in her lack of maternal skills and interest. However, she replicates some of the images in Weldon’s work in her acceptance of the inevitability of her role, which in itself is a feminist comment about the difficulties associated with changing patriarchal institutions. Rowena Talbot in the same novel reinforces the image observed more closely through Wilmet. Sybil Forsyth provides an alternative to the two younger women’s approach through her independent partnership and rejection of a traditional woman’s role. In *An Academic Question* Caro portrays the complexities of a being a dissatisfied wife with the availability of choice in the 1970s. Friedan’s feminist ideas were articulated widely and Caro has some understanding of her position, giving her unexpected choices and responsibilities.

In keeping with Pym’s binary feminist approach, men are not only secondary figures in the novels but treated with a variety of negative approaches. Some, such as Archbishop Hoccleve (*STG*), Adam Marsh-Gibbon (*CS*) Fabian Driver (*JP*) and Alan Grimstone (*AAQ*) have their faults glaringly exposed through behaviour, dialogue or women’s estimations. Other men, such as the librarians and Bishop Grote (*STG*), Julian Malory (*EW*), the anthropologists in *Less Than Angels* and Tom Dagnell and the doctors (*AFGL*) are depicted as comic or child-like figures. Some men are thoughtless or impose restrictions on their wives that appear natural rather than invasive under patriarchy. Rodney Forsyth is an example of such behaviour. One man who escapes censure is Nicholas Cleveland, whose understanding of his wife’s problems is nevertheless tempered by his internal riposte that possibly celibacy would be a better solution than marriage for the clergy. Edwin and Norman (*QA*), despite their shortcomings, are dealt with sympathetically. Pym’s approach to them suggests that Pym is drawing attention to the improvement in gender relations where people are colleagues untouched by romance.
I argue that Pym’s self-censorship led to her developing a method to allow her to challenge the prevailing orthodoxies about women’s position in a patriarchal society. Pym’s strategies of irony, introducing quotation, stock, and continuing characters and the village carapace in to her early novels have led commentators to see them as the whole of her work. Contrary to that view, I see Pym’s method as a technique for enabling her to make salient social commentary, with an emphasis on feminism, in her novels and short stories from the 1930s to 1979.

III

This thesis has concentrated on examining Pym’s work as feminist writing. I have measured Pym’s work against feminist criteria and established that it meets those criteria. Her work has also been compared with the acknowledged feminist writing of Weldon and Fairbairns. The restriction I imposed on this thesis leaves some avenues unexplored. I contend that in a work of this nature it is legitimate to have compared Pym’s work with acknowledged feminists’ work and against feminist criteria.

However, there is further worthwhile work to be undertaken. Although I have made some brief comparisons with her early contemporaries, Pym’s writing could be situated more closely and in more detail in relation to their work. Although Elizabeth Taylor and her work is often a natural choice, as considered by Beauman,895 Pym’s writing extended into the 1960s and 1970s, which widens the context. I have used the fiction of two later contemporaries, Weldon and Fairbairns, to examine the feminist nature of Pym’s fiction. Pym’s fascination with Margaret Drabble’s work, and her desire to emulate her, suggests that a natural extension of this study would be considering Pym’s work in relation to Drabble’s fiction. The study that I would find most rewarding in the context of Pym’s publication, rejection and reinstatement would examine the similar experience of M.J. Farrell (Molly Kean) in the early

1960s. Her writing, like Pym's, made strong social commentary in seemingly comfortable works. The ways in which writers of social commentary have fictionalised their concerns and the literary vehicles through which they have addressed them is familiar. Re-reading of texts from a wide range of literary genres has been undertaken with other works. Pym and Farrell's work could be instructive in this context.
APPENDIX 1

Explanation of archival material.

Some of the material in the Barbara Pym archives is foliated in a way that requires explanation.

The material in the Oxford University, Bodleian Library Hilary Walton Collection has been in different locations during the process of researching and writing this thesis. It is now in the Bodleian Library and is in the process of being catalogued. The citations used in this thesis are relevant at the time of research and writing.

Some records in MS Pym are folioed; others are given page numbers. Some of the diaries are fully dated; some are partially dated; and some have page numbers. Folio numbers have been used in all instances and dates where available and appropriate.

In the Pym notebooks, it is usual that only the recto page is numbered. Pym left the verso pages blank or used them for making additional notes, adding paragraphs or making corrections. Corrections also appear in the typescripts on the page with the original words crossed out.

MS Pym 24 An Academic Question

Notebooks are numbered in sequence on the recto and verso pages 1-6. Rerumbering occurs from page six with numbers circled but this numbering does not continue. Folio numbers are used in all instances and relate to the numbers used in the manuscript.

MS Pym 146 Reflections

An unfolioed notebook.

Small Diaries

The small diaries are located in one box, referred to as MS Pym 101-103. Some pages are not folioed. Like much of the material, they are written in pencil and difficult to read. They have been interpreted to the best of my ability. In one instance I have had to refer to two possible interpretations of a word. Fortunately, a great deal of the material has been included in A Very Private Eye and A Lot to Ask.
APPENDIX 2

PYM AND GERMANY

Friedbert Gluck, Pym’s most significant German romantic interest, was discussed at Pym Conferences in 2006 and 2007. Yvonne Cocking presented the first paper on the topic. Her presentation combined published material and information from Pym’s diaries. Cocking’s paper dwelt on Pym’s attraction to Friedbert and Germany. Pym referred to the appeal of Germany throughout her diaries until the prelude to the Second World War. Pym’s description of her first sight of Friedbert Gluck is a cause for disquiet. She writes:

I had my first sight of real Nazis and of Friedbert Gluck. He was wearing a black uniform although the others were in yellowish-brown shirts with the Nazi swastika business on their left arms. They saluted each other in the heil Hitler manner. Then we went to lunch and various speeches were made. Friedbert spoke in German – I remember being much impressed by him, and thinking him a marvellous unapproachable Nazi. Tall, with a lovely figure set off to advantage by the black uniform – very dark with smooth black hair and a high forehead – dark complexion and greyish green eyes [not a typical blonde Aryan] rather strange looking but undoubtedly fascinating. As fascinating as he was, by the end of the diary entry Pym notes ‘I suppose I ended up by being still in love with Gabriel (Harvey) however much the Nazis had impressed me’.

Jutta Schmidt’s paper brought the information up to date. Schmidt said:

As real Barbara Pym fans, we do want to know more about this time in her life, so I contacted The WAS[German

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896 Cocking, ‘Barbara Pym in Germany’, *GL*, 12, 1, May 2006, (3-8).
897 Cocking, p.3
898 Cocking, p.3.
Wehrmachterfassungsstelle] which is a national information office that deals with questions concerning the soldiers of the German army, the Wehrmacht. I soon received an answer from the WASt informing me that a man called Friedbert Gluck was on their records but he had died in 1988. According to the records, Friedbert was a member of the German Wehrmacht but there was no proof that he was a member of the SS, the Schtzstaffel of the Nazi Party (NSDAP)…Some Pym readers think Friedbert must have been in the SS as Barbara describes him wearing a black uniform, which SS members also wore. But as yet we do not know that for sure.\footnote{899}

Gluck’s widow did not respond to Schmidt’s request for further information. Schmidt’s research at the Berlin Documentary Centre elicited only that Gluck was a member of the NSDAP and his occupation was “Referent” – either: ‘an assistant to someone important or that he was a referee/speaker’.\footnote{900} No further reports have been made.

My work in the Bodleian, through investigation of the dairies located in MS Pym 101-103 and the first typescript draft of Some Tame Gazelle provide more information. A letter between Pym and Liddell refers to Gluck’s role in organising the Olympic Games.\footnote{901} The original manuscript of Some Tame Gazelle sent to Cape and Gollanz included references to Nazi exiles. It was those that Robert Liddell suggested in 1935 should be omitted.\footnote{902} Cape and Gollanz rejected the novel. However, there is no suggestion that either publisher commented on Pym’s inclusion of the Nazi exiles.

Both Nazi and Communist references were excised from Some Tame Gazelle before it was published. Although Liddell’s suggested changes are referred to in A Very Private Eye the nature of the passages has not been discussed. Cocking’s belief that Pym’s enthusiasm for Friedbert arose at a

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{899} Jutta Schmidt, ‘The Search for Friedbert Gleuck’ \textit{G. L.}, 13 2, November 2007.
\item \footnote{900} Schmidt.
\item \footnote{901} MS Pym 98, foils 150-166, Letter from Barbara Pym to “Jock” (Robert) Liddell, 19/2/36.
\item \footnote{902} Hilary Walton Papers, Letter from Liddell to Pym, 22/12/1935 fol. 87.
\end{itemize}
time when she was particularly hurt over Harvey is supported by her writing ‘German’ romantic figures, “Helmuth” and “Kurt” into the original Some Tame Gazelle. Belinda recalls ‘the terrible revolution of the nineteen fifties [now] all the dear Nazis in exile in Africa, things like that [song she could remember] were of no importance’. Warum kuszt mich dein Mund so heisz? Or Horst Wessel Lied.\footnote{MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fols 4-5.}

The Germans’ exile has occurred years before the novel begins, because of a revolutionary overturn of the Nazi regime, an elected government. The omissions are summarised below. Nazis are referred to in the original manuscript\footnote{MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fols 4-5} on 8 folios between 4 and 20; folios 52, 64 and 85; and 3 folios between folios 104 and 156. Russians and communism are referred to on folios 64, 107-108, 114, 117 and 175.

Pym’s earliest and continuing references are to a romantic Belinda instigating knitting groups to provide for the Nazis in exile. She uses expensive wool as the Nazi exiles in Africa are ‘rather \textit{special} people’\footnote{MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fols 4-5}. She claims that the descendants of Helmuth, a former admirer of Pym’s, deserve the best.\footnote{MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fols 4-5} Belinda hides her romantic thoughts about Helmuth and Kurt.\footnote{MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 147.} Belinda also recalls the Nazis as “young and arrogant”. She is pleased to have acted on her mother’s advice and refused Helmuth’s proposal as ‘Otherwise she would probably have been in Africa now, and one heard such \textit{dreadful} things’.\footnote{MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 14.}

Harriet also features in Belinda’s Nazi story. Although she sympathises with them she does not share Belinda’s enthusiasm, preferring to dote on her curates.\footnote{MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 104.} Agatha is criticised in the original draft (a continuing theme in the published version) because she has no German connections and uses cheap
wool for her contributions to their care.\textsuperscript{910} Henry’s son is also brought into the story when he is depicted recalling a German love affair while he was at Oxford and the German songs of that period.\textsuperscript{911}

Communist references are to a Russian guest of a respected member of the community who acts as an interpreter. Harriet exchanges “Tovarich” with him and is told through the interpreter that ‘it is unusual to find anyone in England who is a true Communist’.\textsuperscript{912} His question about Harriet possibly belonging to the ‘great October Club in Oxford?’\textsuperscript{913} causes Belinda to smile as she doubts Harriet’s knowledge of the club or ‘its earnest but dirty young members’.\textsuperscript{914} Harriet does not want to disappoint but knows nothing of Communism.\textsuperscript{915} She talks of being on a Russian ship when she was 21 and how strange she found the fact that there were women crewmembers.\textsuperscript{916} Belinda finds conversation about the Five Year Plan difficult.\textsuperscript{917} There is speculation that perhaps the Soviet Union had become “jollier” since it had become ‘less communistically minded’.\textsuperscript{918} Harriet liked the Russian but considers him ‘too nice to be mixed up with that dreadful Communism’.\textsuperscript{919}

Nazis and Communists were included in the original draft of \textit{Some Tame Gazelle} together with Pym’s English friends. The inclusion of Pym’s two German friends is on a par with her romanticism about the English men who appeared in the novel. They appear to provide insight into her literary thinking rather than political interests at the time. \textit{Some Tame Gazelle} was designed to include the gamut of her friends and romantic interests during her time at Oxford. Her political approach appears to be even handed as Nazis and Communists had a place in the novel, although her romantic interests were

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{910} MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 19.
\bibitem{911} MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 156.
\bibitem{912} MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 108.
\bibitem{913} MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 108.
\bibitem{914} MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 108.
\bibitem{915} MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 108.
\bibitem{916} MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 108.
\bibitem{917} MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 114.
\bibitem{918} MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 117.
\bibitem{919} MS Pym 2/1 Notebook, Draft, Some Tame Gazelle, fol. 175.
\end{thebibliography}
only exemplified in the Germans she had met. Pym's story line, involving the overthrow of Hitler suggests that she had some concerns about what was happening in Germany. At the same time, she clearly remained sympathetic to her German friends as exiles. Although she continued to include characters with socialist leanings such as the student in, *Crampton Hodnet* (pp.5-6) and female anthropologist in *Less Than Angels* (p.206) *Some Tame Gazelle* is the only draft in which Nazis appear. Friedbert contacted her in 1946 as related in her diaries. Cocking suggests it is unlikely she responded.\(^{920}\) There is no further comment in her diaries or writing which suggests that her interest in the Nazis continued.

\(^{920}\) Cocking, p. 8.
APPENDIX 3

Spinsters in Pym’s Novels

The material in this appendix is from novels that were not discussed in Chapter 3.

Unmarried women are given central roles in Pym’s novels. Jessie Morrow appears with Miss Doggett and Barbara Bird in *Crampton Hodnet*; Catherine Oliphant, Esther Clovis and Deidre Swan in *Less Than Angels*, Mary Beamish in *A Glass of Blessings*, Dulcie Mainwaring and Viola Dace in *No Fond Return of Love*, Ianthe Broome in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, Leonora Eyre in *The Sweet Dove Died*, Marcia Ivory and Letty Crowe in *Quartet in Autumn* and Emma Howick in *A Few Green Leaves*.

Spinsters are also a vital part of the community in these works and are represented in a variety of relationships and with a range of behaviours and lifestyles. Although some depictions of spinsters are brief, they nonetheless demonstrate Pym’s continuing and sustained interest in portraying single women as individuals rather than members of a stereotypical group. Spinsters who appear briefly in *Crampton Hodnet, Less Than Angels, A Glass of Blessings, No Fond Return of Love* and *The Sweet Dove Died* are listed below.

As Pym moved into her new phase of writing the number of spinsters diminishes. The work from the 1960s, with its stronger undertones and eventually, openly feminist ideas need fewer comforting characters. Although they are troublesome women and carried Pym’s feminist narrative, they also provided an aspect of her village cover. In the later novels, they no longer had to provide that function.

*Crampton Hodnet* includes young spinsters, one about to go to Oxford, and involved in flirtations which are momentarily disappointing; a young woman who contributes to that disappointment; a potential first class honours student about to embark on an affair with her tutor, and her university friends; a young woman who ‘had an unpleasant experience in Paris’ (*CH*, p.151) and a potential fiancé. Another companion is mentioned and there are additional single working women, such as maids, a nun, three Oxford college tutors and a
college Principal. There are two ‘dim North Oxford spinsters’ in new hats, one of whom elicits possible censure with her newly waved hair (CH, p.29); ‘groups of North Oxford spinsters at tea after shopping’ (CH, p.52) and spinsters amongst a church congregation.

Spinsters who feature in Jane and Prudence continue Pym’s pattern of providing single women with a variety of characteristics and lifestyles. Flora, Jane’s daughter will be studying at Oxford, but in the meantime displays the domesticity that her mother spurns, yearns after various men briefly and is practical in the face of her mother’s fanciful imaginings and behaviour. Miss Jellink, the Principal and Miss Birkenshaw, head of English at Oxford, are unmarried professionals. Miss Clothier and Miss Trapnell are office workers of indeterminate age and occupation. Their concerns about working only the requisite hours are contrasted with the young typists who display no concern about time keeping and talk casually of their elders (JP, pp.109-110). Miss Bird (CH), a friend of Jane Cleveland’s, makes a brief appearance as a writer who seizes a plate of sandwiches to eat by herself at a literary function (JP, pp. 131-132).

Less Than Angels includes spinster anthropologists, one of Bolshevist views and the other a flirt, who compete for funding to go into the field; ‘an expert in African languages’ (LTA, pp. 8-9); an aunt who combines a vivid imagination, observance of ritual and resentment against a clergyman; a spinster aunt deemed, by her unmarried state, inferior to her married sister (LTA, p.129); two fiancés and a rejected lover who is also a breeder of golden retrievers; ‘a tweedy little woman of a mild, almost downtrodden aspect’921 (LTA, p.153); a tall debutante with a desperate mother; a mistaken identity which links stereotypical understandings about spinsters with one who is not a stereotype; and mention of young women who ‘Either said nothing “submitted to his embraces” […] or pushed him away indignantly’ (LTA, p.26) or as

921 Miss Jessop also features in Excellent Women.
members of the local club ‘might also be considered amongst its amenities [...but] often led [men] captive in marriage’ (LTA, p.37).

_A Glass of Blessings_ includes typists and a young woman who works in a coffee shop. The warden of the Settlement is a spinster; other spinsters are a former governess on familiar terms with people of a higher status after her retirement; nuns; ‘two elderly spinsters [learning Portuguese] who planned to hitchhike around Portugal and write a book about it’ (_AGB_, p.64); two young attractive spinsters who are learning Portuguese for ‘personal and romantic reasons’ (_AGB_, p.64); and another whose reason for learning Portuguese is unclear; a spinster with a unique blood type who demands special treatment at the blood donor clinic; women in the civil service including one in a principal role in the ministry; ‘splendid Miss Hitchens’ (_AGB_, p.132) and her friend Prudence Bates; spinsters who are the source of conversation with feminist overtones (_AGB_, p.132); a worker with galley proofs; and unmarried mothers.

The third spinster who appears in _No Fond Return of Love_ is ‘a fellow lecturer’ (_NFRL_, p.9) to the key male character in the novel, the next is the ‘librarian of quite a well-known learned institution’ (_NFRL_, p.13). Variety and commentary on women's work is added by the introduction of a spinster who prefers housework (‘which nowadays did not seem to be regarded as in any way degrading’ _NFRL_, p.29) to working in a haberdashery department; the main character’s niece who comes to work in London after leaving school; a lecturer in science at London University; a helpful woman at a jumble sale; an elderly aunt who worked in censorship during the war and now sits on committees and does parish work who, like the fifty year old former headmistress who is about to marry, at the end of the novel is said to be marrying a vicar; a young woman who expects that women will be in the workforce; and, more typically, a spinster who minds her elderly mother and is distressed about a handsome clergyman.

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922 Prudence Bates is a major character in _Jane and Prudence_.
923 Rhoda Wellcome is a character from _Less Than Angels_.
*The Sweet Dove Died* focuses on a spinster in her fifties and introduces few characters who do not belong explicitly to her world. Her spinster friend from their working days is infatuated with a young gay man; and her tenant is an elderly spinster. On the periphery of her life, but a threat to her friendship with a young man, is a spinster who is a sexually free writer; the uncompetitive, admiring middle-aged spinster works with the young man at the antique shop; and the spinster, so recognised because her basket holds a dinner for one, for whom Pym provides alternative views of spinsterhood: a woman alone and pitiful, or a woman ‘going home to cosy solitude’ (*TSDD*, pp.140-141).

In *An Unsuitable Attachment*, the additional spinsters featured are the vicar’s wife’s sister, a secretary to a London publisher; a retired hospital nurse; the vet’s sister who assists him in the surgery; a retiring library assistant; a dressmaker; nuns; and two seventy-year-old English spinsters holidaying in Rome. 924 The spinsters in *An Academic Question* are a Swedish au pair; a young lecturer who would prefer to eat than talk to her male companion; the owner of a second hand bookshop with ‘a preoccupation with animals and interest in the problems of loneliness, [...and a] sardonic attitude towards academics’ (*AAQ*, p.15); a university student; a nursing home matron; the unmarried sister of the central character; a former principal of a teachers’ college; an assistant editor on a sociology journal; and a lover of medical romances. The novel includes a reference to the well-known Pym spinster character from *Less Than Angels*, Miss Clovis, whose funeral is attended by the main character.

*Quartet in Autumn* has ‘a young black girl, ‘Provocative, cheeky and bursting with health ‘, (*QA*, p.8) working in the office of the main characters; a single landlady and two spinster tenants; and a retirement home “resident warden”.

With *A Few Green Leaves*, Pym returns to her practice of including multiple characters, including a range of spinsters. The novel includes the

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924 *The Misses Bede*, in their seventies in *An Unsuitable Attachment* are originally characters from *Some Tame Gazelle*. 
rector's sister in her fifties and in love with Greece; 'a long-established village resident' (*AFGL*, p.8); a spinster 'of uncertain age' (*AFGL*, p.11) who has written a romantic historical novel; 'a small, bent woman in an ancient smelly coat' (*AFGL*, p.18) who encourages hedgehogs into her house; a former governess; a librarian; young women in church or the local pub; a former headmistress; 'Tom's history ladies' (*AFGL*, p.100), a group that is likely to include spinsters; a worker in a museum; a student 'recovering from an unsatisfactory love affair and writing a novel' (*AFGL*, p.210) and reference to Miss Clovis's death as 'the passing of a formidable female power in the anthropological world' (*AFGL*, p.133).
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