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MAKING A LIFE FROM THE MARGINS:  
THE OBLIQUE ART OF BARBARA PYM

by

Phyllis Margaret Paryas

A thesis  
presented to the University of Ottawa

in partial fulfillment of the  
thesis requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English Literature

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Abstract

Making a Life From the Margins: The Oblique Art of Barbara Pym  
by Phyllis Margaret Paryas

This study examines the grounds of dissonance in the comic novels of Barbara Pym (1913-1980) from a pluralist critical perspective. Pym's restrained and indirect style is considered as a manifestation of the marginal positioning of a middle-class woman writer within the specific cultural milieu of pre- and post-war Britain. Structuralist, post-formalist and feminist criticism are utilized in an attempt to shed light on the contradictory forces discernible in her subtle prose.

Six books were published between 1950 and 1961, followed by her publisher's rejection of a seventh novel in 1963. Pym's career was eclipsed for sixteen years but she was rediscovered in 1977, enabling three additional novels to be published before her death in 1980. Four complete novels, along with three finished short stories and three novel drafts, have been printed posthumously.

The introduction provides an overview of the common preoccupation of Pym criticism to date with the ambiguities and tensions in her work. Chapter One presents the argument for a pluralist approach and discusses scholars whose work illuminates Pym's style. These include Northrop Frye, M.M. Bakhtin, Frank Kermode and anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener. Anglo-American critics Elaine Showalter, Nancy K. Miller and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, among others, contribute a feminist perspective. The remaining four chapters explore the language of Pym's protagonists, the characterization of her "excellent women," the fruitfulness of applying dialogic analysis to her prose, and the revisions of plot teleology which she initiates. Pym finally is seen as an essentially optimistic but divided woman writer negotiating painful compromises for her marginal comic heroines within the formidable constraints of the dominant culture.

Dedicated to the memory of my mother  
Isobel Margaret Fitzsimmons Perazzo  
and for  
Heinz

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List of Abbreviations: Primary Sources

- STG: Some Tame Gazelle  
EW: Excellent Women  
J&P: Jane and Prudence  
LTA: Less Than Angels  
GB: A Glass of Blessings  
NFRL: No Fond Return of Love  
QA: Quartet in Autumn  
SDD: The Sweet Dove Died  
FGL: A Few Green Leaves  
UA: An Unsuitable Attachment  
CH: Crampton Hodnet  
AAQ: An Academic Question  
CTS: Civil to Strangers and Other Writings  
VPE: A Very Private Eye

## INTRODUCTION

The warm reception of Barbara Pym's first six books, published between 1950 and 1961, was followed in 1963 by her publisher Jonathan Cape's abrupt rejection of the manuscript of An Unsuitable Attachment as "not the kind of novel to which people are turning" (A Very Private Eve 213). As a result, Pym's achievement was eclipsed between 1961 and 1977 by sixteen years of silence and exclusion. Her novels were dismissed by Cape, whose contemporary list was comprised largely of "men and Americans," (VPE 213) as "altogether too mild for present tastes" (VPE 216). A fortuitous resurrection ensued when Lord David Cecil and Philip Larkin named her in the Times Literary Supplement of January 21, 1977 as an author whose work had been underrated. Three additional novels were published before her death in 1980. Four complete novels, edited and revised from her unpublished material by her literary executor, Hazel Holt, have been printed posthumously along with three finished short stories and three novel drafts in various stages of completion.

Because the essence of Barbara Pym's art is subtlety, restraint and delicate irony, she was unfashionable in the sixties and early seventies when "strong" books exploring fictional worlds and subject matter beyond her range or replete with explicit sexuality were courted and celebrated by publishers and critics. But recent critical trends stemming from Northrop Frye's radical re-evaluation of the relative prestige of the comic genre within a structuralist perspective, as well as a whole emerging body of feminist critical theory which seeks to distinguish characteristic qualities of women's writing as a subordinate discourse within the language of the dominant culture, provide fruitful new approaches to Pym's elusive and ambivalent texts. In particular, the 1981 publication in English of M.M. Bakhtin's extensive analysis of the history of the novel, The Dialogic Imagination, with its emphasis on the generic roots of the novel as comic, subversive, and multi-voiced in its scrutiny of language and culture from the "outside," is illuminating in a re-reading of her work. Bakhtin's essays, however, do not include a consideration of a single female

novelist. An additional dimension of distance becomes possible when gender de-centres novelistic perspective even further from direct participation or inclusion in the cultural foci of power and authority. Marginality can thus be discerned as implicit not only in what is comic and novelistic, but also in the oblique perspectives and muted languages of the subordinate groups which recur in women's writing.

It is my contention, then, that Pym's comic fictions owe their idiosyncratic character of ironic detachment and restraint to a melding of oblique strategies of discursive subversion rooted in the generic tradition of the English comic novel. In addition, I will demonstrate further elements of linguistic and structural reduction and refraction in her work which are the textual markers of women's writing. It is precisely these oblique characteristics of Pym's very British "Oxbridge" novels that offer scope for a new focus of critical attention. To date, published criticism has centred on thematic concerns (Benet, Nardin, Ackley), biography (Rossen, Liddell, Holt), the literary heritage (Rossen, Nardin) and characterization (Nardin, Long). While not excluding these considerations, I propose to approach Pym from a different critical perspective. I will undertake a detailed study of Pym's techniques of stylistic reduction and comic subversion, that is, those aspects of her art which obliquely satirize a flawed community which is nevertheless finally, if tentatively, embraced through a wry acceptance of limitation and loss. The insights of Bakhtin into the tradition and structure of novelistic discourse, illuminated by more recent studies of language and narratology undertaken by feminist scholars and based in part on the discoveries of social anthropology, will provide the critical framework for my investigation. I will show that genre and gender combine to form the matrix of the comic art of Barbara Pym.

A brief overview of Pym criticism since 1977 will emphasize the tensions and complexities in her texts as identified in scholarly work to date. If there is a common discovery among Pym critics, it is the discernment of disconcerting incongruities. The fictional strategies by which Pym's submerged women, in common with the female protagonists of many other contemporary women writers,

"disengage" themselves from received tropes "alive,"<sup>1</sup> are subtle, tentative and multi-faceted.

Pym's unsettling dissonance is consistently marked in a rapidly growing body of commentary. In his 1988 doctoral dissertation, Elements of Satire in the Novels of Barbara Pym, Bruce Jacobs attempts to position Pym within Frye's spectrum of satire as delineated in Anatomy of Criticism. He concludes:

Pym's novels are at once comic and pathetic, intimate and detached, and tolerant and indignant because two distinct visions operate simultaneously in her work. (300)

Finally, he must end in a compromise--her vision is "both comic and satiric" (306).

Jane Nardin's 1985 study, Barbara Pym, also notes numerous dichotomies in a chapter entitled "Tradition and Innovation." When first reading Pym, she cautions, "one is apt to experience [the novels] as a curious mixture of the familiar and the strange" (8). Pym resists simplification. Her characters, for example, do not "fit" easily into the life-slots available to them. Are some of her women anachronisms? Nardin asks, "If they don't marry, why don't they work? If they neither marry nor work, how can they be happy?" (8). Pym provides no definitive answers to these questions, but instead explores the options open to her women without succumbing to the dangerous dichotomy of essentialism or utopianism. Life remains, as Catherine Oliphant of Less Than Angels notes, "comic and sad and indefinite" (89). Moreover, though saturated with the rituals and language of the Christian tradition, Pym's novels refuse the solace of spiritual certainty. Nardin comments, "It may sound odd to say that for a Christian writer like Pym there is no ultimate answer to any of life's largest questions, yet this surely is the case" (29). Though Pym's novels may appear deceptively transparent, or "crystalline"<sup>2</sup> in Iris Murdoch's terms, they are neither cosy nor safe; a discerning reader soon discovers the deconstructionist abyss yawning beneath the tea table at the vicarage. What Bruce Jacobs calls "a

discordant tone" (2) and Frank Kermode describes as the necessary "discoveries of dissonance" (179) in a work of art, are indelibly inscribed within every aspect of Pym's fiction.

Diana Benet's 1986 analysis, Something to Love, also foregrounds paradox. She observes: "Characteristically, her forte is comedy.... Exploring her large subject, however, leads Pym to tragedy" (2). Benet's conclusion sees the generic distinction as, finally, the reflection of an attitude to life in Pym's characters, and she traces this particular ambiguity by comparing earlier works with the last novels. She speaks of The Sweet Dove Died and Quartet in Autumn: "The impact of these novels is tremendous because Pym presents the issues and their primacy in a fashion more straight-forward than comedy allows..." (163). Pym's problematic consideration of love, in all its aspects, opens up further opportunities for the revision of traditional tropes and plots. A contemporary blurring of generic paradigms is but one manifestation of this particular structural tension. Benet concludes with a distinction that Frye has articulated in Anatomy of Criticism as a structuralist formulation of the tragic and comic modes; the characters must finally choose between isolation and integration:

By their very ordinariness, Pym's people represent humanity in the process of deciding just what kind of life it will live, what will be the nature of existence in an imperfect world that sometimes seems inimical to emotional fulfilment and happiness. Some of them turn away from the questions or, facing them, give the self-defeating, isolating answers; happily, most celebrate life and themselves in the decision to extend, through the various kinds of love, the vital bridge between the solitary self and the world.  
(164)

But Benet is aware that this choice, too, is always compromised and never utopian. Closure in Pym rejects the romantic and the idyllic, and remains tinged

with an irony and doubt rendered both poignant and palatable through dry wit and humour.

Kathleen Browder Heberlein's 1984 dissertation, Communities of Imaginative Participation: The Novels of Barbara Pym, was read in manuscript by Robert Emmet Long as he was writing his 1986 study of Pym. It is useful, then, to look at their perceptions of Pym's work in close proximity. Heberlein explains the tensions in Pym in relation to what she characterizes as an exercise of "imaginative participation" which is a major function of the "traditional novelist"(3). While all competent fiction is necessarily complex, the key characteristics of Pym's art reflect the kinds of tensions described by many feminist scholars as typical of, though not exclusive to, women's writing. Heberlein touches upon many of the antinomies incorporated within the canon:

This kind of knowing [imaginative participation] is inductive, empirical, concrete. Because it begins with the specific detail and derives from it the social reality underneath, this kind of knowing avoids dangerous oversimplification. Contingency, complexity, and fluidity cannot be ignored when every detail's interpretation is provisional, subject to modification should the heart, the imagination, or the historical sense so dictate. (4)

Heberlein's supplementary notes acknowledge Lionel Trilling's "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in his The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society (1954) as a source for her study. Again, while all fictional recreations convey complexity, feminist scholarship points to new ways of understanding some of these antinomies as textual markers of the particular problems encountered by the woman writer pushing towards change or tentatively manoeuvring within conventional tropes. "This kind of knowing" closely parallels the insights of Jean Baker Miller on female creativity (112) or Mary Daly's observations in Gyn / Ecology on the role of "spinsters" who inscribe additional complexity into

traditional fictional paradigms--what Virginia Woolf called writing against the current. Heberlein continues:

By refusal to allow either reader or characters an absolutist stance, by encouragement of the play of thought upon alternatives and ambiguities, this kind of knowing enters the domain of irony. It must be both emotionally involved and intellectually detached; it must imaginatively participate in both "should be" and "is," past and present, manners and morals, appearance and reality. Without imaginative participation in different points of view, neither self-knowledge nor knowledge of others is really possible. (4)

While none of this suggests an "exclusive" difference or alterity in women's texts, it is significant that Heberlein further observes that Pym "tells her stories from a woman's point of view, the male appearing as very much the other" (6). At least one characteristic of this feminine point of view is its insistence upon an opening up of more conventional perspectives to the multiple or alternate visions of subordinate groups. This liberating thrust, shared by all imaginative artists, achieves interesting new dimensions within the context of women's writing.

While Benet locates Pym's characters' ability to transcend isolation in their capacity to love, Heberlein's perception is somewhat more subtle, and ascribes the capacity to connect to the novelistic strategy of imaginative recreation. Perhaps, if we remember Iris Murdoch's analysis in her polemical essay "Against Dryness," in which she perceives "love" as the artist's willingness to free or release the characters from "crystalline" structures into the uncertain world of the random and contingent, we may find that Benet and Heberlein are, in essence, saying the same thing. "Love" is the catalyst to imaginative liberation into multiplicity. The woman writer must "fly more nets" in this novelistic enterprise, however, than her male counterpart, and the

examination of texts produced by women soon reveals characteristic ways of subverting and parodying inherited structures.

The liberating capacity of imaginative participation is thus seen by Heberlein as necessary for novelistic plenitude. She continues her discussion of the Pym canon:

Different novels manifest imaginative participation in different stages, degrees and aspects, acted out by characters of different ages, classes, temperaments, education and marital status, placed in situations that differ in the integrity and extent of their communal structures. Moreover, although her novels belong in the mainstream of traditional realism, she employs a variety of fictional techniques from book to book, moving towards increasingly greater complexity in her use of symbol and allusion, manipulation of point of view, carrying over of characters from one novel to another and exploration of the novel as a self-conscious artifact. Tone and mode range from comic though ironic to near tragic. (6)

When Heberlein reminds us that some critics have discerned aspects of the meta-text in A Few Green Leaves, which can be read as an "exploration of the novel as a self-conscious artifact," the dismissal of Pym's work as "transparent," thematically or stylistically, acquires particular point. Pym's technical range is, in fact, considerable, and, as Heberlein has so clearly indicated in this last summary, her oblique prose style is a sophisticated medium for the explorations of her paradoxical world.

Robert Emmet Long continues in the line of commentators who find in Pym a great deal more than they had, perhaps, initially expected to discover. He, too, writes of a disturbing, dissonant quality in Pym's treatment of her fictional world:



What one finds in her work most of all is a pervasive ambivalence--a conflict between an allegiance to tradition and a deeply felt sense of isolation, a delight in romantic situations, and a sceptical attitude toward the relationships they entail. Her comedy has a special and distinctive charm, but there is a sadness in it too, as her characters attempt to find fulfilment in relationships that, elusively, are only just out of reach of realization. (24)

Long subsequently attempts to locate this uneasiness or discordant tone in Pym within the tension between "her allegiance to classical form" (204) and the fact that, unlike those in Jane Austen's world of confidence and security, "the energies of Pym's world...are running down, and her characters are less certain of their place in society or of their connections with other people" (204).

A perception of the diverse notes of dissonance is shared, then, by everyone who examines Pym's work with sympathetic attention. These complexities mark the "necessary impurities" identified by Kermode as the inevitable consequence of any writer struggling to create within, and to reach beyond, the received paradigms of art. The case of the woman writer, I submit, takes this common struggle into a new dimension, circumscribed by even greater constraints, frustrations and difficulties. Gilbert and Gubar's revision of Harold Bloom's theory of "the anxiety of influence," which he sees manifest in the tensions between tradition and innovation and expresses in terms of patriarchal symbols, is a good example of a feminist reconstruction of the problem.<sup>5</sup> In spite of such work by female academics, there has been little effort to date to consider Pym in the light of feminist critique. Upon cursory examination, she might seem an unlikely writer to choose for such a study. It is no less problematic to place Pym within feminist concerns than it is to "fix" her within the parameters of any other approach. Long suggests a reason for this reticence on the part of feminist scholars:

In novel after novel, Pym's men fail her women because they lack stature, are unable to break out of their self-involvement or illusions of masculine importance in order to provide a basis for love or understanding. Male chauvinism is constantly exposed to satire, yet feminists have not rushed to embrace Pym, and if anything, have been wary and silent. A reason for their wariness may be that Pym's women depend wholly upon men for their self-identity. Without men, they cannot fully exist.... The tendency of Pym's fiction is toward a passive acceptance of isolation, whether within or outside the precincts of the church. (215)

Like most other over-simplifications of Pym's work, this assertion is only partially true. While it is clear that relationships between men and women are a key concern of Pym's fiction, she does not, as Benet has already noted, confine herself to heterosexual relationships, or indeed even to human relationships as the only options available in the quest for "something to love." Moreover, it can be argued that the utopian concept of human beings who "fully exist" is never a realizable option in Pym. All relationships are compromises--none is ideal or idealized--whether between man and woman, woman and woman, or man and man. The utopian maxim of "a full life" is always undercut by an ironic subtext. We "make a life" with others in Pym's fictional microcosms, and make do with imperfection, which is the "given" of human existence in a flawed world.

But certainly commentators have been wary of bringing feminist perspectives to Pym's writing. In her 1989 study, Katherine Anne Ackley describes Pym's characters as "pre-liberation." She, like Long, offers a succinct and somewhat glib reduction in her remark that, "there are two kinds of women in Pym's novels, both of whom are defined by their connection to men: the married--including widowed--and the unmarried" (34). She continues in this vein:

One needs to remember that most of the novels published in Pym's lifetime were written during the 1950s, before the contemporary

women's movement, and that although she makes passing references, largely negative, to women's equality, her female characters belong to pre-liberation days. When she first began writing novels as a young woman, "spinster" was viewed by many as an almost dirty word...the general assumption of the society Pym wrote about was that women ought to marry and were not complete human beings if they did not. (34-35)

Again, it is important to note that Pym's attitude to the freedom and equality of women is as subtle and tempered by irony as all her other attitudes. As I shall hope to show, she was far from naïve in these matters; for example, she was astute enough to realize that the concept of "work" as a liberating force is problematic, especially for the artist. The opportunity for leisure to observe and create, which freedom from "important" work allows, is far more liberating in some ways than the dilemma of many contemporary middle-class women, which has been somewhat justly described as not having it all, but doing it all.

Many of Pym's women have the independent means that enable them to nurture the capacity for Heberlein's "imaginative participation" in the world around them. Like E.M. Forster's Margaret and Helen Schlegel in Howards End, they often may "stand upon money as upon islands" and, as Margaret says, "all our thoughts are the thoughts of six-hundred pounders, and all our speeches" (61). Ironically, though Margaret extols the importance of work, the contemporary woman, like the Wilcoxes of Howards End, may have won the Pyrrhic victory of entry into the world of "telegrams and anger" (27) at the expense of the civility and leisure once deemed essential to creativity. Pym is wise enough to recognize the advantages of what Forster characterizes as the rapidly disappearing Oxford world of "civilization without activity" (112); she often retains the privilege of detachment from a preoccupation with work for her alert Jamesian protagonists, "upon whom nothing is lost," as they engage in imaginative participation in the world they inhabit. The concepts of equality and liberation for women in Pym are as problematic as many other tensions explored in her art. Feminist approaches

which are wary of arbitrary simplifications can, nevertheless, illuminate her work in productive ways.

Jane Nardin's efforts to analyze Pym's unorthodox treatment of the relationships between men and women are complex, and foreground ambivalence:

In the world of Pym's novels, where men are greatly outnumbered by women, the former seek success and the realization of their own desires through doing the sort of work that society rewards, while the latter suppress their own desires and devote themselves to caring for others. Considering that many of Pym's novels were written in the late forties and the fifties when such insights were severely out of fashion, she gives her tart reflections on the exploitative relationship of men to women surprising prominence. But even more surprising than the fact that Pym has these feminist insights is what she chooses to do with them. Instead of taking the common feminist position that women must seek equal opportunity to realize their own desires, Pym's novels suggest that it is in fact men, rather than women, who are the main victims of sex role differentiation. (40)

An explanation of this seeming anomaly lies in the ironic possibility for liberation of marginal women in the very fact of their exclusion from a dominant culture that renders those who occupy its privileged structures "blind" to realities available to those on the periphery. Nardin calls the quality Heberlein speaks of as imaginative participation, the "feminine consciousness" (47). For Nardin, the possession of this perceptive "consciousness," fed by acute observation, is what distinguishes women from men in Pym, and what makes their marginal lives worth living.

Anthropologist Edwin Ardener speaks of this in other terms, as a perception of alternate realities available to members of a subordinate group, while the dominant group (in this case, men) are blind to perspectives not accounted for

within the paradigms they have constructed.' Pym's men thus lack attention and "ironic distance" (Nardin 41).

Many of Pym's men are self-absorbed and almost entirely preoccupied with their own concerns. Their female helpmates receive little, if any, of their attention. Nardin summarizes, once again emphasizing the ambivalence in male-female relationships:

Pym's views on the subject of men and women are among the most consistent in her work, yet even here the matter is more complex than it initially seems.... The most attractive characters counter-balance feminine humility with feminine consciousness.... The only real beneficiaries of the quietly, but dramatically, sexist culture Pym's novels portray are the women characters who, like their creator, can see men as they are. Men themselves, as well as the women who have internalized this society's view of their own inferiority, are its victims. (47)

It is clear from this spectrum of antinomies encountered in Pym scholarship that she is not likely to be defined by any single approach or methodology. My strategy will, therefore, be pluralistic, even within the feminist framework. The first chapter will outline the theoretical context within which I will examine the indirect and ambivalent nature of Pym's fiction. Each of the next four chapters will consider a different aspect of the novelistic strategies of stylistic revision which critique the Pym microcosm in such a way as to "force men to experience ... a different and contradictory reality" (Bakhtin 59). My analysis will illustrate how Pym's art refracts, mutes and de-centres her protagonists and their discourse as they strive to "make a life" from the margins. The "contradictory reality" of the marginal lives of Pym's women will, nevertheless, be shown in the final chapter to reach a tentative integration with the dominant community in a range of revised comic closures.

Notes to Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Mary Jacobus, "The Question of Language," Writing and Sexual Difference, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: U of Chicago P 1982) 50. Jacobus quotes Luce Irigaray in a discussion of the problem encountered by women writers in inscribing their experience within traditional tropes: "For Irigaray, the price paid by the woman writer for attempting to inscribe the claims of women 'within an order prescribed by the masculine' may ultimately be death; the problem as she sees it is this: '[How can we] disengage ourselves alive, from their concepts?'"

<sup>2</sup> Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch," Encounter 16 (1961): 16-20; reprinted Bradbury ed., The Novel Today 23-31.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Daly, "Spinning: Cosmic Tapestries," Gyn / Ecology (Boston: Beacon, 1978) 385-424.

<sup>4</sup> Murdoch's discussion is incorporated into Kermode's The Sense of an Ending.

<sup>5</sup> See Gilbert and Gubar's revision of Harold Bloom's theory of the "anxiety of influence" in The Madwoman in the Attic 46-53, 59, 188, 192, 193. See also Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980). Chapter 9 of Lentricchia's book discusses Bloom's importance in "Harold Bloom: The Spirit of Revenge."

<sup>6</sup> See Ardener's Perceiving Women 25.

## CHAPTER I

Comic, Sad, Indefinite: The Laugh of the Medusa  
as Secret Smile

Feminist criticism is spontaneously aware of the ideological nature of received literary hierarchies, and struggles for their reconstruction.

Terry Eagleton, Towards a Revolutionary Criticism<sup>1</sup>

Jonathan Culler has recognized that for feminists there is "an urgent question: to minimize or to exalt sexual differentiation?" He suggests, following the example of deconstruction, "the importance of working on two fronts at once, even though the result is a contradictory, rather than a unified movement."

"Feminism and the Profession of Literature:

Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Presidential Address 1984 [MLA]"<sup>2</sup>

## PART I - The Argument for Pluralism

Barbara Pym presents an intriguing and problematic example of a twentieth-century woman writer struggling to "make a life" within the paradigms of the patriarchal traditions of the British comic novel, while at the same time pushing, albeit tentatively, towards the kinds of feminine innovations that attempt a reconstruction of "The Book of Old Plots."<sup>3</sup> Writing within the long tradition of what Bakhtin terms "the dialogic imagination," Pym reflects the paradox of the marginalized female author who must inevitably create from both inside and outside a tradition. I believe that her oblique art reveals many of the inescapable frustrations and ambivalences endemic to the struggle of the

female novelist to articulate the alternative perspectives on reality uniquely available from the borderline of a culture. Critical discussion of Pym to date is unanimous in foregrounding the puzzling incongruities in her writing. Each commentator attempts to explain the textual paradoxes in different ways. None, however, has undertaken the task of attempting to situate what Robert Emmet Long has called her "sense of the comic and grotesque," her "classicism" and her "psychological obliqueness" (212) within the framework of contemporary critical theories. In utilizing both structuralist and post-formalist theory, as well as the emerging insights of a burgeoning but divided feminist perspective, I propose to adopt and expand Culler's strategy for feminists of "working on two fronts at once" into a pluralist critical reading in an effort to account for her texts.

An attentive study of the Pym canon soon encounters the dilemma of feminist (and deconstructionist) critique: it is impossible to ignore the literary paradigms, however arbitrary they may be perceived to be, and, simultaneously, one must mark as significant every tentative effort to revise their formal constraints. What is intriguing in reading important studies by influential male academics such as Bakhtin, Frye or Kermode, is the applicability of their theories--concerning the received structures of the literary tradition, as well as the consequent tensions and ideological struggles which saturate a changing fiction--to many aspects of the feminist agenda. Yet the connection is almost never made. The woman writer or critic, like Viola of Twelfth Night, may note concerning her virtual exclusion from male critical debate, that her history is "A blank, my lord...." For example, here is Kermode in The Sense of An Ending (1966):

The pressures which require [the novel's] constant alteration are anguish and bad faith. As to the latter, it proceeds from an uncritical or cowardly adherence to the paradigms. Yet they cannot be dispensed with; and what may seem the necessary impurity of the result is refined by further research. (151)



Kermode is speaking here of the inescapable necessity of imposing some kind of artistic form--a "necessary impurity"--on the flux and contingency of life when creating fiction. The woman writer must engage with an additional constraint--that of writing within forms almost wholly devised by men. This leads to the question of how one may begin to appropriate the various critical perspectives currently available in order to shed light on the problematics of an art constructed primarily from the margins of a long tradition.

Carolyn G. Heilbrun, in "Bringing the Spirit Back to English Studies" (Hamlet's Mother), describes the shock of enlightenment which she experienced as a female academic upon reading the current research of a male colleague of the deconstructionist school. Though he is not explicitly named, we may assume a reference to Edward Said. Thinking that their views had little in common, she nevertheless undertook to read his study of the distortions imposed on the image of the "Arab" by Western analysts. What she subsequently discerned provided for her a revivifying "source of life in humanist studies" (180) and opened up profoundly interesting vistas for research and investigation:

In writing of how the Western world had seen Arabs only as it chose to see them, for its own purposes, and had even imposed that view on the Arabs themselves and on history, my colleague had suggested that we review the literary uses of orientalism to suggest ways in which they had been distorted to serve the needs of Western culture.

All at once, this formerly incomprehensible colleague had revealed the source of life in humanist studies. I saw that if "women" were substituted for "Arabs," we would begin to understand the way in which the male world had viewed women, and equally, I saw the plea that feminist scholars now might make for a fresh start from a new perspective. I realized...that women had differed from Arabs in one important way: far more than Arabs internalized the Western view, women have internalized the male view of themselves, have accepted it as the "truth," as Arabs rarely accepted--or at

least not for so long--the Western view of their ineptitudes and essential inhumanity. Despite this difference, I could learn much from the way my colleague had taken his profound knowledge of Derrida and Foucault, and used it to reveal how long-accepted attitudes can be reconsidered, leaving the texts that had seemed unarguable ready for new interpretations. (181)

I have quoted this passage at length because it encapsulates so many of the difficulties, as well as the advantages, of appropriation of the critical work of male academics to the task of feminist critics engaged in a critical re-evaluation of a woman novelist. Like Heilbrun, I have noted the remarkable parallels of feminist concerns to those of a wider critical debate; the simple substitution of the word "woman," or the feminine pronoun, in a passage of male-oriented critique invites innovative interpretation of a text.<sup>3</sup>

Just as Heilbrun found helpful to a feminist reading of texts the appropriation of a deconstructionist analysis of "Orientalism" so my analysis will attempt to account for the linguistic and structural tensions perceived by so many commentators in the novels of Barbara Pym through the approaches of such diverse and distinctly non-feminist scholars as Mikhail Bakhtin, Northrop Frye and Frank Kermode. The work of social anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener will also form an important basis for my study.

It should be noted at the outset that some important feminist critics have already acknowledged the relevance of these same scholars to their studies of women's writing. French feminist research, which tends to focus on rupture with traditional structures, and which is largely linguistic and psychoanalytical in thrust, has appropriated Bakhtin through one of its most influential scholars--Belgian linguist and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva. Contemporary Anglo-American feminist criticism--as represented by Caroline Heilbrun, Elaine Showalter, Joanne S. Frye, and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, for example--which attempts to differentiate women's writing while at the same time acknowledging the inescapable paradigms within which difference struggles to be heard, has also revised certain aspects

of the writings of Bakhtin, Frye and Kermode. Though the French and Anglo-Americans do not agree on many aspects of methodology, all share a common interest in--among other concerns--the ways in which women must necessarily speak or write obliquely, in indirect, often subversive, ways in order to function within or rebel against a dominant, patriarchal culture. All of these investigations are pertinent to a re-reading of Pym, and will be discussed in the course of my analysis.

It is neither wise, then, nor productive to reject out of hand promising critical perspectives which may seem, initially, to pose irreconcilable contradictions. Jonathan Culler advises feminists to approach texts on two fronts at once, by utilizing both Anglo-American and French critical approaches. The former seek to mark or "exalt" difference, through the development of a feminine aesthetic, and the latter strive to collapse difference, which is viewed as an arbitrary metaphysical construct. Both schools become problematic, however, when pushed too vigorously in either direction. By doing so, feminist criticism faces the essentialist trap on the one hand--that is, the dismissal of women and their work as inferior or marginal because they are biologically or "essentially" different--and the effacement of its own agenda on the other--if there is no difference, then how can one point to textual markers as signs or signatures of women's writing?

This is the difficult dichotomy, the "Catch 22" of a binary opposition, with which feminist scholars are presently grappling. One possible solution for criticism--the one which I propose to emphasize--lies in the perception of difference in language and writing as a product of the inevitable struggle for accommodation and legitimacy imposed upon a marginal group within a dominant culture. The ways in which women's texts must distort language and revise received structures invite the insights which can be brought to bear by a contextual approach. Perhaps Nancy K. Miller offers the most lucid explanation of the pluralist compromise as embraced by Anglo-American contextual critics--those who wish to view difference as a product of cultural positioning which necessarily encompasses such variables as gender, race, and class:

Because women are both of the culture and out of it (or under it), written by it and remaining a largely silent though literate majority, to look for uniquely "feminine" textual indexes that can be deciphered in "blind" readings is pointless.... There are no infallible signs, no failsafe technique by which to determine the gender of an author. But that is not the point of the post-compensatory gesture that follows what I call the new literary history. At stake instead is a reading that consciously recreates the object it describes, attentive always to a difference--what T.S. Eliot calls "strong local flavour" . . . not dependent on the discovery of an exclusive alterity. (28-29)

Because a pluralist approach does not insist upon "an exclusive alterity", it allows useful components of male-authored critiques--the products of those alluded to by Heilbrun as "the Modern Masters" (183)--to be utilized and revised within feminist analysis. Moreover, feminist criticism written by men, such as K.K. Ruthven's Feminist Literary Studies (1984), may also contribute to re-readings of texts authored by women.

Consequently, as I will attempt to demonstrate in my study of Pym, marginal woman writing within the novelistic tradition finds many of her necessarily oblique textual strategies marked and illuminated by M.M. Bakhtin in his theory of dialogization, and many of the characters and narrative tropes that she appropriates and modifies clearly delineated in Northrop Frye's structuralist study, Anatomy of Criticism. Moreover, the contributions of Oxford anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener in their studies of communication between dominant and subdominant groups add a further contextual dimension to the study of indirect language in Pym. From all these perspectives, then, the woman writer can be seen to reconstruct the novel in interesting ways dictated by her subordinate status.

## PART 2 - The Modern Masters

I will consider first, then, some of the contributions of Mikhail Bakhtin to an understanding of the indirect ways in which language functions in the novel. His discussion of characterization is also particularly important in relation to Pym's texts. Subsequently, I will examine the Ardener cultural model. This discussion of social positioning is helpful in an analysis of Pym's style, and buttresses, in its illustration of the necessity for indirectness in social communication between dominant and subdominant groups, the Bakhtinian theories of the oblique, multi-voiced languages which result when speech is further distorted or displaced through parody within the medium of novelistic prose. Finally, I will note some aspects of Northrop Frye's structuralist study of the comic mode which are pertinent to Pym's revisions of characterization and plotting. I will conclude in Part 3 with a summary of the dichotomies evident in French and Anglo-American feminist criticism and an overview of some of the more important feminist revisions of Bakhtin and the Ardeners.

Bakhtin's theories, which, in perhaps his most influential study, The Dialogic Imagination, describe the novel as an essentially comic, revisionary and open-ended genre, are particularly useful in any attempt to explain at least one reason why fiction is so appealing as a formal structure for the woman writer. His significance has been recognized by both sides of the feminist debate. Academics as diverse as Julia Kristeva of the French school ("The Novel as Polylogue," 1972) and the American scholar Joanne S. Frye (Living Stories, Telling Lives, 1986) have seen in his theories valuable tools for arguing that the novel is a uniquely liberating and open-ended genre; it not only permits but, indeed, structurally necessitates the presentation of the kinds of alternate perspectives to authoritative or patriarchal versions of truth which women writers strive to introduce within traditional textual and linguistic constraints.

Bakhtin's writings are extremely complex and, indeed, often somewhat contradictory. Paradox, however, becomes a familiar phenomenon in both

Bakhtinian and feminist critique. Because his theories were published and translated piecemeal and because he revised his own views extensively throughout his career, numerous misunderstandings have arisen in interpretation; within feminist appropriations, the French school has tended to utilize only his most revolutionary, extreme and utopian views concerning the liberating qualities of novelistic prose, views which Bakhtin himself subsequently modified and, indeed, seems finally to have all but rejected.<sup>6</sup> For my purposes, Bakhtin's central contributions to an understanding of the possibilities inherent in the novel genre, which are articulated in the main body of his work, and to which he returned at the end of his career, will be most important.

In Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics, a comprehensive discussion of Bakhtin's theoretical concerns as they evolved throughout his entire career, Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson clarify many of the problems engendered by his "reformulations and inconsistencies" (8). Their summary of his key contributions advances as "global" (17) concepts three overriding concerns to which Bakhtin repeatedly returned--prosaics, unfinalizability and dialogue. Prosaics is their own term, which is used as a corrective to the concept of a "poetics" in literary criticism. Bakhtin's continual opposition to the Structuralists and Formalists, who attempted to reduce novelistic prose to what could be gleaned from a study of "devices" or "tropes" which can only repeat within a self-contained literary universe, is very important to feminist critique. All of Bakhtin's work points to novelistic prose as being unique in both its liberating ability to reflect many opposing viewpoints by incorporating multiple perspectives within the text and in its open-ended "unfinalizability." New critical tools are necessary, Bakhtin argues, in order to appreciate the "depth" and richness of novelistic prose. A structuralist "poetics"--the given of Western literary tradition stemming from Aristotle--which attempts to analyze the novel as one would drama or poetry, for example, is, in Bakhtin's view, totally inadequate to explain the complex play of language which comprises novelistic prose. Thus, Morson and Emerson have coined the neologism "prosaics" to describe Bakhtin's theories, which were forged in order to address the particular characteristics of the novel

as genre. Indeed, prosaics may open up new possibilities for other genres as well. Morson and Emerson explain:

Bakhtin contends that once we examine prose in its own terms, we will come to see all verbal art, poetry included, in a different way. In the light of prosaics, poetics itself appears inadequate even for its own subject, poetry. "Novelistic discourse" is for Bakhtin "the acid test for this whole way of conceiving style, exposing the narrowness of this type of thinking and its inadequacy in all areas of discourse's artistic life" (Discourse in the Novel 261). Theory confronts a dilemma: "either to acknowledge the novel (and consequently all artistic prose tending in that direction) an unartistic or quasi-artistic genre, or to reconsider radically that conception of poetic discourse in which traditional stylistics is grounded and which determines all its categories." (Dialogic 267)(20)

Bakhtin argues for this radical revision, and it is clear that his additional emphasis on the novel as grounded in everyday life, with its attendant non-literary languages of the marketplace, the household and the street, must be of special interest to feminists who struggle, in much the same way as the novel has had to struggle for validity as an artistic genre, to validate women's concerns with the quotidian as a legitimate subject for "high art." Bakhtin and his circle (including Voloshinov and Medvedev) argue that "the Formalist framework leads to a denigration of the everyday realm" (22). Especially germane to a feminist re-reading of Pym, then, are Bakhtin's views on the novel's focus on the everyday and ordinary, as well as on its ability to change and to provide opportunities for innovation and creativity.

Feminists cannot help but look with interest to this affirmation of the artistic relevance of the "ordinary" to the novel, as well as to its recognition of fiction's elastic potentialities for revision. The on-going struggle between

artistic paradigms and the flux of life which Kermode addresses in The Sense of An Ending can, perhaps, be seen in terms of an unnecessary conflict between externally or internally imposed pressures to conform to the criteria of a poetics inadequate to novelistic potential. The adoption of a prosaics, while still finding useful and informative the structuralist approach as far as it can go, opens up the novel to Bakhtin's second key concept--that of unfinalizability.

This notion of unfinalizability lends itself to fruitful application by feminist scholars. In Bakhtin's most radical period, he pushes this concept, as exemplified in his theory of the carnival,' to an extreme. This is not his final position, however, and he later retrenches to an earlier stance which allows this open-endedness to be nevertheless embraced within less radical language and within more conventional forms of narrative which may still, however, resist closure:

Bakhtin advances the term unfinalizability...as an all-purpose carrier of his conviction that the world is not only a messy place, but is also an open place. The term appears frequently in his works and in many different contexts. It designates a complex of values central to his thinking: innovation, "surprisingness," the genuinely new, openness, potentiality, freedom and creativity--terms he also uses frequently. (Morson and Emerson (M and E ) 36-37)

Bakhtin's emphasis on openness caused him to struggle with the kinds of dichotomies or binary traps that feminist concerns also struggle to escape. His theoretical quest reflects the dilemma articulated by his literary hero of "unfinalizability," Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, a marginal figure par excellence, who broods, "Nevertheless, I'm willing to agree that twice-two-makes-four is a thing of beauty. But if we're going to praise everything like that, then I say that twice-two-makes-five is also a delightful little item now and then" (Dostoevsky, MacAndrew trans. 117). It is not my purpose to reproduce Morson and Emerson's detailed discussion here, but their summary is useful:



Bakhtin's several theories of language, literature, culture, and the self offer visions of the world in which freedom and unfinalizability are real. Polyphony, the novelistic chronotope, certain types of dialogue, the "open unity" of culture, and many other key concepts serve as ways of understanding how the world could be sufficiently orderly for general scientific knowledge and yet sufficiently open for true creativity. Indeed, some of Bakhtin's models demonstrate that freedom is, paradoxically, inevitable: "We live in freedom by necessity," as W.H. Auden wrote. [emphasis added] (38)

Here is the problem for critics, philosophers and feminists. How may the world (and literature) be seen as "sufficiently orderly" so that we may write within the patterns of a tradition, and yet "sufficiently open" to allow for, in Bakhtin's terms, the "genuinely new"? In the case of Barbara Pym, how can her work be viewed as unique and unrepeatably, immediately discernible as "very Barbara Pym," while at the same time firmly grounded in the long tradition of the comic novel? Bakhtin's novelistic theories point to some ways of dealing with these paradoxes.

Bakhtin's third major concept is that of dialogue. In this complex theory of dialogism, Bakhtin focuses his world view, his celebration of the novel as "hero" and his efforts to overcome the dead ends of all binary oppositions. Against the limitations of dialectics, Bakhtin offers the freedoms of the dialogic and his concept of "creative understanding," which parallels Iris Murdoch's concept of "love" and, in relation to Pym, Nardin's "feminine consciousness" or Heiberlein's "imaginative participation." In his quest to evade closure and "finalizability," Bakhtin finds his answer in the unique character of novelistic prose.

Bakhtin fought against what he called "theoretism," that is, the concept of dialogue as two oppositions in contradiction which leads finally to a synthesis--the dominant thought pattern in Western history (i.e. Hegel, Marx).

Thus, he rejected Marxism, Formalism and Structuralism as theoretical cul-de-sacs. Dialogue is a unique kind of open-ended interaction (49). Moreover, marginality and "outsideness" are necessary for dialogue--an insight pertinent to all novelists, but assuming added significance for a woman writer. In one of Bakhtin's last revisions, "Towards a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," he muses:

The dialogic nature of consciousness. The dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life is the open-ended dialogue. Life is by its very nature dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth.... He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. [TRDB 293] (59-60)

His detailed consideration of "dialogism" thus includes the discovery that there can be no single-voiced language in the novel and that "everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole--there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (Dialogic 426). The recognition follows that any authoritative discourse' or privileged language presents only one of many perspectives on the nature of reality. When languages are incorporated within the novel, and thus intensively dialogized, a unique literary opportunity results, an enabling whereby silenced or marginalized voices can be heard as counter-statements to such authoritative speech. Indeed, Bakhtin's concept of the novel as composed of "constantly evolving heteroglossia" and dialogism as "the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia" (Dialogic 426) is germane to a study of the fictional writing of any submerged group. The term "heteroglossia" presupposes that all utterances' are governed by context. Thus, any speech, including authoritative speech, once inserted within the novel becomes subject to a detailed examination through which it is variously evaluated by contending

viewpoints--it does not "sound" in a straightforward or arbitrary way, but is modified by the contextual matrix. The novel is generically, therefore, a revisionary, open text. It always has subtexts. When one looks for the oppositional markers of critique in women's writing, then, one is looking only for the "strong local flavour" of what is inherent in novelistic prose. Because the concept of heteroglossia will be so important to my study of various oppositional aspects of Pym's style, it is worth including an extensive explanation of this Bakhtinian term. Heteroglossia may be defined as:

The base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which ensures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions--social, historical, meteorological, physiological--that will ensure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve. Heteroglossia is as close a conceptualization as is possible of that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide; as such, it is that which a systematic linguistics must always suppress. [emphasis added] (Dialogic 428)

Once heteroglossia is dialogized within the novel, suppression of this locus becomes impossible; thus the oppositional (centrifugal) forces of the woman's text are free to decenter and disperse the centripetal force of incorporated speech types of dominant discourse, the "systematic linguistic" that, in the real world, tends to suppress marginal speech.

In Chapter Two of my study of Pym, for example, I will explore the ways in which women's speech becomes necessarily oblique and subversive when it "collides" with the authoritative speech of men--especially those associated with the Church and the Academy. I will also examine some of the ways in which the

speech of women within Pym's fictions operates when dialogized--that is, when it brings the centrifugal force of irony, parody and satire to bear upon the speech of characters representing dominant speech. Never dogmatic, Bakhtin's world view is essentially tolerant of diverse perspectives; the same can be said of Pym's. Thus, the author (or one or more characters) may agree or partially agree with some forms of dominant discourse as well as disagree. Dialogism is not necessarily destructive, but is always creative--questioning, responding and reacting with all the languages sounding within the text. The authorial voice thus interacts with all of the varied speech types present in the novel. There are always at least two voices in every utterance and so all novelistic prose is double-voiced. Where the authorial voice "agrees" with a particular language in the novel, the speech is said to be "stylized" as there is little or no distancing. When the authorial voice "disagrees" with a language--let us say, for example, the language of the sermon which is a kind of authoritative speech--it distances itself, and the language is "parodied." In this way, through a spectrum of subtle shadings, the authorial voice may obliquely evaluate the many languages within the text. This is one way of tracing the ambivalence, or what Toril Moi calls "textual uncertainty," of a female author such as Pym towards one or more authoritative discourses or languages. At times, the authorial voice may tend to validate a particular authoritative speech (or any other inserted language) by stylization, while at other times gently or firmly contesting it through irony and parody. Such an inter-action, particularly in a speech which appears to be a monologue,--authorial monologue in a bridge passage, for example--illustrates the phenomenon of hybridization. When this occurs, we have the "real action of novels," which is especially intense in those passages where the author positions herself among the many contending voices of the text. Close examination of such passages in Pym, for example, which I will undertake in Chapter Four, will allow one to discern the particular quality of the "dissonant note" of a Pym novel by examining the subtle play of the accents of stylization (positive) and parody (negative) which are apparent in the hybridized language of the text.

It is not surprising that Bakhtin's understanding of the dialogic function of heteroglossia is attractive to Anglo-American contextual feminists; his emphasis on the production of meaning in the novel through the inter-action of a "matrix of forces" invites inclusion of the added dimension of gender to the study of the cultural factors operative in the tensions generated when dominant and subdominant languages collide. Again it is only necessary to think of Bakhtin's description of the history of the novel as a reflection of "constantly evolving heteroglossia" to see the opportunities for parody, critique and revision for the woman writer, who, marginalized and on the borderline of language and culture, is already uniquely positioned to appropriate the novel's linguistic potential for change. Bakhtin explains:

In this mirror [the novel] of constantly evolving heteroglossia any direct word and especially that of the dominant discourse is reflected as something more or less bounded, typical and characteristic of a particular era--aging, dying, ripe for change and renewal. (Dialogic 60)

This insight recalls Long's observation of the tension between "classical form" in Pym and her fictional world which is "running down." What Bakhtin has to say in this context about discourse might just as easily be applied to the necessity for the transformation of any traditional fictional paradigm which is "aging, dying, ripe for change and renewal." The opportunity for the woman writer simultaneously to question and reconstruct the structuralist "givens" of language, ideology, gender, class and culture finds a wider scope within the novel than in the authoritative genres of epic and tragedy--what Bakhtin characterizes as unmediated stylizations of the "direct word."

Bakhtin writes, for example, of the ability of the comic novel to allow the author to incorporate multiple strata of languages within the text and to parody, mimic and critique them, without ever necessarily merging with any single discourse. The author may thus fictionally question the direct word of

authoritative speech through "double-voiced" parody. By definition, the writer thus remains at the edge or seam of the world which the novel recreates, on the borderline or margins of the text. Bakhtin expands on the ability of the comic style at its most extreme to "destroy" previous novelistic worlds by parody and by objectifying forms of authoritative discourse which are "ripe for change and renewal." The utility of such a capacity for any oppositional ideology, and for "the strong local flavour" of feminism in particular, becomes transparent:

This varied play with the boundaries of speech types, languages and belief systems is one of the most fundamental aspects of comic style.... Comic style (of the English sort) is based, therefore, on the stratification of common language and on the possibilities available for isolating from these strata, to one degree or another, one's own intentions, without ever completely merging with them. It is precisely the diversity of speech, and not the unity of a normative shared language, that is the ground of style.... The parodic and objectivized incorporation into their [Fielding's, Smollett's, Sterne's and Dickens'] work of various types of literary language (especially in Sterne) penetrates the deepest levels of literary and ideological thought itself, resulting in a parody of the logical and expressive structure of any ideological discourse as such (scholarly, moral, and rhetorical, poetic) that is almost as radical as the parody we find in Rabelais.... Literary parody of dominant novel types plays a large role in the history of the European novel. One could even say that the most important novelistic models and novel types arose precisely during this parodic destruction of preceding novelistic worlds. (Dialogic 308-309)

Such a "parodic destruction of preceding novelistic worlds" suggests the generic value of the comic novel to a feminist critique.<sup>10</sup> Pym clearly both

stylizes and parodies "scholarly, moral, and rhetorical, poetic" ideological discourse in her recreation of the languages of academic and clergyman, as well as in the saturation of her texts with the poetry and prose of the patriarchal canon of English literature which formed the basis of her university education when she read English at St. Hilda's College, Oxford from 1931 to 1934. In Chapter Four of my study, I will examine in detail how Pym both stylizes and parodies the languages and tropes of the literary canon in order to demonstrate her perception of the frequent slippage or gap between the portrayal of a dominant reality through its literary discourse and the alternate world inhabited by her female protagonists.

Bakhtin's conception of novelistic heteroglossia parallels, then, Anglo-American feminist emphasis on "contextual" and "intertextual" readings, both of which recognize the inevitable traces of the patriarchal literary and cultural paradigms against which and within which the female subject of narrative must inevitably struggle for self-definition. Writing what is essentially the realist novel which is, nevertheless, not without modernist traits, Pym is well served by the insights of such Anglo-American feminist critics. Against this context, I will further demonstrate, in a consideration of characterization, how Pym's spinsters both imitate and transform their literary precursors, and, in a study of narrative tropes and closure, how Pym expresses a subtle dissent from the thrust of dominant teleology in plot. My analysis will show that Pym's work both linguistically and structurally contributes to the feminist (and Bakhtinian) transformational enterprise.

Bakhtin emphasizes the difficulty and the complexity of the novelistic function, which seeks, in a manner strikingly consistent with a feminist re-writing of character, language or plot, to restructure and revise what "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" (Dialogic 293). He speaks, for example, of the necessity of linguistic appropriation:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with [her] own intention, [her]

own accent, when [she] appropriates the word, adopting it to [her] own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets [her] words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own. And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property.... Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (Dialogic 293-94)

The substitution of a feminine pronoun in this explanation, as Heilbrun suggests, is fruitful for a feminist reading of texts. Bakhtin's metaphorical exploration of fiction as the expropriation of language (or structures) "overpopulated with the intentions of others" (294) can then be read as an apt reflection of the ways in which the woman writer in particular is faced with the paradoxical dilemma of the necessity to inscribe the alternate reality of the subordinate within what Gilbert and Gubar call, "Palaces of Art and Houses of Fiction" which "male writers authored" (xi).

Bakhtin's summary of the phenomenon of novelistic heteroglossia, therefore, emphasizes the oblique nature of the language of fiction and underlines the liberating and subversive function of comic discourse. For Bakhtin, this function can be accomplished within the tradition of the comic novel. It is my contention that Pym's fictions successfully critique British middle class society from the margins of the dominant community with an added dimension of irony, "accent" or "emphasis added," implicit within a feminist revision.

Bakhtin was deeply interested in cultural anthropology in connection with his contextual approach to heteroglot language, and it is to anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener that one must turn in order to examine the "strong



local flavour" of the dialogic inter-action when the particular exchange is between the languages of dominant and subdominant groups. Perceiving Women (1975) and Defining Females (1978), edited by Shirley Ardener, are the key texts in this study.<sup>11</sup> Initially, Edwin Ardener theorized a cultural model which differed markedly from the traditional concept of two self-contained realities--that of the public sphere which is male-dominated and the private sphere which is a female preserve. The earlier model can be easily rendered.

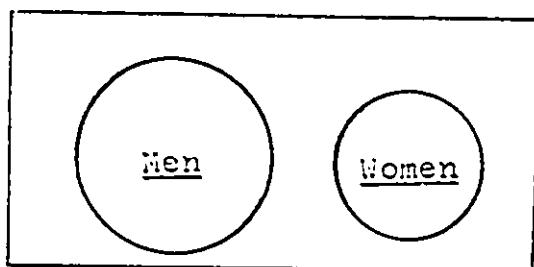


Figure 1. The Public (Male) and the Private (Female) Spheres

Instead, Ardener's studies of the Bakweri tribe of Cameroon resulted in an intriguing model which overlaps the spheres of dominant and subdominant--which may be read as male and female--so that the subdominant may be seen to coincide with the dominant "zone" except for a small area beyond the margins which he characterizes as the "wild zone."

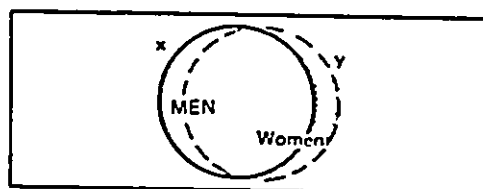


Figure 2. Relationship of the Dominant and Muted Group<sup>12</sup>

From this model, possibilities emerge which are of interest to feminists of both theoretical schools and which are most useful in an attempt to study further the dissonances in Pym's texts, the speech she constructs for her protagonists, the characteristic Pym "brown horse spinster," her stylistic "transgressions" from narrative teleology and other markers of the "local flavour" of women's writing. I will address these concerns in detail in the context of my discussions of language, characterization, and narrative departures in Pym. The two single most important contributions of the Ardeners to a study of Pym, however, centre on their assertion that subdominant groups become "invisible" to the dominant culture, so that instead of seeing the "blue sky" of Bakhtinian dialogic "otherness" behind a subdominant, a blindness results in the "real" world from a cultural positioning which renders marginal groups and their realities "a blank," as they are positioned beyond the parameters of the tunnel vision of a dominant perception. Allied with this insight, is the suggestion that the language of subdominants will of necessity be distorted or even further "refracted," in Bakhtinian terms, in order to emerge in a form acceptable to the dominant group. Because there is an imperfect fit between the realities of dominant and subordinate groups, a necessary obliqueness results when the marginal group undertakes to communicate within dominant structures or paradigms.<sup>13</sup> These theories are particularly pertinent to a study of one aspect of Pym's prose. The surplus of humanness which Bakhtin sees available within the novel provides an enabling factor for a marginal woman writer which, it seems, may not be available in the culture per se--that is, beyond the boundaries of the text. A more detailed consideration of the Ardener cultural model will be undertaken during my discussion of Elaine Showalter's revision, which explicitly focuses on the Ardener model's pertinence to feminist criticism.

While Bakhtin and Ardener suggest ways to begin to understand some interactions--structural and linguistic--within the woman's text, Northrop Frye's structuralist perspectives define the enclosing grids of a long literary tradition which, however constraining, cannot be avoided or ignored. Frye's encyclopedic study of traditional formal structures in his Anatomy of Criticism

clearly sets out the bounds against which stylistic rupture must contend. Bakhtin struggled incessantly against the closures of Structuralism because "wisdom, Bakhtin believed, is not systematizable" (Morson and Emerson 27). At the same time, he recognized that while "unity is never complete" (32) and while no system could adequately address "the rich and 'thick' accounts found in great novels" (27), it is finally impossible to avoid semantic structures in novelistic prose. The novel for Bakhtin, however, as we have seen, can never be reduced to its formal grids and always allows the possibility for surprisingness and change. Frye's work describes the received tropes which the novel--and a woman writer such as Pym--struggles to revise.

Moreover, Frye is an unlikely ally of Bakhtin (and Pym) in his celebration and elevation of the comic genre and in his discovery that, "there can hardly be such a thing as an inevitable comedy, as far as the action of the individual play is concerned...something gets born at the end of comedy, and the watcher of birth is a member of a busy society" (Anatomy 170). When the comic spirit of optimism, reconciliation and renewal is incorporated into the novel it is reinforced by novelistic unfinalizability. From Frye we learn that the convention of comedy "will make some kind of happy ending inevitable, but that still for each play the dramatist must produce a 'distinctive gimmick'" (170). Innovation becomes possible, then, with individual revision of what constitutes a "happy ending" as well as an idiosyncratic "gimmick" which may be identifiable with a particular writer. For Bakhtin, the comic genre actually shapes the way the world is perceived, and thus in novels where the anarchistic, Dostoevskyan, carnival laughter (or in H el ene Cixous' feminist terms--the laugh of the Medusa) is moderated into the quiet laughter we find in a writer such as Pym, it still allows for the comic adventure plot where "'Anything can happen to the hero[ine] and [s]he can become anything'" (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (PDP) 94). What Bakhtin terms "the generic essence" of the comic spirit of carnival--which Frye also attempts to define in terms of the comic mode--shapes the novel in such a way as to render it resistant to what is final and arbitrary.

While such flexibility seems at least possible within the comic novel, Frye's central thesis nevertheless posits, somewhat paradoxically, a self-contained literary realm within which traditional patterns can only repeat--a bleak prospect for the woman writer attempting innovation. Frye's structuralist approach, then, is primarily important because it brings not only the inherited narrative tropes of various literary genres, modes and plot teleologies into clearer focus, but also because it helps to summarize succinctly traditional representations of stock characters, including conventional female stereotypes almost wholly made up and perpetuated by male writers. Especially germane to a study of Pym are his reflections on the depiction of the heroine within various narratives. These determine, to a large extent, what kinds of "stories" are available within the literary canon to the female protagonist. Such a systematic analysis makes available a clear catalogue of useful paradigms for critical scrutiny--the potentially reductive cultural stereotypes which construct and reinforce concepts of "femininity" which frequently lock fictional women into the kinds of binary oppositions which Bakhtin and feminists eschew. In Chapters Three, Four and Five, I will address the revisions which Pym, like other, more contemporary women writers, attempts to make in her texts. She innovates both in terms of characterization and in an embedded dialogic debate which queries and contests the constraints of binary oppositions imposed upon women by inherited images and tropes. She also explores different narrative possibilities, as she pushes against the rigid patterns of the literary tradition which Frye has distilled and defined.

Thus, Bakhtin, the Ardeners and Frye all contribute valuable insights into any study of a contemporary woman novelist which strives to address issues of language, genre, characterization and narrative structure. What use have feminist scholars made of their theories to date?

## PART III - Feminist Divisions and Revisions

It becomes necessary at this juncture to consider Pym in relation to the emerging dichotomies between Anglo-American and French feminist theories. Both schools have appropriated Bakhtin and the Ardener model, but have emphasized different aspects of their ideas. It is clear that Pym's focus on women and other subordinate groups, such as homosexual or bisexual men, as well as her depiction of the significant shift of Church and Academy from authoritative to increasingly marginal positions in Britain, lends itself to fruitful readings in the light of diverse feminist theory, including some recent critical reformulations of Bakhtin and Ardener.

Julia Kristeva's revisions of Bakhtin as articulated in her 1966 essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel" and in "The Novel as Polylogue," (1974) appropriate his most radical stance, which he later reformulated. She is helpful in identifying Bakhtin as a "Post-Formalist," thus recognizing his value in describing the novel as an essentially ambivalent and open genre nevertheless grounded in formal semantic relationships. Bakhtin has noted that, "Dialogical relationships are totally impossible without logical and concrete semantic relationships, but they are not reducible to them; they have their own specificity" (Kristeva, Desire 67). Kristeva sees this as profoundly important because of Bakhtin's explanation of the dialogic nature of novelistic ambivalence. She summarizes his position:

each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read.... an insight first introduced into literary theory by Bakhtin: any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double.

(66)

From Bakhtin, Kristeva formulates her own concept of "intertextuality"--the transposition of one or more systems of signs (Desire 15) from one novel to another.

Kristeva, however, subsequently rejects the realist text--the novelistic tradition within which most women writers still create--as "monologic," and thus not compatible with the French feminist utopian text--*l'écriture féminine*--described by Hélène Cixous as the ideal woman's text and produced in accordance with Bakhtin's most radical concept of the polyphonic novel. Textually, the polyphonic novel is the utopian vision of "unfinalizability as pure loophole" (Morson and Emerson 441). Bakhtin later modified his zealous celebration of Dostoevsky as the progenitor and hero of unfinalizability and loophole, the father of the polyphonic novel. For Bakhtin, the polyphonic novel is irreducibly ambivalent in that it is impossible to associate the authorial voice with any particular point of view, and because it subverts all narrative attempts at closure. Nevertheless, in Bakhtin's theory, the "monologic" text--Tolstoy was his usual example of monologism--is still necessarily double-voiced (as are all novels because of the phenomenon of heteroglossia and dialogism). In a recasting of his thoughts on Dostoevsky, he subsequently allowed that most novels must strike a balance between what is "sufficiently orderly," yet "sufficiently open" to allow for change. The advocacy of an exclusive utopianism becomes, itself, for Bakhtin, another arbitrary theoretism or monologism. His final position, then, "returns to quiet registers and more prosaic dialogues" (Morson and Emerson 469):

In his new conclusion to the Dostoevsky book, he asks whether polyphony makes monologism "obsolete"...he answers unreservedly: "Of course not. A newly born genre never supplants or replaces already existing genres. Each new genre merely widens the circle of already existing genres." (301)

Bakhtin's final position is thus not consistent with Kristeva's wholesale rejection of the realist text as irreducibly monologic. His conclusion implies that the innovations of the polyphonic novel can still influence, shape and change more traditional genres of fiction.

For Pym, then, and most other contemporary woman novelists, the possibilities of fiction can "widen the circle" of the ready-mades they have inherited from the literary tradition; the oppositional woman's text can still be discerned within the realist novel as well as in the avant-garde, modernist text of *l'écriture féminine* which is so assiduously sought by French feminists such as Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray.

Bakhtinian unfinalizability, therefore, is still possible for Pym--and for the Anglo-American feminist school of critics--within the less radical parameters of the realist text. Nevertheless, Pym's work clearly exhibits many traces of modernism, a fact which has been noted by Margaret Stetz in her 1985 essay, "Quartet in Autumn: New Light on Barbara Pym as a Modernist." In commenting on just one aspect of Pym's partial alliance with Woolf<sup>14</sup> as opposed to her often noted indebtedness to Austen, Stetz speaks of closure in Quartet in Autumn:

Finally, we see the difference between Pym's modernism and Austen's traditionalism in their attitudes toward how to conclude a story. The aim of fiction of manners is to affirm stasis by resolving differences and fixing the relations between characters permanently.... Pym, however, rejects the notion of a permanent resolution as either possible or even desirable; she also keeps our attention on the minds of her characters, not on their situations, to the last. (37)

Critics such as Gilbert and Gubar would argue that Austen's fiction also exhibits markers of feminist opposition and is much more subtle and problematic than Stetz suggests here. Nevertheless, Stetz continues by noting that in Pym, "The characters' positions in the world have not improved as much as have their

attitudes toward their fates. For the first time they feel, as Letty puts it, that they 'have a choice' about their ways of life, and it is 'a most agreeable sensation, almost a feeling of power' (p. 219)" (37). Letty's assertion of power immediately suggests the position of Nancy K. Miller in her important paper, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction." Though this essay preceded Gilbert and Gubar's work, Miller points to an important distinction between the agenda of many contemporary women writers and the radical, psychologically based thrust of the French feminist preoccupation with "l'écriture féminine" as exemplified in the utopian woman's text. The "desire" of the woman writer of the realist or more restrained modernist text may not be grounded in the erotic, which rejects all traditional patriarchal paradigms, but in a desire for "power" in a reconstruction of fictional tropes--what Miller terms a desire "to rescript possession" (36). She writes of fantasy within traditional tropes whereby the woman writer's "ambition," which Freud allows only to the male, may replace the "erotic," which he delegates to the female:

The repressed content [in women's texts], I think, would be not erotic impulses but an impulse to power: a fantasy of power that would revise the social grammar in which women are never defined as subjects; a fantasy of power that disdains sexual exchange in which women can participate only as objects of circulation. The daydreams or fictions of women writers would then, like those of men, say, "Nothing can happen to me!" But the modalities of that invulnerability would be marked in an essentially different way. I am talking, of course, about the power of the weak. (35)

If Pym's work can be reduced to a single insight, it would certainly be closely allied to Miller's description of women's texts as an attempt to inscribe "the power of the weak."

A comment by Diana Benet suggests Pym's idiosyncratic predilection for the comic genre, a penchant which reinforces Miller's argument that women's texts



seek to revise fiction so that, like men, they may say "Nothing can happen to me!" We recall Frye's observation in Anatomy that comic structure insists on at least paradigmatic affirmation in closure, regardless of the unequal and imperfect unions between particular men and women--illustrated in many of Shakespeare's comedies, for example. In this sense, there is "safety" for the female protagonist within comic structure. Benet contrasts the essentially comic novels to the darker vision of Quartet in Autumn and The Sweet Dove Died. She notes of a marginal character in A Glass of Blessings:

Augusta Prideaux without the special friendship of Sir Denbigh Grote (or vice versa) and without the help of friends like Sybil Forsyth would be a pathetic figure--but these emotional props gain her admission into the comic world, a community where no serious harm can befall her. (118)

The comic vision, then, may be interpreted as one strategy whereby Pym allows her submerged women to exercise "the power of the weak" within the existing structures of Frye's comic mode or Bakhtin's concept of the shaping vision of a "generic [comic] essence." Kristeva's limiting of women's "ambition" to the erotics of *l'écriture féminine*, and her exclusion of the comic, realistic text from Bakhtinian ambivalence and unfinalizability is too narrow a definition to account for a transitional writer like Pym. For Pym, the comic novel presents a particularly sympathetic medium for the imaginative recreation of marginal lives. Recreating the ambivalence of her own emotions and inclinations, Pym's work explores the limitations of the available life-slots open to women of a certain age, education and economic and cultural background. Her struggle to make a life for them within rigid fictional and cultural constraints, highlights sharply not only the nature of their subordination, but the duplicitous and oblique strategies they must adopt for survival.

While Kristevan revisions of Bakhtin, then, are not particularly useful to a reading of Pym, Anglo-American critics who are interested in contemporary

international novelists such as Doris Lessing, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro--all of whom usually write in a discernibly traditional style--have focused on his concept of unfinalizability in its more moderate articulations. One study of the contemporary novel combines relevant aspects of both Bakhtin's concept of the tension or "non-coincidence" between the perspectives of individual heteroglot languages and the Ardener discussion of the slippage between the articulations of dominant and subdominant groups. In her 1986 study, Living Stories, Telling Lives: Women and the Novel in Contemporary Experience, Joanne S. Frye provides an extremely valuable summary of this Bakhtinian tension<sup>13</sup> in women's writing, as observed and articulated by various critics. She discusses feminist perceptions of ambivalence and "indirectness" in women's fiction. Although she is speaking here primarily of narrative tropes, what she has to say is equally applicable to the language of the female protagonist who articulates through a necessarily repressed register of restraint. She provides a succinct summary of how important feminist critics have attempted to describe this perceived dissonance:

In this way, the conventions of literary narrative [or discourse] can act as an enclosing grid, a set of constraining interpretive paradigms that foreclose women writers' access to new interpretations of experience; but through the subversive voices of those same women, new conventions can also develop in response to the presence of discordant information in the lives of women. From the "emphasis added" that [Nancy K.] Miller sees in women's texts, from the subtexts that Gilbert and Gubar identify, from the muted expression that Showalter attributes to the voices grounded in women's culture--from all these subversive possibilities by which women writers have claimed expression in resistance to the dominant culture, women's texts begin to develop new interpretive strategies for understanding women's lives. (32)

Frye sees the novel and its conventions as simultaneously constraining and enabling for the woman writer, and subsequently argues, as I have done, for the open-ended advantages of revisions within the realist text. I will show how Pym contests many of the cultural and literary "enclosing grids" within which her protagonists must seek to shape their destinies, thus rendering such constraints ironic, dialogic weapons of critique. The methods whereby her fictional women find accommodation within a man-made language through transformational links, while parodying the necessity to do so, is one crucial survival strategy that I will demonstrate is clearly marked in the discourse of the novels.

Moreover, it can be argued that hesitant language reflects the relative inarticulateness of women within cultural models such as those constructed by the Ardeners and adopted by feminist Dale Spender. When incorporated into the novel as part of the richness of Bakhtinian dialogism, however, such clear deficiencies of speech in social circumstances can become powerful weapons of textual subversion; they critique the authoritative discourse of the dominant culture in their dialogic capacity, as a kind of subtext, to refract and distance authoritative speech. In this way, alternate realities are liberated within the text. The "grid of concordance" is undermined through dialogic counterstatement so that "alternative concordances" (Joanne S. Frye 31) may be suggested in re-encoding the lives and experiences of women. I will demonstrate how the speech of Pym's women accomplishes this revisionist task within the texts, paradoxically proclaiming what Nancy K. Miller has termed "the power of the weak" (Subject to Change, 35).

Elaine Showalter's strategy of positioning female writing as part of a women's culture is a further revision of the Ardeners' work which admits the importance of historical, psychological, philosophical and anthropological concerns to the efforts of women to write within inescapable patterns of language and within the specifics of race, gender and class. In "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," she writes of the necessity for a contextual criticism in a manner that places her closer to Bakhtin's final position than the emphasis on intertextuality theorized by Kristeva, which reflects the radical phase in

Bakhtin's career. She is currently the most influential critic who has adapted the Ardeners' cultural model. Showalter asserts:

But we must also understand that there can be no writing or criticism totally outside of the dominant culture...the concept of a woman's text in the wild zone is a playful abstraction: in the reality to which we must address ourselves as critics, women's writing is a "double-voiced discourse" that always embodies the social, literary and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant. (Abel 31)

The "woman's text in the wild zone" refers to *l'écriture féminine*, which even Cixous admits is a utopian goal rather than an available textual reality. She notes in "The Laugh of the Medusa" that, "with a few rare exceptions, there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity" (878). The "wild zone" is a concept Showalter appropriates from Edwin and Shirley Ardener. Showalter discusses the Ardeners in the context of an attempt to position a female culture within a dominant matrix:

The Ardeners have tried to outline a model of women's culture which is not historically limited and to provide a terminology for its characteristics, ... [The] model also has many connections to and implications for current feminist literary theory, since the concepts of perception, silence, and silencing are so central to discussions of women's participation in literary culture. (29)

Edwin Ardener's diagram of the intersecting spheres of dominant and subordinate groups thus outlines "a particularly stimulating analysis of female culture" (29).

Showalter, in turn, provides a concise analysis of the significance of this positioning which is worth including in full, as it will be germane to my argument in Chapters Two and Three. She notes:

Ardener's groups are represented by intersecting circles. Much of muted circle Y falls within the boundaries of dominant circle X; there is also a crescent of Y which is outside the dominant boundary and therefore (in Ardener's terminology) "wild." We can think of the "wild zone" of women's culture spatially, experientially, or metaphysically. Spatially, it stands for an area which is literally no-man's-land, a place forbidden to men, which corresponds to the zone in X which is off limits to women. Experientially it stands for the aspects of the female life-style which are outside of and unlike those of men; again, there is a corresponding zone of male experience alien to women. But if we think of the wild zone metaphysically, or in terms of consciousness, it has no corresponding male space since all of male consciousness is within the circle of the dominant structure and thus accessible to or structured by language. In this sense, the "wild" is always imaginary; from the male point of view, it may simply be the projection of the unconscious. In terms of cultural anthropology, women know what the male crescent is like, even if they have never seen it, because it becomes the subject of legend (like the wilderness). But men do not know what is in the wild. (30)

Using this model, Showalter locates French feminist criticism as well as other forms of radical feminism such as Mary Daly's Gyn / Ecology and Margaret Atwood's experimental novel Surfacing in this utopian, "idyllic enclave" (31) of the wild zone. She continues:

French feminist critics would like to make the wild zone the theoretical base of women's difference. In their texts, the wild zone becomes the place for the revolutionary women's language, the language of everything that is repressed, and for the revolutionary women's writing in "white ink." It is the Dark Continent in which Cixous' laughing Medusa and Wittig's guérillères reside. Through voluntary entry into the wild zone, other feminist critics tell us, a woman can write her way out of the 'cramped confines of patriarchal space.' (31)

While acknowledging the importance of such utopian fantasies as "a phenomenon which feminist criticism must recognize in the history of women's writing," Showalter nevertheless insists that "there can be no writing or criticism totally outside of the dominant structures" (31). Instead, women writers are "inside two traditions simultaneously, 'undercurrents' in Ellen Moer's metaphor, of the mainstream" (32). Showalter concludes:

How can a cultural model of women's writing help us to read a woman's text? One implication of this model is that women's fiction can be read as a double-voiced discourse, containing a "dominant" and a "muted" story, what Gilbert and Gubar call a "palimpsest".... The orthodox plot recedes, and another plot, hitherto submerged in the anonymity of the background, stands out in bold relief like a thumbprint. [Nancy K.] Miller too sees "another text" in women's fiction, "more or less muted from novel to novel" but "always there to be read." (34)

Pym's novels can be read as representative of such multi-layered texts; the ambivalence noted by Jacobs, Nardin, Benet, Heiberlein and Long, among others, can be situated and at least partially explained within the tensions of this

"cultural model." Shirley Ardener herself suggests the significance of the Ardener model to Pym's texts in "The Nature of Women in Society":

Members of muted groups may thus come to an accommodation with the social structure in which they are placed, and find their own satisfaction in its interstices.... The novels of Barbara Pym well exemplify how the narrowness of the stage can endow the most minor acts with great symbolic weight.... Such small gestures are the vivid language and satisfactions of some muted groups. (Defining Females 28-29)

Embracing the concept of the "problem of women" as a cultural phenomenon, Showalter and the Anglo-American feminists thus perceive literary criticism in contextual terms. Whether dealing with British, American, Canadian, French or German novelists, Showalter points to the desirability of a consideration of contexts of gender, class, culture and race in a feminist reading of texts.

Some of the contextual dissonances apparent in Pym's texts can be located in the particular tensions endemic to a middle-class woman writer creating fictions within the very specific cultural variables of pre and post war Britain--a cultural milieu in the process of profound change. For example, Pym is torn between traditional and more contemporary images and roles for women. A conservative and orthodox literary education is tempered by her wide, eclectic reading of non-canonical fiction which includes the works of many peripheral women writers and modernist texts, none of which would have appeared on an undergraduate syllabus at Oxford in the early thirties. Similarly, a sentimental affection for the comfortable rituals and patriarchal hierarchy of the Church of England, an institution which she perceives to be changing in disturbing and not necessarily sympathetic ways, is coupled with an acute awareness of the reductive images and subordinate roles to which the Church has relegated women. An irrational longing in her own life for the illusory glamour of the Romance (or heroine's) plot--derived from cultural paradigms positing marriage or death as

teleology for women--is countered by a clear apprehension that such binary tropes are seductive artifice at best and cruelly restrictive life-slots at the worst, especially in the implications for the single, middle-aged, intelligent woman/writer. From the grounds of such antinomies come the complexities of her novels which, in turn, tend to produce strikingly diverse readings of them.



Notes

<sup>1</sup> Terry Eagleton, Walter Benjamin; or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (London: NLB, 1981) 98-99.

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn G. Heilbrun, "Feminism and the Profession of Literature: Presidential Address," Hamlet's Mother and Other Women (New York: Columbia UP, 1990) 208.

<sup>3</sup> Nancy A. Walker, Feminist Alternatives (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1990) 90. Writer Gail Godwin describes the "Book of Old Plots" as 1. Girl meets man. 2. They fall in love. 3. Complications arise. 4. But are overcome. 5. Proposal or marriage.

<sup>4</sup> See Joanne S. Frye, Living Stories, Telling Lives: Women and the Novel in Contemporary Experience (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1986) 213-14. In the notes to Chapter 3 she writes:

Evidence for this [the exclusion of feminist criticism from the "Modern Masters"] can be found in the infrequency with which most current literary theory even mentions feminist criticism and the near total absence of women from a book like Frank Lentricchia's After the New Criticism, which gives an otherwise notable assessment of critical movements in the preceding two decades. Recent indicators suggest that this pattern of marked neglect may be changing, though the evidence for such a possible shift is as yet insufficient.

<sup>5</sup> See Annette Kolodny, "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," Feminist Studies 6.1 (1980): 17. Kolodny advocates strategies of pluralism and appropriation. See also Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (London: Routledge, 1975) 70-75.

<sup>6</sup> See Morson and Emerson's extensive discussion of Bakhtin's final positions in Chapter 10, "Laughter and the Carnavalesque" 433-470 of Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics.

<sup>7</sup> See Morson and Emerson Part I, "The Shape of a Career." In particular, note their chart on p. 66 which divides Bakhtin's career into four key periods. Period IIIb, in which he published Rabelais and his World, represents his most extreme position on "unfinalizability" in his emphasis on the "Carnival and Joyful relativity." Bakhtin's concept of the carnival and its historic relevance to the novel's ability to offer an ultimately balanced and benevolent critique of society is important. See, in particular, Morson and Emerson 89-96, 435, 437, 463, 491. For a discussion of the importance of the carnival and carnivalization to the modern "academic" novel, see David Lodge's comments in John Haffenden's Novelists in Interview (1985) 166-167.

<sup>8</sup> Authoritative discourse is privileged language that approaches us from without; it is distanced, taboo, and permits no play with its framing context [Sacred Writ, for example]. We recite it. It has great power over us, but only while in power; if ever dethroned it immediately becomes a dead thing, a relic. Opposed to it is internally persuasive discourse, which is more akin to retelling a text in one's own words, with one's own accents, gestures, modifications. Human coming-to-consciousness, in Bakhtin's view, is a constant struggle between

these two types of discourse: an attempt to assimilate more into one's own system, and the simultaneous freeing of one's own discourse from the authoritative word, or from earlier persuasive words that have ceased to mean. (Holquist, ed., Dialogic 424-5)

<sup>9</sup> Utterance is Bakhtin's extension of what Saussure called the parole aspect of language [the speech act/utterance], but where utterance is made specifically social, historical, concrete and dialogized.... "In each speech act, subjective experience perishes in the objective fact of the enunciated word--utterance, and the enunciated word is subjectified in the act of responsive understanding in order to generate, sooner or later, a counterstatement" (Vološinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language 40-41) (Holquist, ed., Dialogic 433-4). The important point to note here is that when utterance is dialogized in the novel it generates counterstatement and is thus productive of contending viewpoints.

<sup>10</sup> In her discussion of Mary Ellman's "sardonic prose" and "elegant wit" (39-40) utilized in the style of Ellman's book Thinking About Women (1968), Toril Moi discusses the subversive "power of laughter" in connection with Bakhtin (Sexual/Textual 40). Moi clearly recognizes the subversive power of comic irony in creating the kinds of "textual uncertainty" so pervasive in Pym's work. She continues by noting that the comic vision as exemplified in Jane Austen, a clear foremother of Pym, cannot be adequately accounted for in Gilbert and Gubar's explanation of the sub-text in women's writing as generated by "feminist rage" (Sexual/Textual 62). She finds their analysis of Austen less convincing than their reading of Charlotte Brontë, for example:

This position [feminist rage], which in less sophisticated guises is perhaps the most recurrent theme in Anglo-American feminist criticism, manages to transform all texts into feminist texts, because they may always and without exception be held to embody somehow and somewhere the author's 'female rage' against patriarchal oppression. Thus Gilbert and Gubar's readings of Jane Austen lack the force of their readings of Charlotte Brontë precisely because they persist in defining anger as the only positive signal of a feminist consciousness. Austen's gentle irony is lost on them, whereas the explicit rage and moodiness of Charlotte Brontë's texts furnish them with superb grounds for stimulating exegesis. (62)

Pym, I believe, not only utilizes the carnivalesque "power of laughter" but also brilliantly adapts Mary Ellman's strategy as articulated by Toril Moi. Like Ellman, Pym, "as part of her deconstructive project" in appropriating traditional paradigms, is "exploiting the sexual stereotypes for all they are worth for [her] own political [or novelistic] purposes" (Sexual/Textual 39).

<sup>11</sup> When I came upon these highly relevant studies in anthropological journals, I was not aware of any personal link with Pym. It was gratifying then to come upon the following letter to Philip Larkin in A Very Private Eve:

You say you will be in Oxford 19th-20th April--is that by any chance for the Rawlinson dinner at St. John's on the 19th? Because if it is, we may catch a glimpse of each other ('across a crowded room,' of course) as I have been invited to this as a guest by an anthropologist I used to know in London who is now in Oxford (Edwin Ardener). I thought I had better warn you, though in a novel one would prefer the man to be taken by surprise and even dismayed! (VPE 317)

<sup>12</sup> See Ardener's Perceiving Women 23.

<sup>13</sup> Shirley Ardener explains in her introduction to Perceiving Women, something of the genesis of the various papers. Many were read originally at the Oxford

Institute for Social Anthropology in the late sixties or early seventies. The essays, which were of particular relevance to those interested in women's issues, were presented subsequently in other contexts. She summarizes their significance:

Edwin Ardener suggested that, with notable exceptions, generally social anthropologists had not studied women with the kind of attention which, as half or more of most populations, they should command.... He went on to suggest that the inadequate treatment might in part have been due to the fact that in their own societies, and as subjects of research, women are often more 'inarticulate' than men, and thus pose special technical problems for the inquirer. It might be appropriate here to stress that he did not deny that women do "utter or give tongue." He was drawing attention to the fact that because the arena of public discourse tends to be characteristically male-dominated and the appropriate language registers often seem to have been "encoded" by males, women may be at a disadvantage when wishing to express matters of particular concern to them. Unless their views are presented in a form acceptable to men, and to women brought up in the male idiom, they will not be given a proper hearing. If this is so it is possible to speculate further and wonder whether, because of the absence of a suitable code and because of a necessary indirectness rather than spontaneity of expression, women, more often than may be the case with men, lack the facility to raise to conscious level their unconscious thoughts. [emphasis added] (vii-ix)

<sup>14</sup> Pym herself commented on her interest in Virginia Woolf's modernist technique of synchronicity, as well as on the fact that she had attempted something similar in her own work:

14 August [1942]. Oswestry. I have been reading Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse. Although I have read her before, this is the first time I have really taken note of her special technique. It is one that commends itself to me—I find it attractive and believe I could do it—indeed, I already have, in a mild way. Sitting by the kitchen fire drying my hair, a cat, a basket chair and a willow tree and Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt meeting in the middle of the ocean to discuss War and Peace Aims. (VPE 107)

<sup>15</sup> Joanne S. Frye, like Toril Moi, discusses the relevance of Bakhtin to feminist perspectives. She writes of the significance of the novel's capacity to engage the contextual and oppositional concerns of women's writing:

This is not to say that language in the novel refers in any direct or unitary way but rather to find in its flexibility a portion of the novel's capacity to interpret and participate in cultural change. Mikhail Bakhtin's highly suggestive analysis of the novel's development traces the historical evolution of this capacity to a developing consciousness of multiple languages—"heteroglossia"—and the resulting awareness that a given language must be seen as no more than "a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality...." From a feminist perspective, Bakhtin's analysis rings true: the novel has evolved in interaction with the social realities of women's and men's lives. But more crucially, the analysis points toward the significance of that flexibility now: the novel's dialogic capacity enables it to engage in "eternal re-thinking and re-evaluating" (Dialogic 31) as it interacts with its social environment.... Thus does the novel reveal an "orientation that is contested, contestable and contesting." (Dialogic 332) (22)

## CHAPTER II

## Registers of Restraint: Muted Discourses from the Margins

It is, however, a common experience that women still 'do not speak' even when linguistic aspects are constant. Ethnographers report that women cannot be reached so easily as men: they giggle when young, snort when old, reject the question, laugh at the topic, and the like.

Edwin Ardener, "Belief and the Problem of Women":

Marginality can be productive.

Dale Spender, Man Made Language

An examination of the discourses Pym constructs for her muted<sup>2</sup> protagonists reveals idiosyncratic registers of restraint, which are, nevertheless, languages which reflect many of the markers discovered by linguists and anthropologists in the speech patterns of subordinate groups. Comedy is subversive, and although Pym's satire is seldom blatantly iconoclastic or vitriolic, her ability to "tell it slant" through the alternate perspectives of her many deceptively benign spinsters or "excellent women" provides an ironic view from the camouflage of the perimeter. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism (Dialogic 324) is relevant to Pym's elusive ambivalence, as are the observations of Edwin and Shirley Ardener on the oblique and relatively inarticulate quality of the language of women. Dialogic heteroglossia achieves a further complexity in fictions which reflect in the discourse of a subordinate group an additional process or an extra stage in the attempt to communicate which Shirley Ardener refers to as "a necessary indirectness rather than spontaneity" (Perceiving ix). An analysis of selected

discourses from the novels can demonstrate some of the ways in which Pym's writing stylizes and parodies the oblique language of subordination.

The "imperfect" fit between the paradigms of the dominant culture and a muted group which the Ardeners have theorized from their cultural model results in yet another identifiable ambivalence in women's fiction. On the one hand, the subordinate group must strive to "make a life" linguistically or narratively through identifiable efforts to forge "transformational links" (xv) to the constraining structures. By dialogizing these discursive accommodations in the speech of her protagonists, Pym achieves the Bakhtinian goal of ironic distance. Through parodying "necessary indirectness," she begins its contestation. On the other hand, the flexibility of the novel as genre allows the sub-group to push or gesture towards a revision or recasting of Kermode's "changing fiction." Bakhtin's insistence on the novel as a subversive genre which is constantly negotiating between received patterns and the inevitable flux of social reality suggests that it is uniquely susceptible to change. Pym's art is continually balanced on the borderline between the objectification and parody of decaying or inadequate paradigms and the struggle to make tentative gestures towards alternative possibilities for her women.

In her linguistic parody of the dominant community and its attendant discourses, Pym protects and paradoxically arms the protagonist with the camouflage of tentative, non-threatening language. In order to distinguish the protagonist from other female characters in the novels, it is probably safe to characterize her as more fully aware and "enlightened" in regard to the alternate reality of subordination in which she participates as a woman, while many other female characters are deficient in self-knowledge and in a clear-eyed assessment of their relative status. Maxine Kumin's insight as a poet provides a concise summary of what Nardin has called "the feminine consciousness" in Pym -- "When Sleeping Beauty wakes up she is almost fifty years old" (Heilbrun, Writing 60). Pym's aging and frequently plain protagonists are wide-awake, often well before fifty, and at some point the romantic scales of self-delusion have fallen from their eyes. They are quiet critics, however, and internalize most of their

observations. When they do break the civil silence, their speech is hesitant, gapped by significant ellipsis and marked by ironic inversion. Although clearly differing in many ways, protagonists such as Belinda Bede in Some Tame Gazelle, Mildred Lathbury in Excellent Women, Jane Cleveland in Jane and Prudence, Jessie Morrow in Jane and Prudence and Crampton Hodnet, Catherine Oliphant in Less Than Angels, Caro Grimstone in An Academic Question, and Emma Howick in A Few Green Leaves share in the linguistic markers associated with Pym's discreetly subversive women.

A useful entry to a study of Pym's diction is suggested by Mary Ann Caws's essay "Wariness and Women's Language," in which she studies verbs as "the active key to speech" (Todd 26) in male and female poets. In a limited analysis of female poets she finds, "Verbs of descent, of awkwardness, fear, shame, self-persecution and doubt...and gestures of awkwardness or discomfort" (28). Dale Spender's comments on the muting of feminine discourse provide a similar perspective on these aspects of Pym's "immediately recognizable voice." She writes of women:

Systematically rejected, denied the confidence to express and affirm the validity of their [sic] experience, any human being would, I suspect, employ similar "protective" strategies and reinforce their [sic] own muted position. (Spender 87)

A study of verbs, qualifiers and gesture in Pym's protagonists or in the authorial voice, which is frequently sympathetic to their point of view, repeats the phenomenon observed by Caws and Spender. Two novels written with a first-person narrator provide stylistic parallels. Excellent Women and An Academic Question, though separated in composition date by some twenty years, show a discernible similarity in technique.

Mildred Lathbury of Excellent Women is discovered by Mr. Mallett, "one of our churchwardens" (EW 5), as she attempts to glean information about her new neighbours, Helena and Rockingham Napier, by a surreptitious viewing of their

furniture as it is unloaded from the moving van. The oblique activities of this "very private eye" are characteristic, as is the discourse of the opening pages of the novel. When accosted by Mr. Mallett, Mildred is made to "start guiltily, almost as if I had no right to be discovered outside my own front door" (5). The protagonist is immediately wary and defensive under the roguish eye of Mr. Mallett, who has rightly guessed at her motives: "'Ah, you ladies! Always on the spot when there's something happening!'" Mr. Mallett's pompous and patronizing intrusion into Mildred's "spinsterish delight" in satisfying her curiosity, as well as his insulting direct characterization of her as a gossip and snoop ("'I expect you know about it'") (5), receives no sharp rejoinder but a characteristically civil defense: "'Well, yes, one usually does,'" I said, feeling rather annoyed at his presumption. 'It is rather difficult not to know such things'" (5). Mildred overtly agrees with Mr. Mallett, "Well, yes," while secretly feeling angry at his crude intrusion. Anger is not a suitable response for a woman, however, so it must be suppressed. Mildred can only feel anger, she must not voice it and even as she internalizes her displeasure she uses a qualifier, as though she cannot admit the extent of her irritation, even to herself. She is therefore "rather" annoyed at his presumption, just as in her defense of her surreptitious activities she proffers the tentative excuse that it is "'rather difficult not to know such things.'" Interest in others is a feminine activity in Pym; her men are focused on themselves: "'Well, well, tempus fugit, as the poet says', called out Mr. Mallett as he hurried on" (5). Mr. Mallett "calls" and "hurries on." In contrast to Mildred, Mr. Mallett is dominant, active, vocal, insensitive, pompous, pretentious and mobile. He is also, of course, unconscious of possessing most of these characteristics, though his discourse and Mildred's hesitant reactions make the reader aware of them. The reader becomes aware of masculine tunnel vision in this initial mixed-sex conversation.

The first discursive exchanges of the novel, then, reveal a preponderance of hesitant, passive, speculative or suppressed verbs in the female voice-- "start," "feel," "suppose," "must expect," "had to agree," "dawdled," "heard,"

"noticed." Even when the same verb is used for a male and female character it is employed in significantly different contexts. For example, the verb "hurried" is used twice on the first page of text. Mr. Mallett "hurried on" after his brief and, he doubtless feels, benevolent and jocular badinage with Miss Lathbury. He has more important places to go; he is on his way, as it were, to life. Mildred, suddenly hesitant at the prospect of actually meeting Mrs. Napier "felt, perversely, that I did not want to see her, so I hurried to my own rooms and began tidying out my kitchen" (5). Mildred "hurries" into her retreat, the privacy of her rooms and the comfort of "the daily round" in order to prepare herself better for an encounter with others. The female protagonist, tentative and careful, "hurries" back to the margins; Mr. Mallett blunders and "hurries" to the centre. Paradoxically, in Pym the dominant centre is insensitive and blind, while the periphery is cognizant of multiple realities. Consistent with the Ardener model of dominant and muted, Mr. Mallett is unaware of his conversational blunders in his exchanges with Mildred, whom he cannot "see" except in terms of a socially constructed stereotype. Sharing Mildred's expanded peripheral perspectives, however, the reader can perceive what Bakhtin terms "the blue sky" behind the dominant (male) discourse of Mr. Mallett, and is thus aware, as he is not, of its limitations and absurdities. It is clear, as well, that in the language of both characters the contextual variables of culture and class are also brought into play.

A further two paragraphs, in which discourse is suppressed in interior monologue, repeat the idiosyncratic verbal markers. Mildred describes her initial meeting with Helena Napier:

I met her for the first time by the dustbins, later that afternoon. The dustbins were in the basement and everybody in the house shared them. There were offices on the ground floor and above them the two flats, not properly self-contained and without every convenience.

'I have to share a bathroom,' I had so often murmured, almost with shame, as if I personally had been found unworthy of a bathroom



of my own.

I bent low over the bin and scabbled a few tea leaves and potato peelings out of the bottom of my bucket. I was embarrassed that we should meet like this. I had meant to ask Mrs. Napier to coffee one evening. It was to have been a gracious, civilized occasion, with my best coffee cups and biscuits on little silver dishes. And now here I was standing awkwardly in my oldest clothes, carrying a bucket and a waste-paper basket. (5-6)

Here one finds the "descent" Caws notes in the verbs of female poets evident within the language of the Pym protagonist. A quotidian Persephone, Mildred enters a comic underworld in the basement, where the female "shades" may find a voice and meeting place among communal dustbins. Verbs expressing "awkwardness, fear, shame, self-preservation and doubt...and gestures of awkwardness or discomfort" are further reductive signs. Mildred's feeling of humiliation sounds in the repeated, apologetic explanation to others that her flat is not self-contained so that "I have to share" a bathroom. Again, a chronological listing of verbs and qualifiers in context is instructive. She "so often murmured," "had been found unworthy," "bent low," "scabbled," "was embarrassed," "had meant to ask," "was standing awkwardly" and "was carrying a bucket and a waste-paper basket." Two consecutive paragraphs chosen at random show Mildred's speech to be punctuated with a reductive choice of verbs and suggest her self-effacing, submerged personality.

The "gracious, civilized occasion" Mildred had imagined is replaced by the two women making contact in the lowliest of domestic contexts. Gesture and body language underline humility as she "bent low" over the dust bin. Even her garbage is pitifully sparse, reflecting the bland diet of a superficially dull spinster. Mildred's reticence is emphasized by the next line, visually heightened by its isolation as a single sentence graphically separated from the rest of the text:

Mrs Napier spoke first. (6)

Restraint and a self-conscious feeling of inferiority repeat systematically in the stylized language of subordination which characterizes Mildred Lathbury.

The main protagonist of An Academic Question, a novel drafted in 1971 when Pym's career was in eclipse, is Caro Grimstone, a "graduate wife," married to Dr. Alan Grimstone, a lecturer at a provincial red-brick university. Pym's original draft was in the first person, and Hazel Holt retained this perspective when amalgamating the initial attempt with a later third person narrative that Pym had abandoned. The novel was published posthumously in 1986. Holt describes this as "a transitional novel, as is its heroine, Caroline, by nature and upbringing an excellent woman, [who is] fitting uneasily into the more contemporary role of graduate wife" (AAQ-NOTE). Though married, and, at twenty-eight, younger than Mildred Lathbury, Caro Grimstone, whose name suggests the romantic and pragmatic dichotomy often characteristic of Pym's heroines, is nevertheless consistent in displaying the linguistic markers of marginal woman.

The novel begins with Coco Jeffreys, a forty-five year old, racially mixed homosexual, querying his mother, Kitty, about the jewels she plans to select in dressing for "a gathering of provincial academics" (AAQ 2) which they plan to attend with the Grimstones that evening. Caro's first statement is internalized, and immediately alerts the reader to her subversive capacity for acerbic critique. An outer-directed perspective makes her a keen observer of the academic microcosm: "I, at twenty-eight, felt old beside them, but then I had never had their self-absorption and passionate interest in what are usually regarded as trivialities" (AAQ 1-2). The initial dialogue is marked by the civil, propitiatory tone common to the marginal heroines. Having just informed the reader of her lack of interest in such matters, Caro nevertheless graciously reassures Kitty about her choice of accessories: "'Pearls always look right,' I said politely, 'even artificial ones, though of course one can usually tell,' I added hastily, knowing Kitty's were real" (AAQ 2). Caro is anxious not to offend and the qualifier is quickly inserted to avoid unpleasantness or

misunderstanding. The responsibility for maintaining smooth social intercourse is characteristic of the language of most of the protagonists in *Pym*, while her many irascible and difficult males often provoke squabbling and argument. Like Mildred overtly agreeing with Mr. Mallett, Caro soothes and placates even when her private thoughts may suggest less enthusiasm than she voices.

A study of the verbs, adverbs and adjectives of the first ten pages of the novel is illuminating. Caro "asked," "thought," "murmured," "wondered," "remembered," "suggested," "laughed," "queried," "added," "reminded," "explained," and "supposed." Key verbs are therefore often interrogative rather than assertive, describe imaginative processes that are silent rather than voiced, and disarm through qualifiers and propitiatory additions to blunt, potentially divisive language. Verbs which describe movement or physical processes suggest subordination, retreat, or de-centre the protagonist to the margins. Caro "followed," "put back," "looked around," and "stood at the open window" (5). This last suggests not only the role of the narrator as observer of the larger world, but is often a textual marker in *Pym* suggesting a longing for "something more" in the lives of her protagonists. The liminal image is frequently ambivalent, suggesting simultaneously loss and hopeful expectation. The circumscribed protagonist is often seen to assume a passive yet optimistic posture. Thus, Caro, by the window, is married and has a child but has found these socially desirable goals somehow insufficient. She is "disappointed that I did not feel more 'fulfilled'" (5).

Adverbial qualifiers such as "politely," "defensively" and "guiltily" reinforce the overt timidity of the narrative voice. Diminutives refract and reduce actions and render them hesitant rather than forceful. For example, Caro "took a small pizza" at the Maynard's party and can only manage "slight malice" in a comment concerning Coco's manner of dress upon his arrival. She "might" have been able to converse with Evan Cranton, the librarian, about entomology "in a simple way" (13). Her humble posture is reflected in language and tone.

When she goes to read to the elderly gentlefolk at Normanhurst, her reaction to Sister Dew's characterization of her as "young" is similarly self-

effacing:

I, who had been feeling at my most dire, hung my head in embarrassment, but I supposed that the face of a not particularly pretty woman of twenty-eight must seem young to people in their seventies and eighties. (22)

Caro, who sees herself as "not particularly pretty," feels shame at her appearance and articulates her feeling of inferiority in deflationary language and gesture. Similarly, Mildred, who has "ventured" (EW 6) a tentative initial contact with Helena Napier, retreats when she senses a possible rebuff and describes her appearance negatively in comparison to Helena:

I, mousy and rather plain anyway, drew attention to these qualities with my shapeless overall and old fawn skirt. Let me hasten to add that I am not at all like Jane Eyre who must have given hope to so many plain women who tell their stories in the first person, nor have I ever thought of myself as being like her. (7)

Mildred is quick to point out in the qualifier, "Let me hasten to add," that the reader need not expect a romantic conclusion to her story. The grand passion in closure of marriage to a Mr. Rochester is not to be the destiny of an excellent woman. Instead, Mildred is tentatively matched to anthropologist Dr. Everard Bone and will find her wry "fulfillment" in learning to type so that she may proof his manuscripts and prepare card indexes for "a nice change" (255).

In this regard, Caro's marriage has become pedestrian, and one of the reductive signs which emphasizes her feelings of inadequacy and failure is her inability to "help" her husband in his academic work in conventional ways. Like Mildred, who compares herself unfavourably to Helena Napier in appearance, Caro feels inferior to Margaret Maynard, wife of Crispin, the head of Alan's department:

She was an excellent housekeeper and cook and did all her husband's typing, this last skill dating from the days when it was regarded as one of the duties of an academic wife. Alan did his own typing and this seemed to cut me off from his work. I did not have the opportunity to suggest an apt phrase or rectify a misplaced footnote--there would be no fulsome acknowledgement of my assistance when Alan published his first book. (7)

The humble role Margaret is able to fulfill is articulated in the verbs "to suggest" and "to rectify"; she is the instrument of marginal revision, rather than a significant collaborator. She can only expect to influence Crispin's "work" in minimal ways, her attention lavished on "an apt phrase" or "a misplaced footnote." The fact that Caro is not able to share in even these traditional tasks of the devoted academic wife results in her feeling even more ineffectual and isolated. Spender's comment seems apt here: "Under patriarchal order, the rules for the construction of knowledge about females have been simple. Women have not counted except in so far as they relate to men. Their silence has been successfully engineered" (63).

The role of the marginalized protagonist is thus clearly established through diction and syntax. Perhaps Caro, in her silent observation of the academic gathering, most concisely captures the contrast between masculine and feminine roles, active and passive, dominant and muted in a succinct cameo portrait of a male academic, refracted through a devastating irony:

My eyes were free to rove around the room while I listened.... I noticed Dr. Cranton, the head librarian, discoursing to a small captive circle, but I could not guess at what he might be saying.  
(8)

The verbs depicting Caro's activities are suitably passive and subversive. She "listens" and "watches" as her eyes "rove around the room." She is free to do

so in this instance as her interlocutor is a dull woman, Heather Armitage, wife of the assistant librarian. Camouflaged on the fringes of the party, she watches the behaviour of others. Characteristically, she is "listening" rather than talking, though we know Heather is not receiving her undivided attention. Heather can offer little conversationally to inspire a listener with suitable awe as her work is appropriately subordinate. Finding her part-time work at the library "not stimulating enough for a graduate wife," she is "going on about how she was helping someone with research, 'not one's own,' she added apologetically 'but very worthwhile really'" (8). Heather is ashamed and defensive about her lowly status, which is articulated in a characteristic qualifier. Furthermore, her talk is described by the reductive verb "going on."

Heather's talk may be safely dismissed as dull, while the demure protagonist maintains a polite posture by pretending to listen--yet another civil gesture. Caro's attention is elsewhere. Rudeness is not tolerated in an excellent woman, though Pym's men and female "eccentrics" are frequently impolite and arrogantly brusque. Spender notes: "there is a social expectation that 'subordinates' should be more polite than their 'superiors'; the onus is on the waiter, not the customer to be polite, it is on the employee, not the employer, the student and not the teacher. It is nothing less than consistent that women should be more polite than men!" (Man Made 37). Just as Caro's initial speech in the novel reflects a subordinate position in her eagerness to protect Kitty Jeffrey's feelings, here she politely maintains Heather's illusion that someone is actually interested in what she is saying. It is interesting to note that the Pym protagonist maintains a subordinate posture consistently, even when speaking to other subordinate groups--lower-class homosexual men, for example, or other women, many of whom may be socially inferior to her. Consequently, she is free to query all members of the community through a dialogic positioning which does not completely co-incide with any group. It is in this sense that the marginal protagonist may fulfil the Bakhtinian function of the "third person in private life," stylizing or parodying in varying degrees all the languages of the text but not completely "fusing [her] identity with any one of them" (Bakhtin 126).

Thus the tension between social realities or constraints and the querying voice of the protagonist gesturing towards alternative truths remains consistent.

Though all of the party, male and female alike, are "a rather dull lot of people" (8), the pretentious conversation of males is received with a marked social deference and a guise of rapt attention which is conspicuously absent in listening to the talk of women. The latter reap a studied civility at best. The diction depicting the librarian, then, bristles with authority which is undermined with reductive irony. Earlier, Caro, sharing her mother's class-conscious snobbery, had presumably included him in her placing of the group as "only a gathering of provincial academics." Her own husband, it is wise to recall, is also not quite the thing, as they had met "at a university which, to my mother's grief, was neither Oxford nor Cambridge" (4). She is secretly contemptuous of both librarian and husband.

When the description of Dr. Cranton is ironically completed by a subsequent dry observation of his wife's preoccupations, the narrative fragment records not only a characteristic spatial relationship between dominant and muted but also further emphasizes language which is written in intonational quotation marks. Bakhtin's novelistic criterion of "double-voiced discourse" becomes apparent in the ambivalent rhetoric. "Dr." Cranton is the "head" librarian and he is "discoursing," to a "small, captive circle." But after all, he is only a second-rate academic at a second-rate university. He may well be "discoursing" rather than "going on," but the pretentious verb, reserved for male rhetoric, suggests rather his pompous, blind arrogance when we learn later that his topics of conversation at which Caro "could not guess," might conceivably be "Anglican-Methodist reunion...entomology...and manuscript Africana" (12-13). Doubtless his "circle" of listeners must exercise even more restraint and civility to appear attentive than Caro requires when "listening" to Heather Armitage. The juxtaposition of Dr. Cranton's talk with the deflation of the next sentence is plangent: "His wife was quietly eating in a corner." Suitably marginalized, and long disenchanted with her husband's "discourse," his wife, perhaps gratefully excluded, is "quietly eating." The diction suggests a docile, domestic animal, feeding in an

attitude of humble resignation to a life of stupefying dullness. Food, however, provides comfort and solace for the marginal woman. While Dr. Cranton is "discoursing," his wife is "eating." The two verbs, the one inflated and intellectually pretentious, the other stripped and comically reductive, suggest the relative status of men and women as perceived by the female protagonist and, indeed, by the larger community. Pym's position as author is clearly more problematic.

Verbs associated with the subordinate group, then, describe awkward, self-effacing actions, and/or gestures. Mildred "scrabbles" among the refuse of her spinsterish cookery in Excellent Women and, in Jane and Prudence, when called upon to laud Fabian Driver's "magnificent" marrow, Jessie Morrow implies a rebellious reluctance to pay suitable homage to her future husband's comically phallic offering to the annual church harvest festival through the same verb, a favourite of Pym's:

'What a fine marrow, Mr. Driver,' said Miss Doggett in a bright tone.

'It is the biggest one we have had so far, isn't it Miss Morrow?'

Miss Morrow, who was scrabbling on the floor among the vegetables, mumbled something inaudible.

'It is magnificent,' said Mrs. Mayhew reverently. (J&P 31)

"Scrabbling" and mumbling from her deceptively servile position, Jessie nevertheless foreshadows her ability to manage Fabian effectively within a pragmatic marriage by a symbolic refusal, through a physical retreat to the margins--here, quite literally "on the floor"--to "reverence" his masculinity; such positioning removes her from the circle of female admirers. The muted voice and gesture are not signs of weak acquiescence, but, on the contrary, idiosyncratic textual markers of subversive deflation and a stubborn, if oblique, "Non-Serviam." Jessie, like Mildred, often utilizes invisibility as a deliberate



disguise for her own purposes. Here, verbs of reduction underline her refusal to participate in what Jane Cleveland, the vicar's wife, vaguely perceives to be a fertility rite involving the ratification of a dominant male. Pym comically deflates the situation in an amusing anthropological analogy: "Jane felt as if she were assisting at some primitive kind of ritual at whose significance she hardly dared to guess" (J&P 31). The irony remains delicate in the discreet ambiguity surrounding the phallic symbolism. Jane "hardly dared to guess" the meaning of marrow worship among the excellent women preparing the church for harvest festival. Again the verbs are tentative and qualified but rich in comic innuendo.

While diction, syntax and gesture are key factors in Bakhtinian refraction, there is an additional phenomenon discernible in the feminine registers of the Pym heroine which Shirley Ardener has identified as "transformational links," where, in conversation between dominant and subordinate groups, "the onus is on the muted group 'to form rickety or cumbersome links' with the dominant group" (Ardener, Perceiving xiv).

In her studies of subordinate groups and their difficulty in articulating their realities in a manner acceptable to a dominant group, Ardener concludes:

The implications are that a society may be dominated or overdetermined by the model or models generated by one dominant group within the system. This dominant model may impede the free expression of alternative models of their world which subdominant groups may possess.... As a result the latter might be relatively more 'inarticulate' when expressing themselves through the idiom of the dominant group and silent on matters of special concern to them for which no accommodation has been made in it. Although he [colleague Edwin Ardener] has suggested that women characteristically form such a relatively 'inarticulate' group in any situation where the interests of the group are at variance with those of men...he also identifies other groups in society, defined

by criteria other than sexual, which may also be effectively 'mute'...we may imagine that, generally, muted groups do manage to establish transformational links between their own perceptual structures and those of the world of events presented to them by the dominant ideology.... (Perceiving xi-xv)

The internalized discourse of the Pym protagonist is constantly questioning and critiquing the world around her in silence, and when she does break silence, the "transformational links" by which perceptions unacceptable to the dominant group are recast and expressed in terms which allow it to maintain a blind "tunnel vision," oblivious to a different perspective, are consistent as part of the "mask of subordination." Dale Spender provides a chart based on the Ardener model which allows one to visualize this process.

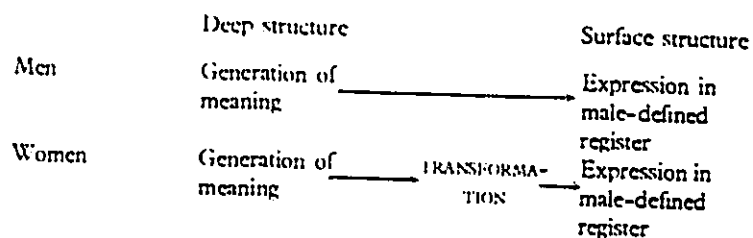


Figure 3. Transformational Links Between Muted and Dominant Groups<sup>3</sup>

In a study of Marcia Ivory in Quartet in Autumn, Patricia Naulty (40) has argued that it is the failure to construct such linguistic and social links that condemns Marcia to dismissal as mad, and that her refusal to conform ultimately leads to her death, her despair articulated only through the silent language of

self-starvation. Virginia Woolf has also expressed this phenomenon as the necessity for women to be "nice." We remember Lily Briscoe's dilemma in To the Lighthouse, for example. She does not like Charles Tansley, who has bluntly asserted, "Women can't paint; women can't write," but knows it is incumbent upon her as a woman to "link" by giving him an opportunity to assert himself in the dinner conversation. She longs to experiment and remain silent to see what will happen, but the social pressure is too great. And so, "for the hundred and fiftieth time Lily Briscoe had to renounce the experiment--what happens if one is not nice to that young man there--and be nice" (106).

In examples already cited, both Mildred and Caro propitiate through such "links" from the private and frequently sardonic deconstructions of the narrative perspective, to the voiced dialogue, usually conciliatory, that smooths the way to social intercourse. It could be argued that all aspects of tentative speech utilized in "binding" with a dominant group illustrate this phenomenon. Pym's excellent women consciously use these linguistic bridges, especially, though not exclusively, in conversation with men. Dominant men usually do not, nor do "eccentric" marginal women who have ceased "making an effort" to soothe the male (or female) ego; these women, forgoing marriage and refusing to "keep up" dress or appearance, do not or will not adopt such oblique, propitiatory strategies of discourse. Characteristically, such women focus their need for "something to love" on non-traditional objects of affection, and display a brusque, unfeminine or decidedly androgynous demeanour. Esther Clovis is devoted to the Learned Society, Gertrude Lydgate to her research in linguistics in Less Than Angels. Edith Liversidge in Some Tame Gazelle is interested in sanitation, "was tough and wiry, dug vigorously in her garden and kept goats" (15). Sister Blatt and Sister Dew fall into this category, as does Dolly Arborfield of An Academic Question, who, in her sixties, "only kept in touch with her former loves for practical and material advantages" (AAQ 15) and now cares tenderly for hedgehogs. Men are typically wary and fearful of these formidable creatures, who regard them, in turn, with a thinly veiled contempt bred of indifference. These women, though clearly marginal and essentially powerless, are disconcertingly dangerous, as

they are liable to say anything, unlike their relatively inarticulate counterparts, the excellent women; they may lay aside "the shallow mask of manners," in Wildean terms, at any time, having liberated themselves into the decided privilege of being just as rude, direct and abrupt as the dominant group. They are capable of bluntly articulating "an alternate reality" and shattering--albeit briefly--male complacency.

The church jumble sale in Excellent Women provides an often-repeated social context in Pym within which to study the contrast between speech which utilizes transformational links and dialogue which omits them. Mildred Lathbury and Sister Blatt display the characteristics of both discursive structures. The object of Sister Blatt's derisive remarks is Father Greatorex, who is standing "uncertainly" in the middle of the room, "wearing a cassock and an old navy blue overcoat of the kind worn by Civil Defence workers during the war" (EW 59). The narrative voice, in this instance Mildred's, has already remarked on Father Greatorex's eccentric and shabby appearance, implying by the use of the word "uncertainly" that he is essentially lazy and indecisive. The narrative description reveals that the work is being done by the women around the periphery. The divine, in common with the other men, is studiously avoiding work, which suggests his genteel sloth. Again the centre or "middle" is occupied by a lazy or ineffectual male who, though unorthodox, nevertheless appropriates overt respect and dominant status because of the trappings of clerical or academic authority. Mildred's critique, however, is oblique and silent; Sister Blatt's is voiced:

Sister Blatt looked at me and clicked her teeth with irritation.

'Oh, that man! How he gets on my nerves!' (59)

To Mildred's mild and clearly ambivalent protest that the priest is "so good, saintly almost," which is immediately refuted in an ironic subtext by the internalized qualifier that she has little evidence for this other than his shabby clothes (which a charitable construction might conclude show "a disregard

for the conventions of this world which implied a preoccupation with higher things,"), Sister Blatt responds:

'Saintly!' snorted Sister Blatt: I don't know what's given you that idea. Just because a man takes Orders in middle age and goes about looking like an old tramp! He was no good in business so he went into the Church--that's not what we want.'

'Oh, come now,' I protested 'surely you're being rather hard? After all, he is a good man....' (59)

Sister Blatt is angry, and, unlike Mildred, who suppresses her irritation with Mr. Mallett in the opening dialogue of the novel, and now internalizes her secret reservations about Father Greatorex's "saintliness," she gives voice to her fury with relish, accompanied by snorts and the clicking of dentures. Of course, this is delightfully vulgar, and it is also semantically clear that Sister Blatt is socially inferior to Mildred. Edwin Ardener's report of the laments of ethnographers who attempt to communicate with "snorting" old women in African tribes, quoted in the epigraph to this chapter, comes to mind. Both Sister Blatt and Harriet Bede of Some Tame Gazelle are prone to derisory "snorts" when attempting to articulate their perceptions of the self-delusions of men. In the context of Pym's civil society, however, they do not often break the silence that renders them, as Spender puts it, "accomplices" (Man Made 102) to male blindness in this "relatively inarticulate" manner. When they do, they usually "tell it slant," by "snorting" their opposition to other women rather than directly to the men themselves, especially if the men enjoy the prestige of a relatively high social status. Mildred's attempts to placate, marked by qualifiers--"surely," "after all"--are in this instance directed at another woman and are a sign of a restraint associated with class as well as gender. Both women, however, are members of the subordinate group in this case, in that neither can speak directly to Father Greatorex and voice her irritation and her perception that he is "useless."

Sister Blatt expresses her anger to Mildred, but not directly to Father Greatorex, who, as an Anglican priest, retains too much status for direct assault. Her attack is still refracted from the target at this point as it can only be expressed to another woman. Mr. Mallett and Mr. Conybeare, who are inferior socially to even a shabby late-comer to the priesthood, are fair game, however, and receive the full force of Sister Blatt's anger, especially after she and Mildred have been "rudely" snubbed by Julian Malory, the vicar, who leaves his tireless, but plain, workers without tea in his haste to join Father Greatorex in bearing food and drink to the charming Allegra Gray:

Sister Blatt and I looked at each other. 'Well,' I began rather doubtfully, 'the vicar is always charming to new parishioners, or he ought to be. That's a known thing.'

'But we hadn't got any tea,' she pointed out indignantly.

'I think it was extremely rude of him to ignore us like that. All because of a new face....'

'Yes, I think he did rather forget his manners' I agreed. 'Of course, Mrs. Gray is going to live in his house, you know, so perhaps he feels the relationship between them should be especially cordial.'

'Oh rubbish! I never heard such far-fetched excuses.'

'Oh-ho, jealous are you, Sister?' said Mr. Mallett roguishly.

'You'd better go and get your tea before all the cakes go.'

'You mean before you and Mr. Conybeare eat them all,' said Sister Blatt. 'I expect you've been tucking in for hours.' (61-62)

Mildred's half-hearted attempts to excuse Father Malory are dismissed as "rubbish" by Sister Blatt, and Mr. Mallett's patronizing attempts at joviality receive a direct rebuff when he and Mr. Conybeare are bluntly accused of sloth and gluttony. Tone is a key factor. Sister Blatt permits herself the luxury of indignation, which sounds in direct, unmediated speech, in a voice which is

doubtless raised in anger. Mr. Mallett pays no attention, however. It is as though he has not heard what she has said. In Pym, women are good listeners, men are not. Sister Blatt clearly has no real status, and so he is effectively "deaf" to her assaults and makes no response to her chiding. Instead, he hypocritically offers to look after the jumble stall, after the work is done:

'Now you ladies run along. I'll look after the stall,' said Mr. Mallett, picking up a dress and holding it up against himself in a comic manner. 'I'll guarantee that business will look up now that I'm in charge.'

'Yes, I think we can safely leave the stall now' I said...

(62)

Again, Mildred forms the conversational link in a non-threatening manner. The truth is that all the best garments have been sold and that the sale is, in effect, over. Mr. Mallett will do no work and business will not "look up." She does not say so, however, but agrees with him. Suppressed irritation, acquiescence and civility permit Mr. Mallett to remain oblivious to Mildred's true feelings, which are that he, like Father Greatorex and the other men, is "useless at jumble sales" (59). Mildred, then, maintains the oblique critique of the invisible woman, while Sister Blatt appropriates the direct word associated with the narcissistic masculine world of the dominant group. Between the two women, the authority of Father Greatorex is thoroughly undermined for the reader.

This passage illustrates clearly the dilemma of women attempting to articulate a perceived truth which is unacceptable to a dominant group. Father Greatorex is "useless" and Julian Malory is insensitive and "rude." Within the text, Pym reveals these facts through the female protagonist's internalized subtext coupled with the stylized and parodied conversation of two women of different age and social status. Neither Father Greatorex nor Julian Malory will ever hear these truths. A woman who is older, plain, and a trained nurse and thus relatively "unsexed" like Sister Blatt, can only articulate perceived inadequa-

cies of the dominant group to men much lower down in the social hierarchy, like Mr. Mallett and Mr. Conybeare. They are, she points out in unequivocal terms, lazy, greedy and selfish. The men remain, nevertheless, deaf to any criticism, and ignore or dismiss it when it is voiced. They simply laugh at Sister Blatt, and remain insulated within the "tunnel vision" of dominant reality. This persistent blindness, even in the face of unambiguous, direct, "masculine" discourse when transformational links are omitted, tends to corroborate Dale Spender's view that learning to speak "like a man" will not solve women's dilemma:

I have thought it perfectly feasible that women could learn to speak exactly like men and still be evaluated as less successful--even hesitant and tentative--precisely because it is not always the language which determines the evaluation, but the sex.... Women will still be judged as women no matter how they speak, and no amount of talking the same as men will make them men, and subject to the same judgments. (Man Made 79)

Sister Blatt's perceptions are not heeded or taken seriously, it seems, because she is a woman.

The reader, however, is fully aware of the frustrations of both women--whether they are silently, directly or indirectly voiced. The dialogism of the novel permits all these "languages" to sound, and textually if not socially, in Bakhtinian terms, the women together succeed in "ripping off" the masks of masculine superiority. The novel allows the reader to juxtapose multiple perceptions--those of dominant and muted--and thus re-encodes and simultaneously critiques a common social phenomenon--the effective silencing of women. Dale Spender summarizes:

That there is a block between the generation of meaning and the expression of meaning for women is a premise which is shared by many



feminists. It is the block which arises when it is necessary to "tell it slant" so that it is expressed in the form of patriarchal order.... There is nowhere for women's meanings to go because [as Shirley Ardener observes] "the conceptual space in which they would lie is overrun by the dominant model of events generated by the dominant group" (p. xiv). This is a very similar concept to that of negative semantic space as outlined by Julia Stanley. (Man Made 82)

Through the palimpsestic or subversive subtext, women's meanings are liberated, though, as Joanne S. Frye puts it, they are still "bound by the assumptions of their social context" (51). Frye continues:

Adding the previously obscured information of explicitly female experience requires a new interpretive paradigm for social reality; the development of new paradigms makes accessible new information. In voicing their own multiple subjective versions of the world, women thus come to identify their reality not in the "femininity" of the dominant paradigm, but in a shared basis of female experience at the heart of the sense-making process. This is a commitment not to an unchanging reality but to a reality of shared interpretation in process. (45)

In this passage from Excellent Women, then, Pym liberates the "multiple subjective versions of the world" within the quotidian social context of the jumble sale. The societal requirement for indirect speech is clearly shown, as well as the futility of direct speech in the mouths of women; at the same time, the multiple realities of "shared interpretation" are encoded in dialogism. The diverse realities of Mildred, Sister Blatt, Father Greatorex, Julian Malory, Mr. Mallett and Mr. Coneybeare blend to reveal the complexity and ambivalence implicit in any social interaction between members of a dominant and subordinate group.

The dinner party in Some Tame Gazelle, attended by many of the key characters, is rich in comic counterstatement within which the bridging characteristic of the female protagonist's discourse becomes evident. In general, it may be said that the most important men, the Archdeacon and Dr. Parnell, are self-centred, vain, poor listeners and argumentative. It has been ironically suggested through euphemism--another oblique discursive marker--that Dr. Parnell is a homosexual: "Nicholas Parnell was small and bearded and did not somehow look the kind of person one would marry, Belinda realized. All the same, she felt proud of his distinction..." (STG 94). Clearly, this factor does not disqualify him from the positive connotation of his role as "bachelor," nor from dominant status in the Pym microcosm, as his academic degree and position of Bodleian librarian neutralize any possible disadvantage of his sexual preference. In fact, eccentrics and homosexuals, whether dominant or marginal, are regarded in Pym with the same civil tolerance that she accords to all her characters. There is no stigma in "difference." The arrogant Archdeacon, nevertheless, can reign supreme in this group, as "dominant male." Belinda and Harriet Bede, though different in temperament, share the linguistic marker of the transformational link associated with a subordinate group, although Harriet makes at least one conversational blunder which suggests her relative indifference to and impatience with the Archdeacon, as the object of her devotion is the timid, naive and painfully eager curate. As a foil to Belinda, Harriet's discourse places her somewhere between excellent woman and liberated eccentric. She shares the brusqueness of the latter group in her thinly disguised impatience with the Archdeacon, whom she views realistically and without Belinda's loving benevolence. She dotes on the young curate, however, and her speech reveals the characteristic "links" when she talks to him. In essence, the male characters are flattered and lionized by Belinda and Harriet through language, so that they remain unaware of their very real defects and absurdities. The men retain a unitary "tunnel vision" blinding them to the reality shared by the reader.

If the men are "protected" within the social reality of the cultural model, however, they are most certainly exposed to deconstructive irony within the

dialogic ambivalence of the text. Here the female "masquerade" (91) is foregrounded, and the representation of "nonlinear multiplicity" (J. Frye 55) is made possible. Joanne Frye reiterates the value of Bakhtinian dialogism for the woman writer:

It is not that the novel is the only narrative form capable of simultaneously invoking and critiquing cultural norms but that its formal evolution predisposes it to this critical interaction. (55)

Through double-voiced discourse, then, the speech of the male characters is simultaneously contested through a subversive subtext, so that multiple realities are brought into play.

Belinda (STG), in particular, as the feminine consciousness in Pym who "sees more," is aware of the numerous potentially embarrassing blunders and breaches of civility which threaten to erupt from moment to moment through the smooth flow of discourse which protects the dominant group; her frantic efforts to maintain peace and goodwill among her eccentric and irascible guests is a light-hearted paradigm of the protagonist's paradoxical role as participant in and critic of the small worlds of the Pym canon. The energy and wit of Pym's first published novel permit the reader to discern in bold relief the oblique techniques which she refines and renders in darker, subtler tones in her subsequent works.

Even before the arrival of the guests, Belinda begins her work of flattering and placating the men by catering to their vanity and intellectual pretensions:

She brought out a photograph of Nicholas Parnell in his academic robes and put it on the mantelpiece; she also displayed on a small table a little pamphlet he had written about central heating in libraries. It was prettily bound and had a picture of a phoenix on the cover with a Greek inscription underneath it. Something about

Prometheus, Harriet had said, for Belinda was like Shakespeare in having little Latin and no Greek. (STG 116)

Dr. Parnell's obsession, the heating of libraries, is satirized through hyperbole, which is the antithesis of the self-effacing discourse associated with women. His "little" pamphlet's importance is inflated by being attractively bound and decorated with symbol and inscription. Harriet, who has studied the classics in her Oxford days, remembers enough to know that the Greek inscription recalls Prometheus, the Titan who steals the divine fire of the gods to bring light to man--and, it seems, a cozy warmth for university readers fortunate enough to benefit from Dr. Parnell's "research."

Belinda, who, like Mildred Lathbury in Excellent Women, may serve only on the fringes of the scholarly community, positions portrait and pamphlet with overt reverence. However, the pompous, essentially trite and stupefyingly dull offerings of the male "intellectuals" are mercilessly satirized. The reader is made aware that, just as Bishop Grote's self-aggrandising book about his "splendid" work among the Mbawawa in Africa, which was neglected on Belinda's knee moments before, is essentially unreadable, so too is Dr. Parnell's dry pamphlet on central heating. Belinda's civil attempt to forge transformational links is made even more comic, however, when the reader learns after the guests arrival of Dr. Parnell's delight that someone has actually gone so far as to cut the pages of his pamphlet, no doubt a rare occurrence:

The Archdeacon advanced towards an armchair by the fire and sank down into it rather dramatically, as if exhausted. Dr. Parnell took up his own pamphlet and said he was glad to find somebody who had cut its beautiful pages. (116)

In a further refraction, which Bakhtin terms a "hybrid" construction (Dialogic 429), irony and counterstatement are obliquely introduced into the grammatical unity of the final sentence in the single adjective "beautiful." While overtly

asserting that the pages are cut, denoting usage and interest in the pamphlet, the deconstructive adjective is all that is necessary to inform the reader that the pages--and by previous implication, the binding, symbol and inscription--are all that is attractive in Dr. Parnell's pamphlet.

Both "dominant" males, the Archdeacon and Dr. Parnell, are revealed immediately upon entry to be focused solely upon themselves. The Archdeacon, who like most dominant men in Pym's world, assumes the posture of exhaustion because of the "burden" of his work, selfishly appropriates the best chair and dramatizes his excessive fatigue. While an excellent woman minimizes, apologizes for and deflates her accomplishments, the difficult or vain man, for whom the Archdeacon is a stereotype, exaggerates his erudition and the "burden" of his work--he is frequently idle and lazy in point of fact. In a mixed gathering, the women focus on the men; the men focus on themselves.

Conversation begins, and it is clear that the men do not treat each other with the discursive "bridges" to civility which are characteristic of female discourse. On the contrary, each is eager to goad the other with derisive remarks. Mr. Mold reveals his social inferiority with an inappropriate remark concerning Rochester's erotic poetry, while mocking Dr. Parnell's pamphlet:

'I'm afraid you're hardly a best seller' said Mr. Mold jovially. 'Nor even as much ordered in the library as Rochester's poems,' he added.

Belinda frowned and looked embarrassed when the curate asked with his usual eager interest, what poems those were.

'I am afraid they are rather naughty,' said Dr. Parnell....

'Oh well, I suppose people have to study them,' said Belinda handing round cigarettes and wondering how she could change the subject....

Belinda was greatly relieved when Miss Liversidge and Miss Aspinall arrived and she was able to introduce them. She was so afraid that Nicholas and Edith would discover their common interest in sanitary

arrangements too soon that she resolutely kept them apart. It was all very difficult and she wished Harriet would hurry up and come in. Only the curate was making what Belinda considered to be suitable conversation for the awkward interval between arriving and sitting down to eat. (117)

Belinda, who is aware that Nicholas as dominant male and Edith as eccentric female share in the appropriation of the discourse of the "direct voice," is terrified that they may launch into a graphic description of "sanitary arrangements." The innocent curate is discussing the weather, which is "suitable" and not liable to result in a conversational catastrophe.

Harriet's arrival "in excellent form" (117) breaks the ice with the transformational bridge of laughter, as there is a danger of frost and she hopes "you're all wearing warm underclothes." There is, nevertheless, a deconstructive subtext here, as the reader remembers the curate's combinations from the opening line of the text. Belinda, as "silent" narrator, deflates the curate's clerical dignity through the sharp powers of observation associated with the marginal woman: "The new curate seemed quite a nice young man, but what a pity it was that his combinations showed, tucked carelessly into his socks, when he sat down" (7). At this juncture then, there is a shared, private irony available to Belinda, the authorial voice and the reader when, "The curate laughed heartily and assured her that he had his on" (117). The use of clothing, in this instance underwear, as a reductive, comic device is characteristic in Pym of the discourse of women. The "daily round" in ironic juxtaposition deflates the "ivory tower."

The Archdeacon is not laughing. A pompous dearth of levity is a sure marker in Pym of lack of self-knowledge. He is still reclining in the armchair, irritable and sulky. Petty and difficult, he retreats into uncivil silence until Harriet turns the conversation directly to him and his latest obscure sermon. She forges links to civility; he participates in discourse only when his vanity is assuaged or it pleases him to do so. Uncivil silence in Pym's men is often a sign of "superiority." They need not condescend to conciliatory politeness. Miss Aspinall, who flatters men indiscriminately, hastens to construct a link.

"'Oh, it was beautiful,' gushed Connie Aspinall, 'I did so enjoy it'" (118). Connie is later "rewarded" for this kind of effusive homage to the male ego with the hand of Theodore Grote, Bishop of Mbawawa, whom Belinda will wisely reject. When it is revealed that the Archdeacon's sermon for Evensong involved allusions to Eliot, though he had "feared it might be too obscure," Belinda "gasped" at his intellectual bravado and provides a link by expressing the hope that he will repeat this daring pulpit piece so that she may hear it in future. The Archdeacon is notorious for inflicting pedantic displays of erudition upon his captive congregation, and delights when his literary allusions are too obscure for his simple parishioners to grasp. He would doubtless be less expansive in the company of scholars; in the parish there is no competition to challenge his specious intellectual authority. The response of Belinda, who has loved the Archdeacon from afar for some thirty years, and that of Edith Liversidge to the imminent prospect of a series of sermons on Dante, "not of course in his original --Carey's translation," repeats the phenomenon observed in Mildred Lathbury and Sister Blatt. Belinda, as excellent woman, displays the propitiatory links, though her tone qualifies with reservations; they are conspicuously absent in Edith's rejoinder:

'It would be a fine and unusual subject,' said Belinda, doubtfully.

'Well, you can count me out,' said Edith bluntly. 'I couldn't make much of the sermon this morning. Too full of quotations like Hamlet.' She gave her short barking laugh. (118)

Sister Blatt "snorts" while Edith Liversidge "barks" in derisive opposition. The androgynous or "unsexed" older woman's blunt opinion, in this case voiced directly, can be safely ignored or discounted by the Archdeacon; however, when the Archdeacon reveals that his formidable wife Agatha, who is taking a cure at Carlsbad, "is getting on quite well speaking Anglo-Saxon and Old High German in the shops," Belinda is gracious to her rival in responding to this novel

intellectual absurdity:

'Ah, well, Agatha is so clever,' said Belinda, without bitterness. 'I'm afraid I've forgotten all my Anglo-Saxon. But surely the vocabulary is rather limited?' (119)

The link is constructed. Agatha is "so clever." The self-deprecation which follows is characteristic, for while Belinda is as well educated as Agatha--both are Oxonians--she has "forgotten" her Anglo-Saxon. The qualifier contests the surface propitiation, however, as Belinda is fully aware of the absurdity of such a linguistic sally. Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Primer is singularly deficient in words appropriate for shopping in Carlsbad. Here the characteristic tone of "innocent irony" subverts the link as Belinda, authorial voice and reader, share a joke at the Archdeacon's expense. Though Belinda's gentle subversion may leave the Archdeacon oblivious to mockery, Edith Liversidge, whose remark again follows directly upon Belinda's, makes no effort to spare his feelings--there is no refraction of meaning in her remark:

'Yes, quite ridiculous,' said Edith shortly. 'Like trying to talk Latin in Italy.' (119)

The Archdeacon does not respond. He is deaf to a criticism coming from a source so easily discounted as "unreal." Belinda quickly attempts to forestall friction by suggesting a glass of sherry, and the next narrative segment provides a cogent summary of the discursive strategies that enable the excellent woman to participate as a non-threatening and therefore seemingly ingenuous observer on the periphery of the civil community. She is responding to Dr. Parnell's fear that Mr. Mold will be thought "lacking in manners" as an "official of our great Library" because he neglected to say "please" when offered a glass of sherry:

'I feel that I have been lacking in manners for not offering



it sooner,' said Belinda quite sincerely, thus taking upon herself the blame for all the little frictions of the evening. But it was so obvious that women should take the blame, it was both the better and the easier part.... (119)

The "burden" of blame for incivility or rudeness is shouldered by Belinda in a linguistic transformational link, though in fact she has been scrupulously careful to appease her guests. If Belinda is "quite" sincere in her sentiments, the authorial voice is not; the internalized rationale for appeasement, which begins piously with a Biblical allusion to the passive listener Mary at the feet of Christ who has chosen "the better part," is ironically deflated by pointing out that in this case it is also the "easier" part. A demure camouflage and an attitude of reverent humility are shrewd tactics, and certainly richly rewarding to this connoisseur of absurdity, disarming the targets of ironic scrutiny by appearing harmless and benign. Polite, accommodating, co-operative, deferential and "suitably" devoted to their men, excellent women provide the discursive "mirror held up to nature" which nevertheless subverts and deconstructs masculine reality in oblique critique. As Pym herself, masked as "excellent woman," records in her literary diary upon observing incongruous and uncharitable behaviour in a clergyman, and filing it away for future fictional recreation, "Little, of course, does he realize who is drinking it all in!" (VPE 261).

Silence, marked by the gaps of verbal ellipsis in feminine heteroglossia, is a strategic marker of refraction in the discourse of restraint. Gesture, what Antonin Artaud terms a "hieroglyph" (94) of communication, is an additional reductive device. Some few examples have been noted in the excerpts so far examined. A woman's silence in Pym frequently becomes a marker not of "impotence" but of a subversive power. Silent observers repeat in fictional recreations the role of the artist as watchful critic.

In "Constructing Women's Silence," Spender writes:

Both sexes have inherited accumulated meanings [which portray men

positively while females are portrayed negatively] and are required to accept them as the only reality, but they are the product of one sex's view of the world, and its own place within that world. It is to be expected that the partial and single view of reality which has been constructed by one sex is a 'better fit' with their own experience than it would be for the sex whose meanings have been omitted, who have been silenced. (Man Made 59)

This "silence" can be simultaneously encoded and questioned in the world of the novel. Breaking the silence by interacting with the "accumulated meanings" and words of patriarchy, the perspectives of women are inscribed in the texts, as well as the idiosyncratic style and tone of the author. Bakhtin writes of the "spectral dispersion" which occurs when the word breaks silence:

The living utterance...breaking through to its own meaning and its own expression across an environment full of alien words and variously evaluating accents, harmonizing with some of the elements in this environment and striking a dissonance with others is able, in this dialogized process, to shape its own stylistic profile and tone. (Dialogic 277)

In this way, the silence and muted speech of women is juxtaposed with the speech of the dominant culture which is reified and distanced. Bakhtin continues:

The writer of prose does not meld completely with any of these words [those of other people] but rather accents each of them in a particular way--humorously, ironically, parodically and so forth...finally there are those words that are completely denied any authorial intentions: the author does not express [herself] in them (as the author of the word)--rather [she] exhibits them as a unique speech thing, they function as something completely reified. (299)

The silence or oblique speech of Pym's sensitive women which, in varying degrees, stylizes (accepts) or parodies (rejects) the intentions of others, creates a unique "spectral dispersion" of the direct word, which underlines the dissonance of the imperfect "fit" described by the Ardener model when women's truths are juxtaposed with dominant meanings and images. In this manner, Pym also constructs a prose style that is instantly identifiable to her readers. Silence and gesture in Pym are characteristically oblique indicators of the female consciousness in the presence of a dominant reality which is "socio-ideologically alien." They are clear signs that novelistic critique is actively in progress. It is interesting to note, however, that "tunnel vision" is not confined to men, but is often shared, as Jane Nardin has noted, by those women who are not able to achieve the "kind of ironic distance that characterizes feminine consciousness in Pym's books" (44). Very young women (Deirdre Swan in Less Than Angels) and very old women (Miss Doggett in Jane and Prudence) may lack this ability which is essential to the mature woman in Pym and, appropriately, to the ideal Bakhtinian novelist.

One of the textual markers of silence in Pym is the gesture of the secret or sardonic smile.<sup>3</sup> Though mute, the smile suggests an absurdity and irony evident to the protagonist or perhaps a secret directly shared with the reader but concealed from others. Suppressed laughter is a concomitant gesture, associated with the register of restraint. Miss Doggett in Jane and Prudence searches her companion Jessie Morrow's room, as she suspects Jessie of concealing something about her relationship with the vain and selfish widower, Fabian Driver: "She had noticed her smiling to herself and had several times caught her at the window looking down into Fabian's garden" (J&P 178). The liminal positioning of a woman at the window has been noted earlier. In this case, Jessie is having a secret affair with Fabian, and has decided to marry him; although she is unsentimentally aware of his shortcomings, she has calculated that life with Fabian will be a distinct improvement on her role as "sparring partner" (29) to the equally self-absorbed Miss Doggett. Jessie's room, strangely characterless, is also stripped and "silent" as it contains no clue to

Jessie's shrewd nature, cleverly submerged beneath a deliberately dim and dull façade--"it seemed almost as if Jessie had been at pains to suppress or conceal her personality. For there was no doubt that she had personality of an uncomfortable kind; she had inherited her mother's sardonic expression" (179). Earlier, Miss Doggett had noted, "The only photograph [in Jessie's room] was of her mother--Miss Doggett's cousin Ella--a plain-looking woman with an unsuitably sardonic expression for a Victorian" (179).

Because Jessie's origins are somewhat "undesirable"--Miss Doggett informs us that Jessie's mother had "married late and made an unfortunate marriage" and that "Aubrey Morrow had left his wife and child after a few years" (179)--she almost goes "too far" as excellent woman in her machinations to secure Fabian. It is not surprising, then, that Jessie very nearly gives voice to her laughter as Sister Blatt did to her irritation in Excellent Women, or that she mounts a daring, silent assault on Prudence, her rival for Fabian's desultory affections. Jessie coldly and deliberately upsets a cup of tea on Prudence's lilac dress at Fabian's garden party in order to mar her impeccable appearance, because, as she had said to Miss Doggett concerning pretty clothes, "I can't compete with Prudence Bates" (167).

Jessie upsets the tea in a pretended "accident" and is silent in the eleven subsequent exchanges of dialogue in which the guests express concern and offer advice. When she does break silence, her cold detachment reveals not only her manipulation of the incident, but also the cerebral, dispassionate manner in which she reverts to passive observer:

'It seems to be leaving a mark already,' said Jessie in an unsuitably detached tone for one who had been responsible for the disaster; 'rather in the shape of Italy. I wonder if that can have any significance?' (197)

Jessie suggests that having marked the perfect Prudence with the blemish of a tea stain, she will soon be far away from Fabian--in Italy, perhaps; or is there a

comic echo of the suitably evil machinations of the Romish Medicis with whom Jessie is comparing her "ruthless" campaign of elimination? In any case, Fabian breaks with Prudence the next day, and Jessie's silent strategy proves successful. This is a characteristic Pym "second best" conjugal alliance in which Jessie and Fabian both pragmatically choose mates calculated to provide a maximum of benefit and comfort with a minimum of emotional disturbance. The middle-aged couple display a Miltonic "calm of mind, all passion spent"--a favourite Pym quotation--in which rational self-interest prevails over romantic idealism. Jessie's characteristic, "sardonic expression" (179), then, inherited from her mother, is another manifestation of the secret smile; it complements the oblique linguistic and, in this instance, comically "physical" assaults of the silenced woman.

In the light of the Ardener cultural model, it is not surprising to find a preponderance of interrogative sentences in the dialogue of Pym's excellent women. Linguistic studies have shown that subordinate discourse "submerges a woman's personal identity by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject matter and uncertainty about it" (Lakoff 7). The last novel to be completed before her death, A Few Green Leaves, confirms that this discursive marker of hesitancy does indeed persist throughout the canon; as elsewhere, however, it disguises a secret strength. While it is not surprising to note that the protagonist, Emma Howick, as newcomer to a West Oxfordshire village, asks numerous questions, a close study of the first three chapters suggests a deliberate parody of this semantic aspect of non-assertive speech. As a "very average anthropologist" (FGL 126), a characteristically humble description of her success in her profession, Emma reminds herself of "the necessity of being on the outside looking in" (20), as she observes and records the "rituals" of village life. Once again, Pym utilizes the linguistic codification of the exclusion of women from the more positive valence of a dominant rhetoric to equip the female protagonist with the investigative tool essential to the detective/artist/anthropologist--a non-threatening and tentative register which disarms and flatters in its seemingly

innocuous civility and propitiatory humility. This semantic disguise allows Emma to conduct fieldwork through the anthropological approach known as "participant observation" (Ardener, Perceiving 87). Through this strategy, she gleans rich material for her field notes which she plans to "write up" as a paper entitled, "The Role of Women in a West Oxfordshire Community" (38). This ploy of applying the anthropological techniques and jargon associated with the study of "primitive" societies to the critique and deconstruction of a genteel and "civil" community is a fruitful strategy of comic subversion in Pym. Discreet questions coupled with close observation complement a rigorous research "into the lives of ordinary people" (VPE xv).

Ironically, as the Reverend Thomas Dagnall, widower, is speculating on how best to make use of this particular "excellent woman" as helpmate--"She might be a good typist...or even be expert at deciphering Elizabethan handwriting, a skill none of his other willing lady helpers possessed" (7)--Emma is dispassionately "using" him as "anthropological data" in her own research. She will "turn the tables" of the acceptable roles of dominant and muted, using linguistic camouflage, but Tom will remain unaware of this reality, as Emma does not choose to enlighten him. The "tunnel vision" of the dominant society is cleverly, deliberately maintained. For Pym's women, "marginality can be productive."

It is noteworthy, then, that in the initial three chapters of text, every instance of the protagonist's direct speech is voiced in an interrogative construct, save one, which is nevertheless marked by the semantic hedge "perhaps." The context of this isolated "assertive" statement is worth examining, as it reveals an interesting paradox. Emma comes upon a ruined cottage in the woods while walking within the grounds of the manor with a "genteel" group of villagers, which includes the rector:

She began to speculate about its possible history. "Perhaps some of these people would know," she said innocently, as the sound of a transistor radio heralded the approach of a party of villagers. (6)

In fact, although this remark is expressed as a statement, it is clear when scrutinized that the tone is almost certainly interrogative. It exemplifies what Robin Lakoff isolates as a characteristic of women's language--"question intonation." Lakoff discusses this marker in connection with a consideration of why and how women's speech is more "polite" than that of men. Question intonation, where the voice rises at the end of a statement, is included among numerous other conventions of polite speech which she groups under a "rule" of linguistic codification expressed as "Deference--give options" (65). Here, Emma, speaking to the scholarly rector, Tom, knows perfectly well, as a result of her anthropological training, that villagers carrying transistor radios, a déclassé "totem," will neither know nor care about the history of a ruined cottage. Tom's consuming interest, searching for traces of a deserted medieval village--the D.M.V.--allies him socially and intellectually with Emma's anthropological pursuits, a fact which, in turn, foreshadows his suitability as a future "second best" husband in a passionless union contemplated in the novel's closure.

At this juncture, however, Emma is not about to reveal to Tom her acute sensitivity to social nuance--in this case, the knowledge that the approaching villagers are of a different generation, class or educational background from that of "the rector and his group" (FGL 6). The rector--"Poor Tom" in Emma's private musings, which associates him unflatteringly with his namesake in King Lear--must not be made aware that he, too, is one of the imminently obsolete social "types" under intense scrutiny, and therefore grist for the mill of Emma's own scholarly interests. She thus gives him, through linguistic deference, the polite "option" to assume the dominant role of instructor in this regard so that he may be encouraged to supply information she already possesses. Interrogative intonation thus repeats the phenomenon, noted elsewhere, of Ardener's theory of the "transformational link" to the dominant figure. To speak directly would be to say to Tom, "I can see that you are rapidly becoming irrelevant." Emma uses tentative language to mask her own astuteness; she is the competent woman politely "playing dumb." Again, the Pym protagonist uses a tentative, voiced discourse deliberately, to create the impression of a disarming ignorance in

order to advance her own ends.

Further, a subtle modulation in tone recreates in the novel the "innocent irony" noted before which Philip Larkin spoke of as also characteristic of Pym's private correspondence. This idiosyncratic tone is overtly sympathetic, civil and benign, inviting confidence and disarming the wary while alerting the reader to the ironic subtext. The naive, bright curiosity of such a tone not only elicits an indulgent, often significantly revealing response, but also fulfils the fruitful novelistic function of the "clown" or "fool" as outsider noted by Bakhtin. Excellent woman as naive "fool" may express "the inability to understand...conventions" (Dialogic 162), which ironically deconstructs the dominant community. Here, Pym is illuminating the erosion of traditional faith and culture, the increasing irrelevance of the Anglican Church and, simultaneously, Tom Dagnall's personal diminution, as the authority and high culture he represents become increasingly devalued. Tom's antiquarian investigations into the practice of "burying in wool" in the late seventeenth century, as recorded in Anthony à Wood, which even he admits are "no more than dabblings" (EGL 23), his position as leader in the group reviving the seventeenth century right of villagers to walk in the park and woods of the manor house on Low Sunday, and his interest in the D.M.V., ally him with obsolete or moribund cultural traditions. Emma's cold anthropological eye sees this, albeit ruefully, and the "innocuous" suggestion that the second group of villagers, who represent the encroachment of a crude egalitarianism, may share his interests, obliquely forces Tom to face his increasing irrelevance and loss of influence:

Greetings were exchanged on an equal level. Tom made no attempt to inquire after relatives or children and grandchildren or even livestock, as the Lord of the Manor or even his own predecessors might have done.... He knew that very few of them would be at Evensong. (6)

Pym's personal dismay--"Oh pray for the Church of England" (VPE 272) she writes



in her diary--is distanced and objectified through Emma's queries. Tom is a sympathetic and rather poignant symbol of a cultural erosion. Nevertheless, the crumbling of traditional authority is effectively depicted. The direct observation of the author's diaries that "the doctor's surgery is crowded but the vicar's study is empty" (VPE 298) becomes suppressed as authorial comment in the novel (107). Oblique language inscribes the sociological phenomenon of cultural evolution through an anthropological model of inquiry in the first three chapters of text. Pym's own ambivalence--a personal sympathy tempered by an irony which is aesthetically distanced--records the decline of the Anglican Church from an historically dominant position to that of subordinate group.

The protagonist breaks her discreet silence in only six inserted exchanges, five of which are unequivocally framed as questions, in some sixteen pages of text. Acute observation followed by silent speculation, yet another interrogative mode, internalizes the major part of the narrative. Consistent with this linguistic restraint, all of Chapter Two is cast as an internalized juxtaposition of the interior monologue of the protagonist with the authorial voice. Emma says little, but reflects at length. Private musings share the tentative quality of her direct speech, as she queries, challenges and contests the community. Pym's prose often demonstrates a marked economy; through a close observation of daily life, the languages of "marginal woman" and "anthropologist" combine to provide, in a consideration of the eating habits of the villagers, for example, a comic, pragmatic, social analysis through the quotidian medium of food. Anthropology, which echoes Pym's technique "by privileging the common over the culturally extraordinary" (Danson 234), serves the ends of comedy and Pym's art admirably. Spender notes, "For women writers, art and domesticity have been inextricably linked" (The Writing 121). Emma speculates:

What did people in the village eat? she wondered. Sunday evening supper would of course be lighter than the normal weekday meal, with husbands coming back from work. The shepherd's pie concocted from the remains of the Sunday joint, would turn up as a kind of moussaka

at the rectory, she felt, given Daphne's passionate interest in Greece. Others would be taking out ready-prepared meals or even joints of meat from their freezers, or would have bought supper dishes at the supermarket with tempting titles and bright attractive pictures on the cover. Sometimes there might even be fish, for a man called round occasionally with fresh fish in the back of his van suggesting a nobler time when fish had been eaten on Fridays by at least a respectable number of people in the larger houses. Had there even once been Roman Catholics in the village? Then there were people living alone like herself, who would make do with a bit of cheese or open a small tin of something. (9-10)

Here Pym has loaded "every rift with ore" (VPE 323), as, displaying an encyclopedic knowledge of "the daily round" gleaned from acute observation, she "betrays to the public a personal life, down to its most private...little secrets" (Bakhtin 163). Displaying the "imaginative participation" in the community documented by Kathleen Browder Heberlein, the tentative queries which are repeated in the texts are rich in the data of everyday, which nevertheless describe incisively the experience of a community undergoing profound social change. Every detail is charged with meaning expressed through a metaphor that is characteristically stripped and pragmatic.

Food as a precise register of social nuance reveals a whole spectrum of pertinent data in a mere nineteen lines of text. Sunday is still a day apart largely because men are not working, but clearly marked by a decline in faith and ceremony. "Fresh" fish, suggesting a "nobler" time is delivered only "occasionally," reflecting a levelling out of class and an erosion of gentility as well as the discontinuance of Roman and/or High Church dietary laws. Fast food promoted by media advertising is replacing the "Sunday joint" as traditional values of home and family fragment and the déclassé world of popular culture encroaches. The cultural richness and glamour of Greek civilization are only available to Daphne, who dreams of retiring to Greece, through annual holidays

and, rather poignantly, as a moussaka "concocted" from leftovers; meagre scraps representing all that remains of the promise of a "richer" life are her humble portion. Daphne, spinster and sister of the Reverend Tom Dagnall, for whom she has "made a home," will, in fact, in a characteristic authorial deflation, retire with her unmarried friend, Heather, to Birmingham, accompanied by her dog Bruce. The village is essentially homogeneous in religious affiliation, which is, however, almost universally nominal; the fascinating possibility of the historical presence of Roman Catholics in the community is associated in Emma's mind with the traditional culinary religious ritual of weekly fish-eating. The circumscribed and possibly isolated lives of those living alone are evoked in a stripped diction, suggesting in their modest demands a probable lack of interest in food not likely to be consumed in company. They "make do with a bit of cheese or open a small tin of something." In miniature, Pym has portrayed a community in religious, economic and social transition through the vital cultural medium of food.

In all these instances of Pym's use of the interrogative, it becomes clear that she transcends a syntactical "minus" by creating a novelistic "plus." Emma's carefully constructed civility does indeed reflect Lakoff's observation that "deferential mannerisms" (79), often framed in an interrogative syntax and further marked by the "hedges" of hesitant speech, characterize the "polite" language of women. Even when due allowance is made for the cultural and educational background of Pym's refined protagonists, their excessive verbal restraint is clearly parodied. At the same time, the "scientific" methodology of the anthropologist legitimizes Emma's natural curiosity and validates the repressed quality of interrogative syntax, silent or voiced; within the novel it is transformed into the imperative of a professional discourse where a tactful civility becomes a powerful narrative strategy.

Hesitant language reflects the relative inarticulateness of women within cultural models such as those constructed by the Ardeners and applied by Dale Spender. When incorporated into the novel as part of the richness of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, however, such clear deficiencies of speech in the real world can

become powerful weapons of textual subversion; they deconstruct the authoritative discourse of the dominant culture in their dialogic capacity, as a kind of subtext, to parody unitary speech. In this way, alternate realities are liberated within the text. The "grid of concordance" is undermined through dialogic counterstatement so that "alternative concordances" (Joanne S. Frye 31) may be suggested in re-encoding the lives and experiences of women. The speech of Pym's women clearly accomplishes this revisionist task within the texts, proclaiming what Nancy K. Miller has paradoxically termed "the power of the weak" (Subject to Change, 35).

In summarizing the linguistic research of Julia Stanley (1977), Dale Spender notes the phenomenon of a classification system in the English language [and other languages] of "plus male / minus male" which is "at the root of divisions structured by language" (Man Made 21). Because the masculine is considered the norm and thus "positive," words associated with the feminine are consistently marked as "negative" or "minus." The most blatant example is clearly relevant to the fictional world of Barbara Pym and may be regarded as central to the difficulties encountered by the female writer who attempts to encode the alternate reality of the "minus male":

The word for woman assumed negative connotations even where it designated the same state or condition as it did for men. "Spinster" and "bachelor," for example, designate unmarried adult but when this word is marked for males it is positive while when it is marked for females it is negative. The only variable is that of sex and this variable is crucial to the semantic system. (17)

Spender concludes, after citing numerous subtler examples, that "For women who do not wish to be compared to men there is 'nowhere to go' in the language... there is only negative semantic space for females in the English language" (21).

Robin Lakoff arrives at similar conclusions in her study Language and Woman's Place, where she notes that though grammatically symmetrical, naming

conventions for men and women are, in fact, nonparallel in connotation. Those referring to women are usually pejorative, while masculine titles and euphemisms tend to be neutral or positive (32). Muriel Schultz (1975) has also recorded this phenomenon.

Indeed, the term "excellent women," so identified with Pym's work, is paradoxically pejorative, illustrating in a particularly apt manner this linguistic asymmetry. An "excellent woman" is viewed by the dominant community with patronizing indulgence; she is someone who can be counted on to perform menial tasks, the "unimportant" and invisible drudgery necessary to the "real work" of men, dutifully, cheerfully and without complaint. As Jean Baker Miller notes in Towards a New Psychology of Women:

There is no question that the dominant society has said, men will do the important work; women will tend to the "lesser task" of helping other human beings to develop. (40)

The "excellent woman" is thus seen by many as a powerless object to be viewed with a benevolent, mild derision, and her services and devotion are barely acknowledged as they are so universally taken for granted.'

Bakhtinian dialogism within the novel thus provides the opportunity for critique of the inadequacy of social discourse which renders women inarticulate and semantically disadvantaged. Pym recorded this asymmetry in her diary, speaking of her inability to "be herself" in the company of men in her student days. She writes of speech in the real world, which lacks the aesthetic distancing of parodied fictional discourse:

But I felt resentful of being dominated by them and not being allowed to be myself at all. Also I was so conscious of being much better on paper than in speech. (VPE 58)

How can a woman be "much better on paper"? What Joanne S. Frye calls the

"enabling" of the novel is explained by Bakhtin as the opportunity to objectify and distance linguistic paradigms and restraints through parody and reification. All novelistic languages are already in the process of being examined and critiqued from alternate perspectives--whether they are the languages of dominant or muted groups. All arbitrary categories--discursive or structural--are held up for distanced examination and revision, thus liberating the individual into the possibilities of multiplicity from confining social or literary "falsifying" (Frye 40) grids. Joanne S. Frye notes that, "Bakhtin's terms, if not his male bias, point the way" (27) to emancipation within the text. Bakhtin explains:

The epic wholeness of an individual disintegrates in a novel.... A crucial tension develops between the external and internal man [or woman], and as a result the subjectivity of the individual becomes an object of experimentation and representation.... [emphasis added] The disintegration of the integrity that an individual had possessed in epic [and in tragedy] combines in the novel with the necessary preparatory steps toward a new, complex of wholeness. (Dialogic 37-38)

For Bakhtin, wholeness is always "complex" and multiple, rather than single or homogeneous. Frye continues her analysis of Bakhtin by explaining how the flexibility and revisionary capacity of the novel is essential to "the possibilities for changing women's lives" (27) and thus central to the feminist agenda. She notes of Bakhtin:

The point to be taken here is the recognition that individualism in the novel, like the literary form itself, is a function of ceaseless and open-ended interaction. As the tension between external and internal--between established "categories" and a "surplus of humanness" [Bakhtin]--is inherent to the novel's dialogic form, so the notion of the complex and protean individual is an effect of that form. (27)

The novel, because it allows the author to interact with an infinite number of languages from both dominant and muted groups, is a uniquely fruitful medium for the woman writer because of its generic capacity to free her from inescapable lexical, semantic and syntactical constraints through its ability to distance and parody discourse.

The authorial voice in Pym, which is most frequently--but not always--closer to the perspective of the female protagonist, retains many of the markers of a subordinate discourse and thus helps impart the stylistic restraint immediately discernible in her prose. Barbara Bowman has commented on this correlation in observing that "the narrators in her novels adopt points of view resembling those of her heroines" and, furthermore, that her heroines "think and speak in ways characteristic of women when they adopt a subordinate role" (Rossen 82). Muted speech is the language that is heard most frequently in the novels, as it is the speech of subordinates that predominates. Additionally, cultural factors of class are added to those of gender to produce a civil, restrained register. These are not necessarily stylized discourses, however--that is, speech with which the author can be discerned to be more or less in agreement. They often are parodied through exaggeration, and thus allow the author to question and critique the very speech which her culture assigns or imposes as a "suitable" or necessary language for women.

In her recent study, The Writing or the Sex?, Spender reiterates this linguistic "Catch 22" of women's speech. She writes, "To be a member of a society is to use its 'rules' even when they encode offensive forms of sexual discrimination" (17). Pym's textual strategy co-operates with the inevitable by inscribing the subordinate language of her protagonist as a Bakhtinian "verbal masquerade" through which the novelistic function of contestation may be achieved. Linguistically and through appearance and demeanour, her eavesdroppers on private life appropriate many of the "inoffensive" images of ass, clown or servant which Bakhtin sees as rooted historically in the development of the comic novel. In disguise as the undervalued and lowly wise fool of tradition, contemporary women in Pym may be ignored, dismissed as insignificant, or rendered

almost invisible to the dominant group. Pym appropriates and revises the traditional mask and incorporates it into the appearance and subordinate speech of many of her protagonists. Bakhtin shows how this novelistic image, re-encoded by Pym, contests received cultural paradigms:

The novel continues this struggle against conventionality. The primary level, the level where the author makes his transformation, utilizes the images of the clown and the fool (that is a naiveté expressed as the inability to understand stupid conventions). In the struggle against conventions, and against the inadequacy of all available life-slots to fit an authentic human being, these masks take on an extraordinary significance. They grant the right not to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; the right to parody others while talking, the right to not be taken literally, not "to be oneself"; the right to live a life in the chronotope of the entre'acte...the right to act life as a comedy and treat others as actors, the right to rip off masks...and finally, the right to betray to the public a personal life, down to its most private and prurient little secrets. (162-3)

Bakhtin, it seems, can see the author as none other than "he"; nevertheless, one cannot but be struck by the aptness of his analysis to the goals of the woman writer, and to Pym in particular, who critiques through a deceptively naive and muted discourse "the inadequacy of all available life slots to fit an authentic human being" behind the "mask" of novelistic prose. The compromises that Pym's protagonists make are a result of an attempt to find an acceptable accommodation for women beyond the "life-slots" and definitions accorded to them within the community, within the negative valence of women's language and within conventional narrative tropes.

The prohibitions surrounding the speech of women are illustrated in a particularly dramatic way in an essay by Caroline Humphrey in Defining Females,



which describes the linguistic taboos in Mongolian culture whereby a daughter-in-law is prohibited from using certain proper names directly. The necessity to "tell it slant" forces her to use elaborate circumlocutions in order to speak at all.' The Ardener model also suggests that when a powerless, subdominant group wishes to express an aspect of marginal experience or perception which is not accounted for within the dominant model or paradigm, they are rendered inarticulate or silenced because their insights are not acceptable when stated directly. As Shirley Ardener puts it:

Discussion of 'mutedness,' then, is concerned, among other things, with distortion of modes of expression. It has been suggested...that the insertion of an 'extra step' may be required of muted groups after a thought is conceived before it is realized in speech.... The effect is to stifle statements which have no acceptability in the dominant field of discourse. (Defining 21)

Indirect speech, then, or "distortion of modes of expression," is a characteristic of the daily communication of a subordinate group within society. By parodying such speech within the novel, Pym clearly illustrates and critiques its necessity, while utilizing its subversive potential by inserting it alone or in conjunction with an additional authorial subtext which renders it ironic. Through diction, syntax, transformational links, silence and gesture, Pym fashions the ironic registers of restraint which define her female protagonists.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Shirley Ardener, ed., Perceiving Women (London: Malaby, 1975) 2.

<sup>2</sup> Shirley Ardener, Perceiving xi. Shirley Ardener points out that the term "muted group" was suggested by Charlotte Hardman after the publication of Edwin Ardener's paper "Belief and the Problem of Women," in order to describe the inarticulate group within the dominant culture. She writes, "His views have received considerable support, particularly from younger female social anthropologists, one of whom, Charlotte Hardman, proposed the useful term 'muted group' to describe the kind of conformation in mind, and the term 'counterpart model' for any alternative model such a group may generate."

<sup>3</sup> Dale Spender, Man Made Language, 2nd. ed. (London: Routledge, 1985) 84.

<sup>4</sup> Hybrid: The mixing, within a single concrete utterance, of two or more different linguistic consciousnesses, often widely separated in time and social space. Along with dialogization of languages and pure dialogues, this is a major device for creating language - images in the novel. Novelistic hybrids are intentional ..... their double-voicedness is not meant to resolve. Since hybrids can be read as belonging simultaneously to two or more systems, they cannot be isolated by formal grammatical means, by quotation marks. (Holquist, ed., Dialogic 429)

<sup>5</sup> Within the text, there is the literal smile or suppressed laughter of the protagonist. Bakhtin speaks also of the "faint smile" which accents or reifies language, indicating authorial opposition or distancing from that particular discourse. He speaks of Eschenbach's Parzival:

It is the first German novel to be profoundly and fundamentally double-voiced ... all of which takes into account language that has been somewhat reified and relativized, removing it ever so slightly from the author's lips by means of a faint smile. (Dialogic 377)

This echoes Irigaray's concept of the woman writer remaining "elsewhere" in the text and Nancy K. Miller's description of "an italicized version" of fictional language with "emphasis added" (29).

<sup>6</sup> Pym is, of course, using the term ironically. An "excellent woman" is another version of the patriarchal stereotype of woman drawn from Coventry Patmore's "angel in the house"--the angel/monster dichotomy which forms the basis of Gilbert and Gubar's critique of images of women in fiction in The Madwoman in the Attic. Just as Virginia Woolf had to strangle that angel to become a writer or critic, Pym's "good" women often balk at the necessity of being "drearly splendid" (VPE 129) and self-sacrificing. All have a decidedly subversive side to their characters which attests to their complexity and obliquely oppositional stance to many of the constraints which patriarchal stereotypes place upon them.

<sup>7</sup> See Caroline Humphrey, "Women, Taboo and the Suppression of Attention," Defining Females, ed. Shirley Ardener (New York: Wiley, 1978) 89-108. Humphrey notes that the social purpose of the oblique language imposed on the Mongolian daughter-in-law is, in effect, to obviate the necessity of the father-in-law noticing her at all. It is designed to render her invisible. "Mongols do not name certain people (nor, indeed, dangerous rivers, wild animals, dead ancestors, etc.) directly because to speak the name aloud does not merely make the named-one look up, as it were, but actually focuses attention on the pronouncer of the

name.... So what the name taboo...establishes is that the father-in-law (and other senior males) will not have his attention compelled by the daughter-in-law, and refuses to focus his thoughts on her" (106). The "necessary indirectness" of name taboos, then, implies that oblique language is a factor in rendering a woman invisible to men through the "suppression of attention."

## CHAPTER III

## Old Brown Horse Spinsters: Gender, Disguise and Invisibility

But as long as this Miss Pym remains an old brown spinster, reading the poems of John Betjeman with calm of mind all passion spent, it is okay nicht wahr?

Pym, A Very Private Eye

My intervention in the discussion [of dominant and subordinate groups] as far as it concerns women was a product of concern with the technical features of socio-intellectual structures which regularly assign contending viewpoints to a non-real status; making them 'overlooked,' 'muted,' 'invisible': mere black holes in someone else's universe.

Edwin Ardener, Perceiving Women

Closely allied with a study of the protagonist's oblique discourse is a consideration of the cultural positioning of the submerged woman. The Pym protagonist adopts strategies of adaptation, camouflage and deliberate disguise in order to facilitate a secret observation of others while maintaining a limited capacity for participation, however minimal, in the community.

Social anthropologist Hillary Callan reminds us in her study of British diplomats' wives, "The Premise of Dedication," that in her discipline the methodology is known as "participant observation" when the researcher is a member of the group to be studied, as opposed to "sympathetic observer" if one is an outsider (Ardener, Perceiving 87-88). Because Pym's position as Assistant Editor of Africa, the journal of the International African Institute, made her intimately familiar with linguistic studies and the investigative methods of

social anthropology--the more bizarre aspects of which afforded her endless hours of irreverent office amusement--she frequently utilized the methodologies of fieldwork and parodied anthropological jargon in her novels. We have seen already how the character of Emma Howick in A Few Green Leaves allows Pym to capitalize on the marginal social positioning of an excellent woman in the role of anthropologist. In a sense, however, every Pym protagonist is an anthropologist, or, in Northrop Frye's terms for the eiron, a "predestined artist" (Anatomy, 40), recording and recreating the world around her with an unsentimental precision.

The necessity for restraint and inscrutability in the artist as anthropologist is articulated in one of Pym's favourite "professional" directives which she copied in her notebook from Notes and Queries in Anthropology: "It is important that not even the slightest expression of amusement or disapproval should ever be displayed at the description of ridiculous, impossible or disgusting features in custom, cult or legend" (VPE 189). Here, one recalls the "secret smile" characteristic of Pym's women as a deconstructive marker when they practice "collusion" in maintaining the blindness of the dominant culture. An excerpt from the "intractable seminar papers" she spent countless hours editing reads, "The Hadzapi will eat practically anything that is edible except the hyena" (VPE 189). The comic potential in fictional recreation of similar material from "field work" and its adaptation to a subordinate's perspective on the civil community is evident.

In the novels, women often adopt the inscrutable or neutral mask of the anthropologist as a part of the "transformational link" necessary when feigning interest in the frequently pretentious and boring conversation of men. Because listening to the talk of women pays no social dividends, only a humane civility encourages an attentive posture when listening to them. Minnie Foresight, a rich widow in Less Than Angels, finds interest somewhat difficult to maintain at a meeting of the anthropological Learned Society where, as a potential financial benefactor, she feels obliged to listen to Gertrude Lydgate--spinster, scholar and linguist:

Her expression as she listened to Miss Lydgate's plans for the writing up of her linguistic researches, was one of rather strained interest. Women must so often listen to men with just this expression on their faces, but Mrs Foresight was feminine enough to feel that it was a little hard that so much concentration should be called for when talking to a member of her own sex. It seemed, somehow, a waste of effort. (LTA 16)

Pym, as a young student at Oxford, echoes the same sentiment when attending "a delightful lunch party at Trinity" where "the girls were too intellectual and didn't have the compensation of being of the opposite sex" (VPE 20).

It is particularly apt that the research of Oxford anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener on dominant and muted groups in an African tribe, the Bakweri of Cameroon, should be so relevant to a study of the language and cultural positioning of women. Pym would certainly be amused at finding one of her own comic techniques--the juxtapositioning of the tribal and civil community--paralleled in their scientific studies. The invisibility of members of a muted group, which, in "The 'Problem' [of Women] Revisited," Edwin Ardener compares to "black holes in someone else's universe" is illuminating to a discussion of marginality; Shirley Ardener's focus on the concept of the necessity for binding or "transformational links" has already been noted in connection with women's use of language.

Though Pym's protagonists retreat to the margins, the comic vision redeems and affirms "the trivial round, the common task" where a passionate love, rejected or unrequited, is moderated, transmuted and re-focused; expectation is reduced and full participation is relinquished for the pleasures of keen observation. Her women often reflect Shirley Ardener's observation that "members of muted groups may...come to an accommodation with the social structure in which they are placed, and find their own satisfactions in its interstices or outside its dominant structure" (28). Small joys and spinsterish delights replace the pain of absence and emotional deprivation, becoming the catalyst for a re-

evaluation of the minimal pleasures of ordinary lives. The very private eye of an excellent woman becomes a keen, though deceptively benign, weapon of deflation in its dispassionate examination of the genteel communities of the Pym microcosm. Again and again, Pym's women relinquish deeply felt emotion for alternate accommodations offering safer, kinder options in the quest for a measure of fulfilment.

Bakhtin's reference to Apuleius's The Golden Ass and the role of the lowly and thus invisible observer in the tradition of the comic novel suggests comparisons with what Pym called her "old brown horse spinsters" (VPE 74) and their oblique perspective. Lucian, disguised in his metamorphosis as ass, notes, "the position of an ass is a particularly convenient one for observing the secrets of everyday life" (Dialogic 122). The self-effacing, plain, awkward, outwardly bland and frequently sexually understated older woman, a "very Barbara Pym" character, is nevertheless an aloof, amused, close observer of the mess and muddle of private lives. What is lost in possession is gained in ironic distance. She repeats the novelistic function of Apuleius's ass whose consolation for his "pathetic transformation" is his huge ears with which he can "hear excellently" (Dialogic 122). Barbara Pym's sister Hilary recalls of their mother that, "One of her favourite books which she would read to us was The Adventures of a Donkey, a translation of La Comtesse de Segur's Memoirs d'un Ane" (VPE 3). In this story, a little donkey has many adventures in which he is cruelly treated, but his misfortunes allow a social critique and satiric commentary on a flawed society reminiscent of the Apuleian model, which is doubtless its literary precursor. Masked or invisible, Pym's "brown horse" spinsters or other unobtrusive women spy and eavesdrop on everyday private life. Unlike Bakhtin's Apuleian prototypes who are "in life but not of it" (161), Pym's women retain minimal participation and may even willingly choose roles which permit a greater integration in a comic closure, but they choose in full knowledge of the compromises they have made.

Because Pym is often compared with Jane Austen, David Cecil's discussion of the unmarried woman as bland "background" in Austen's own life and work is

relevant to the depiction of Pym's outwardly drab protagonists. Cecil quotes a contemporary description of Austen: she was "no more regarded in society than a poker or a fire screen or any other thin, upright piece of wood or iron that fills the corner in peace and quietness" (136). This depiction is not, Cecil argues, strictly accurate as a portrait of Austen herself, particularly when she was within the family circle; he nevertheless observes that "her interest in the human comedy grew less that of one taking part in it and more and more that of a detached novelist observer" (136). The same may be said of Pym as writer, or of her heroine as "grey eminence." Pym's marginal heroines gain what Elaine Showalter calls "the best seat in the house" (Spender, Man Made 98) in their vantage point from the periphery. Perhaps Mildred Lathbury of Excellent Women best articulates the novelistic function of the "old brown horse spinster" when she confides to the reader with wry resignation:

I suppose an unmarried woman just over thirty, who lives alone and has no apparent ties, must expect to find herself involved or interested in other people's business, and if she is also a clergyman's daughter then one must really say that there is no hope for her. (EW 5)

Pym notes, moreover, the difficulty of utilizing in the literary climate of the early seventies the characters she knew best: "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" (VPE 269). Perhaps she would have felt some consolation in her frustrated desire to encompass in her fiction what Jean Baker Miller has termed the "vast areas of life"(47) which a dominant group attempts to deny, had she read Edwin Ardener's observation of a similar phenomenon of exclusion in his own discipline. He quotes a female colleague who remarked that, "in the social-anthropological world [by the 1960s], no anthropological book with 'women' in the title sells" (Perceiving 20). In the same context, his modification of the motto of the pre nineteenth-century



Russians concerning books dealing with women helps explain the exclusion of women's writing from Bakhtin's "extensive" historical analysis of the novel: "De mulieribus sunt, non leguntur" (20); that is, "They are about women, they are not being read."

It is helpful to turn to Pym's autobiography, A Very Private Eve, to discover the personal genesis of these idiosyncratic marginal women whom Jane Nardin has characterized as "unachieving." Nardin observes, "Perhaps the most unusual features of Pym's novels are the sort of people she chooses to write about and the unfailing respect and sympathy with which she treats them..." (10). Although the novels are peopled with a variety of marginal personalities--male and female--the aging spinster is the character which predominates, and autobiography reveals unambiguous roots in a personal, youthful trauma.

Pym's meeting and love affair with Henry Harvey while she was a high-spirited and popular undergraduate at Oxford profoundly influenced her life and work. The attempt to distance her art from the pain of rejection she suffered, initially from Harvey, and later from "unsuitable attachments" to Julian Amery, Gordon Glover, and Richard Roberts, was a major catalyst to her continuing growth as a novelist. Glynn-Ellen Fisichelli has documented this phenomenon of progressive aesthetic control of autobiographical material in her dissertation, "The Trivial Round, The Common Task." Barbara Pym: The Development of a Writer (1984), where she compares early novels and draft work in published and unpublished materials with Pym's mature style. She concludes that the goal of "calm of mind, all passion spent" was attained only after a rigorous literary apprenticeship.<sup>2</sup> The personal anguish which was the catalyst to Pym's art supports Frank Kermode's observation that "Melancholy is not only an illness; she is also the patroness of creativity" (147). Pym herself acknowledged the centrality of her failed romantic relationship with Harvey to her fiction when she wrote, "Poor Henry, what an inspiration he has been" (VPE 241).

The autobiographical parallel to fictional characters and patterns is striking. Henry Harvey's cool and even deliberately cruel treatment of the exuberant girl who loved him with a passionate devotion caused Barbara Pym great

pain in some of the most impressionable years of her development as a writer while at Oxford. She writes in her diary for July 18th, 1934, when she was just twenty-one, and after they had become lovers: "He [Henry] said I was part of his background..." (VPE 44), and on December 12th, "I saw my Henry for the first time since July 18th. He greeted me with derisive laughter but said he was glad to see me" (46). By May of 1935 she is still in love with him, but is already contemplating a retreat into platonic friendship in order to salvage some sort of relationship with this man who was to become the inspiration behind many of her male characters:

Is it any use hoping even for his friendship--and is that enough? Is it not rather worse than nothing? At present I can't decide. Barnicot [a friend of Harvey's, who, along with Robert Liddell, became Pym's friend as well] thinks I have no hope at all and that his friendship would be of no use to me. But I think somehow that I'd like it. I don't mind being a part of the furniture of his background, or even hanging over him like a gloomy cloud, as he said at tea one day. He himself has admitted that I have a special place in the little world he has built for himself and of which presumably J. is the centre. And I suppose too that he feels this is so in the novel [Some Tame Gazelle] where I have brought us all together in our later years. But at the present moment it seems as if this world is falling to pieces--so what becomes of me then (49)?

She remained a part of his "background" through two Harvey marriages, and maintained a friendship with this "difficult" man until her death in 1980--some forty-seven years. Hazel Holt writes of Pym's final days in hospital: "Henry Harvey, visiting her on January 8th, found her wit and courage undiminished. It seemed, somehow, fitting that almost the last visitor Belinda had should be the Archdeacon" (292). The Archdeacon is the character in Some Tame Gazelle for whom Harvey was the model.

It is significant that her first published novel establishes this paradigm of transmuted love in the affection which spinster Belinda Bede still harbours for the vain, irascible and safely married Archdeacon Henry Hockleve, some thirty years after their undergraduate affair. Belinda still retains a decorously suppressed fondness for "dear Henry" and is grateful that she may keep alive to some extent the romantic image she constructed of the Archdeacon in her youth, a deified portrait that she is all too aware is a product of romantic idealism rather than reason and which the propinquity of marriage would modify all too quickly. She is happy to play a humble role as "part of his background," while his long-suffering wife Agatha bears the brunt of his bad humour, vanity and selfishness. Agatha develops rheumatism, for, as Belinda astutely observes, "she would have to have something out of self-defense and perhaps with the passing of the years it had become a reality" (STG 24-25). The formidable Agatha also becomes short-tempered, and the Archdeacon somewhat wistfully remarks that Belinda is a "nice, peaceful creature," though at the time of their romance he was "bored...by her constancy" (26). In her autobiography, in the throes of a youthful passion, Pym writes, "Henry gave me a character, saying that I was kind-hearted and didn't demand much" (VPE 42). The fictional recreation is marked when Belinda Bede articulates the reduced expectations and the modus vivendi of the Pym protagonist: "She was fortunate in needing very little to make her happy" (STG 89).

Belinda's retreat to the margins allows her to maintain a tenuous relationship with her beloved Archdeacon without harbouring animosity, a relationship in which time will reduce the pain of loss:

Belinda's thoughts slipped back to her college days when they had been students together. Most odd...and yet there was no sadness or bitterness in her mind as she thought of him. It was obvious that poor Agatha had a very difficult time with him....And yet he had such charm, even now....(11)

Later she muses:

Besides...it was obviously natural that one should lavish it [affection] on somebody. Indeed, one of Belinda's favourite quotations, taken from the works of a minor English poet, was:

Some tame gazelle, or some gentle dove

Something to love, oh, something to love!

Belinda, having loved the Archdeacon when she was twenty and not having found anyone to replace him since, had naturally got into the habit of loving him, though with the years her passion had mellowed into a comfortable feeling, more like the cosiness of a winter evening by the fire than the uncertain rapture of a spring morning.

(17)

All Pym's subsequent work explores alternatives for women to deeply felt romantic love. Diana Benet chooses to focus on this pattern in her book on Pym, Something to Love, and offers an astute analysis of the relinquishing in Pym's heroines of what Rachel Blau DuPlessis characterizes as the narrative trope of "romantic thralldom" in the closure of the traditional novel. We recall Mildred Lathbury of Excellent Women who tells the reader, "I am not at all like Jane Eyre." The "splendours and miseries" of Romance are prudently though wistfully relinquished by Mildred for the rather cold, pragmatic regard of anthropologist Everard Bone, the "second best" lover so familiar in Pym; Everard realizes, not without a somewhat aloof affection, that Mildred will be a useful typist and compiler of indexes, as well as a woman from a background which makes her capable of dealing with his querulous, eccentric mother whose "dotty" obsession is the sinister encroachment of birds. But as Benet notes:

In Pym's world...though the characters think often enough in standard terms of class, education and age...the only unsuitable attachments...are those devoid of affection or those motivated by

purely self-enhancing reasons. (13-14)

Everard is not romantic, but neither is he "devoid" of affection or positive qualities; Mildred may decide to "make do" with this "suitable" husband who, nevertheless, represents a compromise with the conventional romantic hero. In the meantime, however, as she does not, in fact, marry within the pages of this novel, Mildred fulfils the interim role of brown horse spinster admirably. Her friend William Caldicote, one of Pym's many homosexual or bisexual characters, inadvertently describes her "novelistic" function when he advises her not to marry:

We, my dear Mildred, are the observers of life. Let other people get married by all means, the more the merrier...Let Dora [William's sister] marry if she likes. She hasn't your talent for observation.

(70)

The "talent for observation" of Pym's spinsters can range unchecked in the guise of Bakhtinian "ass," "clown," or "servant" figure, or indeed as Ardener's "black holes in someone else's universe." Invisibility confers the freedom of the power of the gaze.<sup>3</sup> Her characters share the crystal eye of the author in their sensitivity to the comic incongruities of daily life, while escaping the constricting sexual attentions and delineating gaze of their unsuspecting subjects of scrutiny.

The role of "private eye" or detective assumed by the marginal protagonist is clearly echoed in Hazel Holt's reminiscences of Barbara Pym, as well as in the writer's own diary entries which recall her investigative techniques, later faithfully recreated in the novels. Pym was always curious about the backgrounds of the very ordinary people who interested her, and would often go to great lengths to find out more about them in an unobtrusive manner. It was she, for example, who initiated the contact with Henry Harvey, which foreshadows an interesting paradox in the novels. Overtly passive, Pym's characters are often

stubbornly aggressive in secretly pursuing their objectives in order to satisfy their curiosity. Concerning her volatile relationship with Harvey, Pym admitted her strategy to him thirteen years after the fact in a letter recorded in the autobiography:

Yes, I 'did start it,' even if I was inspired by you or rather the sight of you in the English Reading Room. I even got Rosemary Topping to go and look in your books when you had left them for a moment to see what your name was. Does anybody ever do that now? I suppose not, though no doubt others are doing it at Oxford. I almost envy them--one seems to feel so little now, and life was certainly exciting then, full of splendours and miseries. (VPE 178)

The distancing that would allow one to "feel so little" was part of her "anthropological" strategy for her fictional characters, though it is clear that cold detachment came with difficulty to Pym herself. In her fifties, and again painfully wounded when her young homosexual friend Richard Roberts withdrew from the rather "joking" relationship she hoped could be maintained between such unlikely companions, she wrote:

So unflattering to feel that a person really doesn't ever want to see you again--I don't think it's ever happened to me before quite like this. Now, alas, I am too old to change myself but shall just be more cautious in future--not allowing myself to get fond of anybody. (VPE 243)

Distance from the object of affection while an eager curiosity is maintained is achieved through the "tracking" strategies of the novels, which imitate Pym's personal approach to social "research"; these deserve detailed attention as they reflect the novelistic function of observer as the "third person" in private life whose role is to spy and eavesdrop.

In tracking Henry Harvey while at Oxford, for example, Pym would often "accidentally" be found at some place where he might be expected. A diary entry reads:

22 January [1934]. Having discovered that Lorenzo [Harvey] goes to some lectures on Mondays and Thursdays at 5, I arranged things so that I should be passing the Schools on my way to the Bodleian, just before 5. I timed it beautifully and met Lorenzo as I had hoped....

(VPE 34)

Katherine Anne Ackley notes how the "chance encounter" figures prominently in the novels. She writes, "This is the sort of happenstance which brings many of Pym's characters together, the chance encounter that might lead to something..." (19). Of course, in the autobiography, and often in the novels, such an encounter is not chance at all, but is meticulously timed and orchestrated; it is based on a close scrutiny of the habitual movements of the other person over an extended period.

At other times, the youthful Barbara kept Harvey's lodgings under surveillance, taking advantage of the dark to see through windows:

6 December. After supper I went on a Banbury Road crawl--in spite of great weariness. There was a light in Lorenzo's bedroom--is he ill, or packing, or was he just there? Anyway, it gives me a little hope....(VPE 31)

That this kind of curiosity was habitual with Barbara Pym in her private life is revealed in a diary entry where she records an outing with her friend, Richard Roberts [Darling Skipper], some thirty years after her Oxford days: "4 September [1964] we walk to Windmill Hill, Admiral's House, see Galsworthy's house, etc., have coffee in High St. Talk and wander about peering into people's uncurtained windows and even their letter boxes" (VPE 229).

In one of Pym's darker novels, Quartet in Autumn, eccentric Marcia Ivory, who has had a breast removed in cancer surgery, is one of the most poignant of the fictional spinsters in whom unrequited love is manifested as a secret affection; she focuses her need to love on the totally oblivious Mr. Strong, her wealthy surgeon. The parallel in technique is striking. Marcia travels to Mr. Strong's house, which she observes undetected at night:

Marcia's second holiday treat was a visit to Mr. Strong's house, or rather to view at a safe distance the house where he lived. She knew from the telephone directory that he functioned not only in Harley Street but also at an address in Dulwich, a district easily reached by her on a 37 bus...Of course, Mr. Strong was a family man; he had children, and now they were all away at the seaside. The house was completely deserted, which meant that Marcia could stand in the road gazing, noticing discreetly drawn curtains in a William Morris design. (QA 50)

Marcia, as an invisible victim of the dominant group's blindness to those who do not reflect their own perceptions, eventually starves to death after retirement--one who has "fallen through the net of the Welfare State" (VPE 272). The dominant group in this case represents middle class society, symbolized by her physician in particular as "care-giver," who cannot hear or see people like Marcia who do not conform to conventional expectations. It is appropriate that her secret love is reduced to the "small joy" of a surreptitious surveillance in this aesthetic recreation of Pym's youthful romantic obsession. Marcia's holiday treat involves gazing at an empty home, a fitting symbol of her place in the "interstices" (Ardener) of modern life.

Looking through windows, or peeking through curtains, long a comic cliché of spinsterish curiosity, thus becomes a recurring device of covert investigations. Looking out of windows, an activity associated more exclusively with the circumscribed lives of the female protagonists, provides an opportunity for their



benign curiosity to deduce conclusions about the lives of others from minute social "clues." One of the most comic examples occurs in Some Tame Gazelle, and illustrates in the characters' respective surveillance techniques--Belinda's is discreet and tactful, Harriet's much more aggressive--the distinctive personalities of the two spinsters. Here, the sisters are "staking out" the vicarage, which is close to their home, so that they may view the departure of Agatha Hoccleve, wife of the Archdeacon, for the German spa where she will take the waters for her rheumatism:

When the day came for Agatha to go away, Belinda and Harriet watched her departure out of Belinda's bedroom window. From here there was an excellent view of the vicarage drive and gate. Belinda had brought some brass with her to clean and in the intervals when she stopped her vigorous rubbing to look out of the window, was careful to display the duster in her hand. Harriet stared out quite unashamedly, with nothing in her hand to excuse her presence there. She even had a pair of binoculars, which she was now trying to focus. (70)

The image of Harriet's feverish attempts to get her binoculars into focus in plain view, while Belinda pretends to be polishing brass--a recurrent spinsterish activity in Pym associated with women's humble role in the Church--clearly distinguishes them.

In Less Than Angels, the unmarried Rhoda Wellcome spies on bachelor anthropologist Alaric Lydgate, who has moved in next door. She is joined in this activity by her sister, the widowed Mabel Swan. Like Belinda and Harriet Bede, these sisters derive benign creative pleasure from speculating about the mysterious lives of others. They reflect, from a uniquely comic perspective, Iris Murdoch's insistence in "Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch," on fiction's imitating the essential "opacity of persons" (30). This quality of complex unpredictability in character, a Bakhtinian quality of "surprisingness," which

in turn entails a depiction of the random and contingent in narrative, allows Pym's watchers to marvel at the enigma of personality which is consistent with the most "ordinary" people. In this case, Lydgate's arrival demonstrates the rich potential for interest in the superficially mundane--a next door neighbour in a suburban community:

The sisters had been sitting in Rhoda's bed-sitting-room which commanded an excellent view of the next door back garden...It was natural that they should find the unmarried and apparently rather eccentric Alaric Lydgate more interesting than their neighbours on the other side, a married couple with three young children ... Mr. Lydgate was not often to be seen in the garden, but there was always hope that he might appear, especially when the weather got warmer. There was a good deal about him that was promising. (LTA 33-34)

The first fruits of observation are yielded when Rhoda subsequently glimpses Lydgate in his yard beating rugs at night--a clear sign of eccentricity:

'That can't be Mrs. Skinner [Lydgate's housekeeper] beating the rugs now,' said Rhoda. 'She must be mad.'

'It might be Mr. Lydgate himself,' suggested her sister. 'In some ways, you know, he is rather strange.'

It must be his life in Africa, Rhoda thought later, as she stood in the dark uncurtained window of her room, looking down into the next door garden. She could just make out his shadowy figure in some long garment; if he had been a clergyman it could have been a cassock, but as he was not she was forced to the rather shocking conclusion that it must be a dressing gown. He seemed to be moving about on the lawn, picking up the rugs which had been lying on the grass. When he had gone into the house she drew the curtains and put on the light.... (44)

Rhoda sits in an "uncurtained window" in the dark so that she may draw a "rather shocking conclusion" about Mr. Lydgate. He appears in his garden "unsuitably" dressed and carrying out incongruous activities which are inconsistent with his class and profession, appropriating in this case the feminine task of rug-beating. Somewhat later, it is left to the young undergraduate, Deirdre Swan, who is returning home late, to be treated to a still more "shocking" glimpse into the bizarre private life of Alaric Lydgate. This scene is once more glimpsed through a lighted window:

'Good heavens! Do you see that?' Bernard pointed to the lighted window where a grotesque silhouette appeared, lingered for a moment and then moved away.

'It looks as if he's wearing an African mask' said Deirdre.  
'It seems a strange thing to be doing at this time of night-- probably the neighbours will complain.' (55)

An isolated bachelor, Lydgate retreats behind an exotic mask in the "privacy" of his home. In contrast, Pym's single women assume the "mask" of drab spinster in order to achieve invisibility when in the company of others. Though they are unobtrusive, an avid interest in ordinary people focuses their attention outward towards the community, rather than inward to the kind of melancholy preoccupation with self suggested by Alaric Lydgate's dramatic private posturings.

Moreover, Pym's private eyes frequently conceal themselves behind objects in order to avoid being recognized, thus remaining quite literally invisible to their subjects of study. Here is a very concrete kind of marginalization found frequently in the novels. In Some Tame Gazelle, for example, Belinda is taken by surprise while working in the garden by the unexpected arrival of the somewhat "common" librarian, Mr Mold, who has come expressly to make a formal proposal of marriage to Harriet: "So Belinda concealed herself as best she could behind a large rhododendron bush, which grew on one side of the little drive leading to the front door. She was fully aware how foolish she would feel if she were

discovered in this undignified crouching position" (STG 131-132). It has been noted before how "brown" spinsters are diminished in reductive verbs, but here Pym utilizes obscurity to facilitate the detective work of her heroines. Belinda is "crouching," Rhoda Wellcome (LTA) "creeps" downstairs, Jessie Morrow (J&P) "scrabbles," and Emma Howick also "peers" and "creeps" when looking into the doctor's surgery (FGL). In this last novel, as in her first, the desire for concealment remains consistent. When Emma sees a man incongruously wearing a raincoat on a fine summer day at the church flower festival, her first impulse is to hide herself, so that she may study him at leisure in order to answer her silent query concerning this "anthropological" mystery of inappropriate dress: "She concealed herself behind the delphiniums and studied the man more closely" (FGL 81).

Perhaps No Fond Return of Love provides the most extensive treatment of the strategies of the invisible female observer. Dulcie Mainwaring investigates the family of Dr. Aylwin Forbes, academic and editor; she first meets Aylwin at a conference of indexers, proof-readers and editors who "worked on the dustier fringes of the academic world" (NFRL 13). Both Aylwin, who is separated from an unsuitable young wife who can't share his academic interests--which in Pym usually means being able to "listen" to the beloved with "strained interest" and/or compiling an index for his work--and his equally handsome brother Neville, a "celibate" high church clergyman, become subjects for Dulcie's curiosity and research. Her methods include tracking Aylwin to his home in Quince Square, and even paying a visit to his birthplace, The Eagle House Private Hotel, which is run at Taviscombe by his eccentric and rather common mother.

Hazel Holt recounts spending many a lunch hour with Barbara Pym when they both worked for the International African Institute, engaged in the kinds of research which are recreated in the texts. She writes:

Through her eyes I saw the whole richness of academic life--the extraordinary quirks and foibles of eccentric personalities and the bizarre quality of the jargon....She infected me, too, with the

fascination of finding out about people, and lunchtimes were often spent in public libraries, searching for clues in Crockford's [clerical index of the Church of England], Kelly's Directories or street maps. (VPE XIV)

So it is that Dulcie begins to find out more about Aylwin, who has fainted while delivering a paper on "Some Problems of an Editor" at the conference, as well as about Viola Dace, a young woman whose health broke down while "working for a PhD at London University" (17) and who now is "helping" Aylwin in research for his book on an obscure "neo-metaphysical poet"(121), Edmund Lydden:

Later that evening Dulcie looked up Viola Dace in the telephone directory, but could not find her name. Then she looked up Aylwin Forbes. He lived in the Holland Park or Notting Hill area to judge by the address--5 Quince Square, W.11. I might see him one day, Dulcie thought. She imagined herself in various places but could not exactly visualize the meeting. Perhaps, she told herself with a quickening of excitement, it would have to be contrived. Women were often able to arrange things that men would have thought impossible. (37)

Dulcie continues her research into Aylwin's brother, Neville, at the Public Records Office. Realizing that she does not know the name of his parish, she is consoled with the thought that, "a short visit to the public library would give her the information she wanted and she decided to save it up as a kind of treat for herself" (44). Here we are reminded of Marcia Ivory's choice of the same word, "treat," to describe her holiday visit to view Mr. Strong's home, and, in turn, of Shirley Ardener's observation about the "small pleasures" which "nurture the confined soul."

There follows perhaps one of the most explicit explanations of the motivation behind such activities for the Pym spinster:

For this was really the kind of research Dulcie enjoyed most of all, investigation--some might have said prying--into the lives of other people, the kind of work that involved poring over reference books, and street and telephone directories. It was most satisfactory if the object of her research were not too well known, either to herself or to the world in general, for it was rather dull just to be able to look up somebody in Who's Who, which gave so many relevant details. Crockford was better because it left more to the imagination, not stooping to such personal trivia as marriages or children or recreations. (44)

At the same time, the catalyst is not always as objective as the social anthropologist might be entitled to claim: "Love was a powerful incentive to this kind of research and...Dulcie did feel that she had fallen a little in love with Aylwin Forbes. It might be that the absurd conference had served some useful purpose after all" (44).

Pym's spinsters are curious, but never malicious. Their curiosity is often fuelled by affection and always tempered with a benevolent tolerance and genuine interest in "the lives of ordinary people." The highly suggestive scraps of information thus gleaned become the genesis of a spectrum of complicated imaginative scenarios surrounding the object of interest or affection, constructed through the avid speculation of the protagonist. For example, even the observation of the time of day Aylwin buys a newspaper is a "clue" for Dulcie concerning his personality: "She noticed that he had been carrying an Evening Standard, and it gave her an insight into his character to see that he was the kind of person who bought an evening newspaper at lunchtime, thus spoiling his evening's pleasure, or so she thought" (39).

When Dulcie makes her trip to the public library, the collection of eccentrics assembled there is a diverting spectacle in itself. Crockford is already in use, and Dulcie's active imagination is rapidly speculating on the purposes to which information is to be put by her fellow "researchers":

A shabbily dressed man with a raffish air appeared to be taking down names and addresses, perhaps with a view to writing begging letters to unsuspecting clergymen. Dulcie always found a public library a little upsetting, for one saw so many odd people there, and it must be supposed that a certain proportion came in because they had nowhere else to go. Others were less easy to classify and less worrying. Why, for instance, was a reasonably prosperous-looking middle-aged woman--the smartness of her clothes detracted from the dowdy laced-up shoes that told of bad feet--so anxious to get hold of a pre-war Kelly's Directory of Somerset? (52)

All of the characteristics of the unobtrusive investigator are in evidence here, including the multiple queries concerning the significance of what is observed and an underlying compassion for other marginal persons who are lonely, unwanted or--even more "worrying"--perhaps with "nowhere else to go." An acute eye for details of dress, gesture and speech, which enables her to classify them as to profession, status and age is also demonstrated.

Crockford, then, provides the kind of titillatingly cryptic details which Dulcie has indicated she prefers because they allow more scope for the imagination to fill in the provocative gaps:

"FORBES, Neville Arthur Brandreth--Univ. of Lond. B.A. 1937. Kelham-Th. Coll. 1938," she read. He had been a curate in West Hampstead, then a chaplain with the Navy, and was now (since 1954) vicar of a parish in North-West London, "Gross Inc. 6261, and Ho."--did that rather jolly-sounding phrase mean an income or stipend of £626 per annum and a house?, she wondered. She was glad that his parish was in an accessible part of London. Indeed, when she looked at a street map, she found that it was almost within walking distance, if one were wearing comfortable shoes. (53)

Dulcie plans a visit to Neville's parish for evening service after taking tea with her aunt and uncle who live nearby. Her imagination continues to focus on the unmarried vicar: "She tried to imagine the Reverend Neville Arthur Brandreth Forbes, but all she could see was Aylwin Forbes in a dog collar" (53).

Her real focus of interest, clearly, is Aylwin, so she proceeds to look him up in the more informative and thus, ironically, less satisfactory Who's Who. Again, the "small joy" generated by her investigation is evident in her postponement of this pleasure which "she had been saving till last" (53). It is an emotional experience:

Her fingers fumbled nervously with the pages as she prayed that there might be at least a short entry for him. There was--and it gave quite a wealth of information. His date of birth was 3rd June, 1912, but his parentage was not mentioned. He had married Marjorie, daughter of James Williton, no date or children given. His publications--a modest half-dozen on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literary subjects--were listed, and his recreations given as 'conversation and wine.' (53)

The cold objectivity of the anthropologist might dismiss such a description as of negligible interest and Aylwin as irredeemably mediocre, but Dulcie marvels at how the eyes of love can transform an ordinary human being into a person of glamour and mystery. She begins with a rational assessment, then contemplates the alchemy of love which, if we recall Murdoch's essay, is equated with the liberating power of the artist's imagination:

Dulcie closed the book with a slight feeling of distaste. 'Conversation and wine'--what an affectation! He had got little enough of either at the conference--she smiled to herself at the memory of his avoiding conversation with ladies and sipping the cold dark wine in Derbyshire. And for you, she thought, a wife will go



back to her mother, an unhappy woman [Viola Dace] will be on the grass, wearing red canvas shoes and not caring about anything. And perhaps another--usually so 'sensible'--will begin to think she is falling in love...It was not to be considered for a moment. (53-4)

This phenomenon--the transformations wrought by love--is succinctly articulated by Dulcie somewhat later in the text: "When one loved somebody, everything about him--imperfections, vices even--became rare and special" (229). The tension between the rewards of emotional detachment and relative liberation gained by the "occupation" of spinster and the desire to re-enter the Romantic plot by "falling in love" and idealizing the beloved is clearly marked in the character of Dulcie Mainwaring. Mildred Lathbury in Excellent Women and Jessie Morrow in Jane and Prudence more or less resolve this ambivalence by the time they choose to marry, and view their respective future spouses with a clear-eyed, unsentimental gaze devoid of youthful romanticism. They retain the emotional liberation of the spinster in the teleology of a revised closure within the Romantic plot. Dulcie's negotiations between the passionate pitfalls of Romance and the comforts of detachment are somewhat more problematic.

She has an unexpected stroke of luck when Mrs Williton, the mother of Aylwin's wife Marjorie, holds a jumble sale at her house in order to purchase a "better instrument" for the church organist. What begins as a typical viewing of the outside of the home becomes an opportunity to enter and see Marjorie, thus confirming her suspicions of Aylwin's penchant for choosing "unsuitable" women. As Marjorie wraps a purchase, Dulcie, who has given her name as Miss Lamb, and supplied a false address, notes:

Her fingers were rather stubby, with childish-looking, short--perhaps bitten?--nails. It suddenly occurred to Dulcie that Aylwin Forbes had married beneath him--but why? (79)

Aylwin, one of Pym's consistently self-serving intellectuals, likes young,

pretty, "unsuitable" women because they pose no threat and provide balm to his considerable ego. This explains why he "married beneath him." He later proposes to Laurel, Dulcie's eighteen-year-old niece, showing a predictable consistency in his quest for self-aggrandising relationships.

Another time, Dulcie furthers her investigations by locating the Eagle House Private Hotel at Taviscombe, Aylwin's birthplace, and visiting a churchyard with Viola Dace to inspect the monuments. She hopes to find out more about Aylwin's ancestry and the unequal marriage between his aristocratic father and his "common," hotel-keeping mother. Again she conceals herself: "I'd feel safer hiding behind something, said Dulcie, moving to the other side of a large marble angel with outstretched wings" (211). In the context of Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of the angel/monster paradigm in traditional literary tropes constructing images of women, Dulcie's retreat behind the "large marble angel with outstretched wings" is significant. Hiding behind the angelic mask, Dulcie, like Jane Austen's Fanny in Mansfield Park, "can only assert herself through silence, reserve, recalcitrance and even cunning" (Gilbert and Gubar 165). Paradoxically, through the "intricate gestures of subordination," Dulcie, like Austen's heroines, "get[s] what she both want[s] and need[s]" (Gilbert and Gubar 163).

Nevertheless, the exploitation of women as subordinates by men is consistent in Pym, though this asymmetry in relationships of power is rendered amusing and relatively benign because of its fictional recreation within the refinement of the scholarly community and through a comic paradigm. The almost complete effacement of sexuality in Pym can be discerned as yet another strategy of textual revision which protects her women from the kinds of abuse and brutality implicit in unequal relationships in the larger community. Clerics and scholars in Pym can be cruel, but their destructive proclivities are deflected into the realm of the cutting remark or a benign neglect. Their danger to the female protagonist is confined to an emotional threat; she may suffer volatile "splendours and miseries" if she succumbs to the imperatives of the fictional trope of "romantic thralldom."

The hesitant language and covert investigations of the excellent woman, however, would hardly be sufficient in themselves to guarantee a protective invisibility unless coupled with a drab and deliberately "asexual," or perhaps more accurately, "under-sexed," appearance. Men, and indeed many women, do not "notice" her, or, if they do, dismiss her immediately as of little consequence. Gilbert and Gubar note the effects of "angelic reserve" by citing Frank Churchill's comment concerning Jane Fairfax in Austen's Mansfield Park: "There is safety in reserve, but no attraction" (165). There is an interesting paradox here, of course, which feminist writers have pointed out. It is necessary for a woman to "put on" or "assume" the trappings which society considers the markers of femininity. Pym calls this "making an effort" and, for most women, the pressure to continue the rituals of dress and grooming necessary to appear "feminine" and to please men is a cultural imperative to the end of a lifetime, long after one might think it superfluous. One definitive sign in Pym that a woman has "retreated to the margins," perhaps only for the interim, is a phenomenon which might be compared to Lady Macbeth's invocation of the murdering ministers to "unsex me here," though, of course, the comic motivations are benign rather than sinister. Pym's protagonists aspire only to acquire the novelistic "power" to become invisible through a kind of Proserpine descent. Once again, the social minus of a drab exterior which allows a woman to become part of "the furniture of [his] background" becomes a fictional advantage.

The Pym protagonist is far from indifferent to the limiting and potentially dangerous prohibitions of male perceptions; she is, on the contrary, acutely aware of them. She is unambiguously a woman, but arbitrary, culturally determined "feminine" attributes are often wilfully hidden or underplayed. Dulcie Mainwaring, for example, feels herself to be perceived as a "woman manqué" (282). In fact, the excellent woman's drab "disguise" is deliberately adopted and heightened, perhaps after a painful romance, to provide a little "sexless" invisibility before re-entering the cruel dangers of the Romantic fray. Laurel, Dulcie's young niece, muses:

As far as she could remember, her aunt was a reasonable sort of person and quite young for an aunt, but there was nothing elegant or interesting about her. She wore tweedy clothes and sensible shoes<sup>4</sup> and didn't 'make the most of herself'. Laurel's mother had told her that Dulcie hadn't bothered since a love affair had 'gone wrong'. (44)<sup>5</sup>

One of the first signs, usually near a novel's closure, that the protagonist is ready to risk a relationship again, even if it is a safer "second best" alliance, is a renewed interest in clothes, hair and make-up.

It is interesting that--in the more mature novels published within her lifetime--only three of Pym's protagonists, Wilmet Forsyth (GB), Prudence Bates (J&P), and Leonora Eyre (SDD), are elegant and conventionally attractive. These three women are all self-consciously vain and spend many hours perfecting their appearance. However, they are also emotionally aloof and, it is implied, cautious and sexually "cool." They maintain their own kind of protective distance from vulnerability. All the others, however, are variously described as "drab," "dim," "dull," or "plain," and are keenly aware of their lack of sex appeal. None can attract a man sexually through her appearance, though it is suggested that wily Jessie Morrow provides Fabian Driver with the "one thing" (J&P 70) every man wants. Characteristically, the men in Pym's world are not highly sexed and, after the first flush of youth, are likely to choose mates for selfishly pragmatic reasons.<sup>6</sup>

The drab protagonist is not considered irredeemably plain, however, and though not likely to undergo a Cinderella-like metamorphosis (in the Apuleian model this might correspond to the "transformation" of Lucian, when he is restored to his former "human," i.e. culturally constructed, form) there is always the possibility that with a little more "effort" she could be moderately attractive to men. In Pym, it is all a matter of timing--the prudent calculation of a "sadder but a wiser [woman]." For example, after Dulcie Mainwaring's engagement to handsome young Maurice Clive is broken off because "he was not

worthy of her love, as he put it" (NFRL 11), Miss Lord, who helps with the housework, encourages her to improve her appearance, as it is not too late for her to marry. Dulcie, she says, would make a very good wife: "'Of course,' she went on quickly, 'you're not glamorous'" (231). She goes on to note, "'You could make so much more of yourself, Miss Mainwaring...if only you would.'" Miss Lord suggests a "perm" and a restyling of Dulcie's hair "in the bouffant style...And you could use eye make-up. It would make your eyes look bigger." The exchange which follows is revealing:

Dulcie laughed! Goodness! Head bigger and eyes bigger--then what?

'Then you'd be the one to get the bunches of carnations,' said Miss Lord triumphantly '...But oh, Miss Mainwaring, I should so like to see you get married.'

'I think getting married depends on more than that,' said Dulcie. 'It comes from within, an attitude of mind somehow.'

'Yes, but a man's got to notice you, hasn't he--that's the first step.' (232)

Significantly, when Dulcie's "attitude of mind" deliberately determines on a course of what might be called "conscious" loving, she is--as second wife--presented with an appropriate bunch of autumnal chrysanthemums by Aylwin; Pym deflates a traditional trapping of Romance with an appropriately reduced symbol of a mature love largely purged of idealism.

Because the heterosexual men in Pym's refined, middle class world are often self-absorbed or sexually diffident, and do not display the kinds of aggressive masculinity associated with a less cultured milieu, her protagonists may at times wish to be more physically appealing in a mild way, but are careful to remain non-threatening. Dulcie rejects advice to appear "bigger" by the "additions" of a new hairstyle and dramatic make-up, for example, and retains her colourless façade, because to appear in any way sexually aggressive or threatening would frighten away the men available to her. Her strategy proves an astute one when

she later allows herself to love Aylwin Forbes.

Pym was well aware of the alarming aspect of a woman wearing brilliant make-up or too flamboyant clothing in the world of her timid and even sexually cold or ambivalent intellectuals. She writes in December 1956:

On T.V. I thought that women have never been more terrifying than they are now--the curled head ('Italian style'), the paint and the jewellery, the exposed bosom--no wonder men turn to other men sometimes. (VPE 197)

As a young girl, Pym was amused to note the scholarly shudder of a disapproving tutor--in this case a respectable spinster--to unsuitable "paint" on a lively student: "13 January [1934], Oxford. In the morning I went to see Miss Everett, who seemed almost paralysed with horror by my red nails!" (VPE 34).

The autobiography is also instructive in showing how Pym herself often adopted quite deliberately the "shrinking" and subordinate posture of her dim protagonists. It was a "mask" which she, too, assumed, and characteristically, in her personal life, she heightened it after a failed romance. She speaks of her war-time experience in the WRNS after her broken relationship with Gordon Glover:

It amuses me to pay exaggerated respect to very young Sub-Lieutenants and even Midshipmen, flattening myself and my broom against the wall as they pass, less than the dust indeed. (VPE 152)<sup>8</sup>

When her characters assume these humble disguises, it is a clear indication of an underground or submerged strategy which is designed to facilitate their roles as invisible observers. Like Dulcie in the early pages of the novel, they do not want to be "noticed" until it suits them to arrange that the men, who are usually totally blind or indifferent and treat them as part of the furniture, are made aware of their potential as future wives and helpmates. When Mildred Lathbury

becomes (hopelessly) infatuated with handsome Rocky Napier, for example, she purchases a new lipstick--"Hawaiian Fire." The sheer inappropriateness of this cosmetic for Mildred is a clear indication that "nothing will come of it." The clerk suggests "Sea Coral," which is "quite pale, you know." Mildred's response is, "'Thank you, but I think I will have Hawaiian Fire,' I said obstinately, savouring the ludicrous words and the full depths of my shame" (EW 130-131). Mildred's "shame" is that she has allowed herself to feel passion for an unsuitable man who can see her only as a person who may provide him with cups of tea. Rocky does not "see" Mildred as a desirable woman. Sexually, she is invisible in his universe.

Mildred's small and futile compliance with cultural markers of sexuality--her almost pathetic fantasy of becoming the kind of woman Rocky might desire--is the occasion for a keenly observed passage on the ritual of women putting on make-up, and the suppressed frustration or even anger which their increasingly futile labours seem to provoke in them. Ackley finds this passage one of the few in Pym that is "vicious" (54), but it also can be read as poignant, and as close as she comes to articulating the inevitable tragedy of women, who are almost universally esteemed as valuable only as long as they are sexually attractive. While there are echoes of Hamlet's disgust for women in the brutal, "Get thee to my lady's chamber" meditation, one can feel the very real desperation of those still "making an effort," and the bleak defeat of the women who have given up the struggle. A Jacobean revulsion against the duplicity of those who "paint an inch thick" is recast into the wry ambivalence evident in a woman's questioning of an ultimately cruel cultural expectation:

Inside [the Ladies' Room] it was a sobering sight and one to put us all in mind of the futility of material things and of our own mortality. All flesh is grass...I thought, watching the women working at their faces with savage concentration, opening their mouths wide, biting and licking their lips, stabbing at their noses and chins with powder puffs. Some, who had abandoned the struggle

to keep up, sat in chairs, their bodies slumped down, their hands resting on their parcels. One woman lay on a couch, her hat and shoes off, her eyes closed. (EW 131)

Here, the poignancy of the social imperative imposed upon those who can't "keep up" because they are not "pretty" is once again vividly evoked, as is the note of a deeply felt despair.'

In Mildred's case, moreover, the romantic promise of "Hawaiian Fire" is denied her when she is forced to accept the futility of her yearnings and to acknowledge the "shame" of her unsuitable passion. Her renewed decision to "make an effort" later in the novel is a foreshadowing of the ambivalent success she will achieve with Everard Bone when she has at last ruefully and euphemistically decided to "cook his meat" and do his proofing and indexing. Everard, of course, fails to notice any difference. Mildred says, "My normal appearance is very ordinary and my clothes rather uninteresting, but the new dress I had bought showed an attempt, perhaps misguided, to make myself look different" (EW 248). On the way to Everard's house, Miss Statham says Mildred's hair "looked better the way you did it before," and her homosexual friend William Caldicote, who does notice and can read the signs of sexual enticement, is comically terrified; there is a note of alarm in his voice as he queries, "Were you perhaps coming to see me?" (251). Everard's response as he greets her is typical of Pym's sexually diffident males: "'Oh, there you are,' Everard said as he opened the door. Not exactly a welcoming speech but I knew him well enough now to realize that he never did appear pleased to see anybody" (EW 252). Mildred's calculated but, one feels, ultimately problematic decision to "settle" for Everard, which is implied as the novel ends, is perhaps as close as Pym comes, except for the character of Marcia Ivory in Quartet in Autumn, to allowing the shadow of the tragic vision to impinge on her hopeful world of wry comic possibility. It is also feasible, however, to read this closure as an attempt to transform the Romance plot; it liberates Mildred from the victimization inherent in a relationship of unequal affection into a more emotionally balanced union where the woman thus minimizes



the potential for psychological damage and suffering. Eros is renounced for agape and a comfortable, if more pedestrian, relationship becomes possible.

Pym, then, was fascinated by her social observations concerning women; in particular, she speculates about the circumstances under which some women feel free to abandon constructing the feminine illusion which renders them highly "visible" as sex object. She writes in her diary of an academic gathering at which:

I was also struck by the number of academic women who appeared to have made really no effort at all--obviously none of that agonized 'But what shall I wear?'--really an enviable detachment and when will one ever reach it? (VPE 250)

In Pym's last novel, Emma Howick's widowed mother, herself an academic, considers her daughter's drab appearance and, in a highly amusing calculation, concludes that she has not yet "earned" the credentials necessary for this particular entry into what is, after all, no more than the right to be oneself without "additions." Beatrix thinks of Emma's appearance after a party at which a few of the villagers were entertained:

Beatrix...found herself thinking that Emma could have made herself look more attractive....Surely a dress of a prettier colour and some attempt at a hair style, either curled or neatly cut and set, might have made the evening more successful? It wasn't as if Emma had ever produced anything that could justify such high-minded dowdiness--here Beatrix considered various contemporary women of distinction--no novel or volume of poetry or collection of paintings, only a few unreadable anthropological papers. Was she not capable of better things? (FGL 98-99)

The opportunity to cease "making an effort," then, is only permissible to those

women capable of inhabiting an alternative "life slot" built into the dominant cultural model--in this case, writer, artist or "serious" scholar. It is clear that many women, even the well-educated Beatrix, have internalized these rigid parameters of possibility. For most women, culturally as well as linguistically, there is "no place to go" if they reject the structures created for them by the dominant group. Pym chooses to move her women toward the cultural borderline where, in Barthian (and Bakhtinian) terms, they may participate in the critical and deconstructive enterprise available at the seam or gap of the imperfect fit between dominant and muted.<sup>10</sup>

Like Emma Howick, the many plain "excellent women" who assume the role of protagonist, therefore, remain submerged and invisible through most of the novels, yet retain the provocative potential to "make something of themselves" in a mild way--enough at least to form a sensible marriage if they choose to do so. The important point to note is that for Pym's women this becomes a matter of choice, not compulsion. A sensible marriage (or spinsterhood), like sensible shoes, may provide rational comfort and, to continue the analogy, a more perfect "fit" than the constraints and suffering implicit in the Romance plot.

Beautiful Prudence Bates comments on the appearance of Jane Cleveland, who has married, and on her university contemporaries, when she returns to an Oxford reunion:

And why couldn't she (Jane) have made some effort to change for dinner instead of appearing in the baggy-skirted, grey flannel suit she had arrived in? Jane was really quite nice-looking, with her large eyes and short, rough, curly hair, but her clothes were terrible. One could hardly blame people for classing all university women as frumps, thought Prudence, looking down the table at the odd garments and odder wearers of them, the eager, unpainted faces, the wispy hair, the dowdy clothes; and yet most of them had married-- that was the strange and disconcerting thing. (J&P 9)

Prudence was one of Pym's favourite characters, and, Hazel Holt suggests, perhaps the protagonist whose propensity to move from one romantic liaison to another most closely parallels her creator's. The enigma whereby a plain woman may nevertheless find a husband if she chooses to do so puzzles Prudence. Exploiting a narrative inversion whereby it is the mousy woman who "snares" a man, Pym's characters are capable of surprising revisions of convention. It is Jessie Morrow, not Prudence Bates, who becomes the wife of Fabian Driver in Jane and Prudence, and it is Jane who marries and not the elegant but more demanding Prudence.

Because the subordinate status and muted sexuality of the plain protagonist position her close to the sexual borderline of the culture, Pym's descriptions of her "dim" women are almost interchangeable. In Some Tame Gazelle, Belinda Bede suppresses the intellectual and perhaps even erotic "excitement" of her youth. A deceptively restrained posture is expressed through the image of veiled eyes: "Even now a light would shine in her mild greenish eyes, so decorously hidden behind horn-rimmed spectacles, at the mention of Young's Night Thoughts or the dear Earl of Rochester's Poems on Several Occasions" (STG 7). Serious scholarship or even the appreciation of mild erotica occupies alternate "life-slots," however, and so such proclivities must be "hidden" in an aging spinster. Moreover, as Miss Lodge reminds Dulcie Mainwaring in No Fond Return of Love, men, even "intellectuals," don't like women who read too much, and would be almost as terrified as William Caldicote, it seems, at any blatant eroticism.

In Crampton Hodnet, Jessie Morrow is "a thin, used-up-looking woman in her middle thirties...Miss Morrow, in spite of her misleading appearance, was a woman of definite personality, who was able to look on herself and her surroundings with detachment.... She shivered and pulled her shapeless grey cardigan around her thin body" (CH 2). In this novel, Jessie receives a loveless proposal, which she wisely rejects, from the Reverend Stephen Latimer, but deliberately chooses to marry the selfish widower, Fabian Driver, in Jane and Prudence. Fabian will be a husband whom she can, nevertheless, successfully control. In the latter novel, Jessie introduces herself to Jane Cleveland, and again illustrates the

coupling of drab appearance with the characteristic emotional detachment which allows her to see herself and others in an unsentimental light:

'Well, I am Jessie Morrow,' said the little brown woman. 'I suppose you would describe me as that outmoded thing, a "companion." Miss Doggett, my employer, is a vigorous old lady who has no need of my services as a companion, but rather as a sparring partner.' (J&P 29)

Jessie sees herself and others with a profound integrity which dispenses with comfortable stereotypes and exhibits the inherent complexity of Pym's women through acerbic remarks which foreground the dissonance between cultural paradigm and an alternate "truth."

Most of Pym's protagonists who are already married, such as Jane Cleveland (J&P), Caro Grimstone (AAQ), and Wilmet Forsyth (GB), have reached that stage in their relationships of, as Jane Cleveland expresses it, "mild, kindly looks and spectacles" (J&P 48). Because the fine frenzy of romantic thralldom is long over, if it ever existed--which is somewhat unlikely given the less than passionate natures of their respective spouses--their attention is, in fact, de-centred from their husbands to the larger community; thus, they too can fulfil the role of participant observer. All the wives, with characteristic humility, feel that they have fallen short in some way, and so share the humble posture of the "old brown horse spinsters," though they have rebellious moments, and carry on the same process of continuous critical evaluation already noted in the other women. Of the wives, only Wilmet is elegant and conventionally attractive, and it is perhaps appropriate that she, like Prudence Bates and Leonora Eyre, sacrifices the advantages of acute perception in return for the blind vanity that characteristically accompanies beauty in Pym. Naïve Wilmet, for example, is not, until late in the novel, aware of Piers Longridge's homosexuality and the ironic futility of her dream that he will turn to her for comfort. A plain woman, in Pym's world, always possesses the heightened awareness that comes to those for

whom it is necessary to turn attention away from themselves to others because of their invisibility and the fact that they are dismissed as negligible. All of the handsome men, or even the not-so-handsome, are entirely self-absorbed. Digby Fox, the young anthropologist in Less Than Angels, for example, sums up the worth of the protagonist, Catherine Oliphant, from a male perspective: "A woman who can cook and type--what more could a man want, really?" (LTA 75).

The handsome woman is an exception in Pym and will be dealt with more extensively in another context. It is perhaps enough to suggest at this point that because such women fulfil so completely the dominant ideal of womanhood, they are more difficult for Pym to liberate from the Romantic paradigm, and thus become a liability within the novel because they attract too much attention and cannot easily be freed from the "Book of Old Plots." Ironically, their mask-like faces, lacquered hair and nails and costumed bodies represent the "real," while Pym's sensible protagonists who refuse such artifice are "in disguise" and ignored--in Ardener's terms, they become the "black holes" in the universe of the dominant culture. The "suppression of attention" imposed linguistically on the Mongolian daughter-in-law by oblique language, a cultural phenomenon noted previously in a discussion of women's speech, is reinforced in Pym's women by their appearance, which deliberately disappoints the sexual stereotypes of the dominant culture. Often, men don't "see" them at all. The life-slot that remains, of course, is one of Pym's many alternate versions of the excellent woman. Pym's women, it seems, must choose one disguise or another, and can only achieve a measure of independence by duplicitous manoeuvring within the narrow cultural parameters available to them.

Both Frye and Bakhtin are helpful in uncovering the prototypes for Pym's brown horse spinsters within the literary tradition. When Frye, for example, in Anatomy of Criticism, defines the eiron of Aristotle's Ethics as "the man who deprecates himself" and further states that "the ironic fiction writer, then, deprecates himself and, like Socrates, pretends to know nothing, even that he is ironic" (40), we have only to change the gender to see a reflection of the "innocent irony" of Pym's protagonists. Further, Frye discusses the comedy of

manners where, "the hero is regarded as a fool or worse by the fictional society, and yet impresses the real audience as having something more valuable than his society has" (48). As heroine and eiron, the astute yet benevolent insights of the drab, marginal woman, who is almost universally regarded with a mild derision, are set against the blind hubris and self-aggrandizing posturings of the male alazon or imposter, who "pretends or tries to be something more than he is" (39). In Some Tame Gazelle, the Archdeacon, Dr. Parnell, and Bishop Grote, for example, all share aspects of the alazon as "learned crank or obsessed philosopher" (39) and serve as foils for Belinda who, as eiron, "is a predestined artist, just as the alazon is one of [her] predestined victims" (40). The eiron as clear-eyed "artist" or anthropologist is "invulnerable "on the margins, according to Frye, for as long as [she] remains detached and ironic; this position is adopted by the protagonist in Pym throughout the greater part of the action of the novel. Here, once more, one sees the "ironic distance" identified by Jane Nardin as a characteristic of the feminine consciousness. This distance is only maintained, however, through a deconstruction of Romantic tropes and a refusal of the Book of Old Plots as "given" by the literary tradition. This can be accomplished only within the novel which allows for Bakhtinian "unfinalizability." The rejection of the Romantic image of the heroine is the necessary subversive transformation which opens the way for a Bakhtinian novelistic enabling, and the creation of alternative possibilities for closure. Marriage, which commits the protagonist to what Joanne S. Frye calls the "culture text" (43) of subordination, is thus postponed, in DuPlessis's terms, "beyond the ending," and its parameters are modified in interesting ways.

In the same way, Northrop Frye's description of the eiron of comedy as "rather neutral and unformed in character" if a male and "played down...a *muta persona*" (173), if female, assists in illuminating Pym's innovative transformation of these liminal characteristics in the brown horse spinster. If one can collapse gender and genre categories here, Bakhtin's "surplus of humanness" and Frye's "unformed" eiron in the comic, ironic text are both discernible in Pym's art. Frye further notes that "the manipulation of plot does

not always involve metamorphosis of character, but there is no violation of comic decorum when it does" (170). The capacity of Pym's spinsters to exhibit the disguise of eiron as a mask, which they adopt to facilitate their roles as observers, as well as the suggestion that it may be mitigated or cast off if they so choose, fulfils one function of the comic capacity for metamorphosis. The comic plot and the dialogic character of the novel permit the protagonist to, in Emily Dickinson's words, "dwell in possibility."

Pym's brown horse spinsters as marginal women also share in the characteristics of yet another eiron figure--that of the "tricky slave" of Roman comedy. Jessie Morrow as Miss Doggett's companion is perhaps the most obvious example of this aspect of the eiron, but all the drab protagonists as subordinate women share in the oblique strategies of manipulation common to the tricky slave--the necessary indirection when interacting with a dominant figure which Jean Baker Miller notes is often explained through the cliché of "feminine wiles" (31). Frye traces the evolution of this manifestation of the eiron through the nineteenth-century novel to "the amateur detective of modern fiction" (173), which reinforces the link to Pym's "very private eyes." Again, Nancy K. Miller's concept of "emphasis added," which points to linguistic duplicity and irony in the feminine text, can be read in terms of character. If language can appear "italicized" or, in Bakhtinian terms, "re-accented" or in "quotation marks," through the irony and distance permitted by dialogism, so, surely, can character types be heightened, thus emphasizing the seam or dissonance in "fit." Just as, for Bakhtin, all languages within the novel are open to authorial "re-accentuation" so is all characterization subject to transformation.

Parodying and modifying the masks of the eiron, Pym inserts her women into the traditional tropes by collapsing dictates of gender, and finds a more comfortable accommodation for her protagonists within the received structures of the comic plot. What is striking in considering the many aspects of subordination assumed, heightened and parodied by Pym's women--language, cultural marginalization, physical appearance, a role as the invisible investigator, and so on--is the recurrence of these masks within the novelistic tradition. Pym has

created a distinctive character, identifiable as "very Barbara Pym" (VPE xiii), which is nevertheless firmly rooted in the history of the comic novel and which represents a new synthesis of the literary precursors of ass, clown, fool, rogue and servant--marginal woman.



Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pym's remarkable letters in Compton-Burnett style to Robert Liddell, or those in which she imitated Stevie Smith to Henry Harvey and Harvey's young wife Elsie, clearly signal a metamorphosis from rejected lover to platonic friend, and are stylistic precursors to the novels. She whimsically adopts the identity of Miss Pym, spinster, when she is only twenty-four, in an attempt to maintain what became a life-long friendship with Harvey. Her "Oxford" novel, Some Tame Gazelle, first drafted even earlier during the emotionally turbulent days of her uncertain undergraduate affair with Harvey, is peopled with her university friends, and portrays the then-youthful Barbara and her younger sister Hilary as middle-aged spinsters, Belinda and Harriet Bede. A close reading of the autobiography in conjunction with the novels suggests that what began as artistic exuberance and the innate ability of an imaginative young writer to project herself into the sensibility of an older woman, became in her own life a deliberate disguise; she adopted a protective strategy which enabled a retreat from pain as well as a pragmatic accommodation to reality subsequent to the disappointment and anguish attendant upon Harvey's marriage. This paradigm of "romantic thralldom" muted into platonic friendship or "second best" pragmatic marriages repeats in the novels.

<sup>2</sup> Fisichelli writes: "At the beginning of her spy novel, So Very Secret, she [Pym] makes a marginal notation. 'Is spinster an occupation? Very definitely.' It is almost as though she feels compelled to work out her emotional struggles, her need to define herself through roles in her writing. Pym probably felt in control of the situations that she could turn into fiction" (10).

<sup>3</sup> See "Performances of the Gaze" in Nancy K. Miller's, Subject to Change 162-203. The power of the gaze is a masculine prerogative which is appropriated by Pym's spinsters; it is de-sexed and transformed into what novelist Anita Brookner calls "the chemical eye of the artist." Miller explains that "woman's place in culture is constructed by man's view of her," i.e. a performance of the gaze, and asks, "Can the gaze of a woman writer 'speak' the body differently in images that don't 'fix her in the frame'?" (165). By retreating into the guise of brown horse spinster, Pym's protagonists, "refuse the legitimacy of a permanent patriarchal construction" [emphasis added] (165). The metamorphosis into the mask of spinster "buys time" and temporary freedom from the constraints of the Romantic plot which will "fix her in the frame." Miller's source for this last quotation is Mary Ann Doane, "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body," October 23 (1981): 36. The image of the gaze entered feminist studies through Laura Mulvey's classic article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen (1975).

<sup>4</sup> See discussions of the erotic significance of the female foot and restrictive shoes in Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology, "Chinese Footbinding: On Footbinding the 'Lotus Hook,'" 134-150 and Andrea Dworkin, Woman Hating, "Gynocide: Chinese Footbinding," 95-116. Daly comments on the pejorative connotation associated with women who wear sensible shoes. Pym's private eyes walk extensively in pursuing their interests, and achieve a freedom and mobility in the de-sexualizing of their appearance which is not available once they "put on" the cultural trappings of a sexuality that inevitably renders women spatially restricted and confined:

Anyone who thinks of contemporary Western stylish women's shoes and of the indoctrination women all receive from earliest childhood

about the "correctness" of such footwear knows something of this [supposed] "affinity" [women have always had ... for fragile foundations and willowy walking] and its origins. We have all heard the familiar derisive remarks about "women who wear sensible shoes." The term sensible, meaning reasonable, is used as derogatory when applied to women's choice of footwear. An implication of this is that women should not be sensible/reasonable because this is de-sexualizing in men's eyes. The connection between the condition of one's feet and the state of one's mind is implied in this adjective, sensible. Hobbling on spiked heels or platform shoes, painfully smiling, women feel physically and emotionally unsteady. (146)

Pym's spinsters often sacrifice the ability to attract men for emotional steadiness and, by implication, intellectual astuteness when they put on "sensible shoes."

The retreat into asexual disguise in response to rejection is clear in the pattern discernible in the autobiography. Pym repeatedly chose to lavish her affection on vain men in whom there was no corresponding physical "chemistry" of attraction for her. She pursued Henry Harvey, for example, quite aggressively and received very brutal verbal rebuffs, even while she was being used as a "doormat" (VPE 37). With typical discretion, only a few of these remarks are recorded, but they are extremely revealing. Harvey enjoyed humiliating her in front of his friends by mocking her devotion, and, after they had become intimate as a result of his repeated euphemistic invitations that she "come to tea" in his rooms, she writes:

Just before lunch Henry called and tried to persuade me to go to tea. But I resolutely refused. After lunch he came in again and stayed all afternoon and moreover was quite nice most of the time .... Just before going he said 'Oh you're common property.' He tried to be nice to me when he saw he'd hurt me. (VPE 38)

It is important to note that these deliberately destructive remarks were often directed towards her physical appearance or her mild attempts at "making an effort." Pym was an attractive, but far from beautiful woman, with somewhat prominent teeth. She records: "Henry was rude about my teeth, which always makes me unhappy" (52). On another occasion, "He made fun of my pink toenails, saying that I must hide them under a table as quickly as possible" (48). It is not difficult to surmise that her vulnerability under these conditions was a catalyst to a defensive withdrawal into the safe disguise of "old brown horse spinster." After Harvey's marriage, she continues to write to him; Miss Pym is, like so many of her fictional women, positioned at the window as the Lucian metamorphosis repeated in so many of her novels begins:

And Miss Pym is looking out of the window, and she is looking into the field opposite the house where there are many lambs frisking, it being spring, the sweet spring, when maids dance in a ring. But this Miss Pym, although she is, so to speak, a maid, is not dancing in a ring, no sir, and she is not frisking, no buddy, no how. She is seeing an old brown horse which is walking with a slow majestic dignity ... and she is thinking it is the horse she will be imitating and not the lambs. (67)

Pym's own deliberate withdrawal from the agony of a passionate relationship of unequal affection in an attempt to find solace and sanctuary on the periphery recurs in the characters of the numerous excellent women within the canon. Jean Baker Miller notes that, "direct, honest reaction to destructive treatment is avoided" (9) if one is in a subordinate position in a relationship. Pym's reaction was always to attempt to maintain the connection through the compromise

of withdrawal and the transmutation of the connection into the kinder affection of a "celibate" friendship.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Emmet Long notes the diminished sexuality in Pym's male characters and sees this as indicative of the increasing marginalization and erosion of traditional authority: "One remembers that the masculine principle itself has lost its power and efficacy in the tight, retrenched, postwar England that Pym observes with easy precision" (107).

<sup>7</sup> Pym's habitual role-playing, as well as the profound conflict between a desire for romance and sexual fulfilment and the dry detachment of emotional distancing necessary to survive disappointing relationships, is noted by Anne M. Wyatt-Brown in her essay, "Ellipses, Eccentricity and Evasion in the Diaries of Barbara Pym." She writes, "For most people, inventing or assuming a new identity is either uncommon or a sign of mental deterioration, but in Barbara's case inventing roles for herself or for her family, was quite routine" (Rossen 37).

<sup>8</sup> Fisichelli records that Pym adopted a self-effacing posture in her years at the International African Institute which parallels the role of helpmate often assumed by her protagonists: "Dr. David Gilmore of the Stony Brook Anthropology Department notes that several of Pym's heroines assume the same self-effacing role which Pym adopted at the Institute. Mildred Lathbury, Prudence Bates etc. help male scholars forward their research by making unacknowledged editorial contributions to academic projects" (185). Dale Spender explores the phenomenon of male appropriation of women's work in artistic and scholarly publications in The Writing or the Sex and Women of Ideas. Of course, Pym's women do not have the educational background or expertise of the male scholars in many cases. Nevertheless, though women are excluded from "important" work, such work could not be completed without their frequently "unacknowledged" contributions.

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Dworkin summarizes the artifice of female sexuality which Western culture promotes as "normal":

In our culture, not one part of a woman's body is left untouched, unaltered. No feature or extremity is spared the art, or pain, of improvement. Hair is dyed, lacquered, straightened, permanented; eyebrows are plucked, pencilled, dyed; eyes are lined, mascaraed, shadowed; lashes are curled or false--from head to toe, every feature of a woman's face, every section of her body is subject to modification, alteration.... From the age of 11 or 12 until she dies a woman will spend a large part of her time, money and energy on binding, plucking, painting and deodorizing herself. (114)

Pym reflects an awareness of a profoundly sad dichotomy in cultural values in relation to women--especially the aging or old, in a notebook entry:

1 October. [1977] We [Barbara and sister Hilary] took two sisters from the village to visit their other sister 'terminally ill' in the Churchill. Driving in the car, the smell of poverty.... Looking at one of them with her hairy chin and general air of greyness one couldn't help thinking that this was as much a woman as a glamorous perfumed model. [emphasis added] (VPE 306)

<sup>10</sup> It is here that the quick-eyed love of the novelistic enterprise has freedom to "play." In a Barthesian analogy, one might say that the Pym protagonist as "novelist" forgoes the erotics of culture for the erotics of the duplicitous "text":

They [texts of duplicity] always have two edges. The subversive edge may seem privileged because it is the edge of violence; but it

is not violence which affects pleasure, nor is it destruction which interests it; what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the dissolve which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss. Culture thus recurs as an edge: in no matter what form (Barthes, Pleasure 7). Bakhtin reinforces this insight in his assertion that all dialogism occurs on the borderlines of cultures, where one culture or language may evaluate another. Creative understanding results when "a dialogue enriching to both cultures may take place" (M and E 310).

It is in this sense, I believe, that Ackley's perception of Pym's depiction of a woman putting on make-up can be read as "vicious." She is writing here "in the gap" of the imperfect fit, making the reader acutely aware of the violence of a damaging cultural imposition upon a subdominant group. Women are forced to see and value themselves by a set of artificial and arbitrary criteria--for the aging woman, the inevitable erosion of "value" is particularly painful and cruel. For the discerning novelist, however, the site of this slippage or "gap" produces the dissonance which reveals a cultural incongruity and the counterpoints of novelistic plenitude.

## CHAPTER IV

Divided on the Boundary Line: Dialogization and the Culture Text

The author [of the polyphonic novel] is profoundly active but his activity is of a special dialogic sort... This is a questioning, provoking, answering, agreeing, objecting activity...every internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another, and in this tension filled encounter lies its entire essence.

Bakhtin, "Towards a Reworking of the Dostoyevsky Book" (1961)<sup>1</sup>

The fact that the [female] novelist conceives of her work in an atmosphere of disruption is...entirely promising. It suggests a covert perception of writing as trespass, of writing as a force of interruption in which the ideas of "unity" or "the tradition" or even "the novel" are continually challenged by the alien rhythms of everyday life and the interrogative rhythms of the writer's own body.

Patricia Yaeger, Honey-Mad Women (1988)

Two of the sites of unresolved counterstatement in Pym's work have already been addressed in this study: the double-voiced, oblique links between muted and dominant speech in an application of the Ardener cultural model and the splitting of the female protagonist which results in the assumption of disguise or culturally sanctioned costumes available for the female characters. I now wish to consider some of the ways in which dialogical criticism helps to identify contending, often contradictory, viewpoints as subtexts in the novels. In a consideration of style, such an approach can better facilitate analysis of the "emphasis added" or characteristic "local flavour" of the oppositional subtext in women's writing in general, and, by noting idiosyncratic foci of profound tension, foreground recurrent sites of dissonance in Pym's texts.

Discourse theory, then, opens up new ways of approaching the grounds of ideological tension in the canon. Pym consistently interrogates and disrupts her narrow social context--middle and upper-middle class Britain between 1930 and 1980--in such a way as to make the reader aware of the difficulties faced by her female protagonists in their efforts to achieve even a small measure of self-realization and self-esteem within its formidable constraints.

Pym's ideological debates characteristically focus on those institutions and socially derived images of women which combine to construct what Joanne S. Frye describes as the "culture text." Frye adopts this term from J.S. Lotman's "Point of View in a Text" in New Literary History.<sup>3</sup> She also equates the culture text with a second concept--that of the "femininity text." Both neologisms describe the entrapment of women within a binary opposition in fictional narratives; these traditional teleologies mandate, for the educated female protagonist, an inescapable series of either/ors: motherhood or individuation, love or work, sexuality or autonomy, body or mind (J.S. Frye 2-3). As a result, in many nineteenth or even twentieth-century novels, "none of [the] protagonists can really do anything, none can act for herself or find in her intelligence and sexuality and ambition the resources by which to develop into complex adult womanhood" (2).

The fact that women in real life are negotiating these compromises painfully all the time, especially in the last few decades, does not preclude the fact that the fictional patterns of the inherited literary tradition provide little flexibility for the protagonists of a more contemporary female writer who seeks to revise or transcend such prescriptive alternatives. Bakhtin theoretically eschewed all ideological dichotomies and celebrated the liberation of multiple perspectives and possibilities in novelistic prose. In Pym's art, the struggle with the many aspects of her culture which press to mandate these alternatives is expressed not so much in a revised plot teleology--though she does attempt innovation here as well--but in the inscription of these frustrating woman-centred conflicts within the deceptively "static" prose passages of the texts.

Consequently, all of Pym's protagonists find themselves engaged in an oblique interrogation of the culture text. Their inner struggle with these conflicting forces can be foregrounded through dialogic analysis because much of the debate is internalized in authorial bridge passages or embedded in the voiced dialogue. The multi-layered richness of language in all novels can be perceived more precisely through such a scrutiny. The "emphasis added" or additional complexities of the woman's text, however, where the author and protagonists themselves may be divided or torn between conflicting loyalties to one or the other side of the cultural alternatives mandated for women, is particularly marked in Pym. In her novels, Bakhtin's dialogic tools are especially effective in identifying the multiple, even contradictory viewpoints of an "Underground Woman." Pym's oblique style reveals its dissidences through discourse analysis as well as demonstrating an idiosyncratic, democratic tolerance of divergent perspectives; such a scrutiny can identify these tensions even within the grammatical boundaries of a single sentence.

The frequent interactions of Pym's heroines with the Church and the Academy, then, as representative of rigidly patriarchal institutions undergoing transition, are always quizzical and frequently polemical. Her negotiations with the conventional roles and restrictive narratives available to middle-class women provide centres where divergent points of view collide, particularly when focused on traditional literary or theological versions of "truth." Dialogical criticism is particularly useful in providing more sensitive tools for a close textual analysis of fiction written by women in conflict, revealing significant gaps between authoritative versions of reality, which include the perpetuation of the culture text, and the necessarily contentious and divergent perceptions of women as a marginalized, subdominant group.

Bakhtin celebrates the complexity, diversity and potential for unfinalizability in the many voices which populate the text. For Bakhtin, the ideal polyphonic' (dialogic) novel allows the great human seminar to continue, liberated from monologic authorial control. . The author is active, but democratically positioned "alongside" (PDP 6) the characters. Moreover, the

generic shaping of comic laughter is subversive and contesting yet finally life-affirming and liberating; consequently, in the carnivalized novel, muted and silenced voices are allowed to speak and to sound alongside authoritative speech.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, there is an absence in Bakhtin's original formulation of this liberating vision--a consideration of the added complexity that the dialogic process assumes when woman is inserted as author and character. Bakhtin has been characterized as gender blind or misogynist in this respect because his formulations at no point address the additional oppositional subtexts which can result when novels are female-authored and woman-centred.<sup>4</sup> Anne Herrmann theorizes an extension of dialogic analysis which includes a consideration of the complications which ensue when both author and characters recreate Luce Irigaray's concept of the specular (split) female subject.<sup>5</sup> Herrmann notes:

But Bakhtin's dialogic represses gender by assuming gender-neutral,<sup>6</sup> that is, masculine subjects.... The specular [female] subject constitutes itself simultaneously as subject and object, as woman and "the other woman," that is, woman's own otherness in language and the other women of her sex. (Dialogic and Difference 7)

Male authors can recreate myriad sources of conflict in their fictions, but perhaps they cannot--at least with the same authenticity--speak to the particular divisions which frustrate and further divide women as authors when they must contest the femininity text while necessarily living within its imposed dichotomies.

Despite the Bakhtinian blindness to gender, his meditations on the role of the author acknowledge the presence of the novelist within the text, countering Barthes' argument which posits the "death" of the author and, consequently, the writer's final irrelevance to any meaning or interpretation of the work of art. For women writers who have frequently been historically rendered "invisible" through exclusion, Bakhtin's alternative is attractive because it provides a



theory which enables a recognition of the inscription of the divided female subject as author and character; this additional phenomenon of division and refraction occasioned by a consideration of gender helps to account for the disturbing dissonances which characterize the novels of a woman writer and, more specifically, those of Barbara Pym.

Focusing upon the white, educated, British, middle-class woman, Pym's texts reflect clearly the open, unfinalizable debate between and among author and characters, as well as within the author herself, and recreate many of the tensions relevant to the position of woman when the divided self encounters the other(s) on the boundary line of a culture. Pym's "personal" voice, which is characteristic of her democratic relationship to all the "voices" which sound in her fiction, is described by Hazel Holt when she comments upon "Finding a Voice: a radio talk," which Pym recorded on February 8, 1978:

To those of us who knew her, this piece is especially poignant since, through the words, we can hear that quiet, rather hesitant voice, summing up with style and succinctness her thoughts on writing and on "finding one's own particular voice" ending, typically, on a wrv, almost wistful query. [emphasis added] (CTS 4)

Pym's quizzical voice, and those of her female characters within the texts, explore multiple positions and offer tentative, open-ended options for her characters. Never dogmatic, she is consistently tolerant of alternate perspectives, and cannot be unequivocally identified with any particular point of view.

This immediately recognizable authorial voice--hesitant, restrained and "ending...on a query"--is evident when Pym speaks, with characteristic humility, of her goal as a writer:

I think that's the kind of immortality most authors would want--to feel that their work would be immediately recognizable as having

been written by them and by nobody else. But of course, it's a lot to ask for. ("A Radio Talk", CTS 388)

Pym achieved this elusive goal. Her novels are both double-voiced--as demonstrated in the application of the Ardener cultural model in Chapter Two--and dialogic (polyphonic),<sup>9</sup> in that they are representative of texts in which no single viewpoint is allowed to prevail. One can readily discern the hybrid fusion of two or more voices, which characterizes all novelistic prose, in many of the speeches of her female characters--the ironic subtexts evident in the language of Belinda Bede (STG) or Emma Howick (FGL), for example--or in authorial bridge passages. It becomes evident, however, that such speeches introduce an additional agenda in Pym's work; they incorporate the oppositional woman's voice in a subtext which is frequently engaged in a deconstruction of the culture text. As J.S. Frye suggests, Pym's women can seldom do anything about the perceived inequities and hypocrisy of a male-dominated society, but the novel provides an outlet for both divided author and protagonist at least to query incongruity and to voice confusion and/or frustration. Pym rebels "on paper," and the structure of the novel permits her to do so.

It is further demonstrable, then, that the multiple voices (heteroglossia) which populate the texts are, at the same time, engaged in a continuous debate consistent with a woman writer contesting the femininity text. This ongoing dialogue addresses a central philosophical and pragmatic preoccupation of the author and her female characters. Expressed succinctly, this question is "How am I, as a woman, to make a life?" This life, in Pym, must be constructed in the interstices of the enclosing grids of the culture text--the Romance plot and the institution of marriage, the Church of England, the Academy and the literary canon. The response to this query varies from novel to novel, all of which explore the limited range of options available to her women as they negotiate compromises within the narrow parameters which mark the constraints of the author's particular time frame, class and culture. All of Pym's women engage in an on-going dialogue within themselves, and with other women and men, in an

effort to make a life which enables them to find a measure of personal fulfilment and happiness. Consequently, Barbara Pym is a woman writer who--in manifesting the contextual variables of a unique personality, the traumas of early romantic attachments, a sentimental affection for the traditions of her academic and religious education and a penchant to translate experience into the comic mode--presents an interesting subject for discourse analysis. In her unresolved dialogue with the dichotomies of the femininity text, she can be seen to represent an early, tentative stage of feminist opposition to cultural constraints; though often ambivalent and seldom overtly articulated, her artistic contestations are nevertheless rendered accessible through a study of prosaics.

The many divisions and tensions which emerge are situated not only amongst the characters and the author, but also are in contention within the divided consciousness of the protagonist. All voices are set in play in this debate, resulting in that special kind of polyphonic unity which Bakhtin describes as "a dialogic concordance of unmerged twos and multiples" (Morson and Emerson, Rethinking Bakhtin, TRDB 289). Because of its insistence that dissonance remain unresolved, and its emphasis on the unique capacity of novelistic prose to interrogate dominant discourses and value counterstatement, dialogic criticism illuminates the strange, ambivalent resonances and complex richness of Pym's texts.

Perhaps a point of entry for a discussion of dialogization in Pym is a particularly pertinent observation by Morson and Emerson in their attempts to describe Bakhtin's essential understanding of the disruptive role of the novel:

Overcoming naiveté is part of the novel's generic task. Novels invade a tranquil realm to dispute territory, violate generic decorum, and upset poetic harmony... Where language was once unself-conscious and categorical, after being novelized it becomes polemical and double-voiced; it takes a sideward glance at other ways of speaking. (Creation of a Prosaics 304)

Pym's particular disruptions of "the tranquil realm" of the monologic voices and institutions of her culture--often articulated as challenges to the femininity text--are manifest in at least four major sites of comic transgression: in the woman-centred debate within the divided subject of author and/or female character; in the interrogations implicit in what Bakhtin calls "compositionally expressed dialogues"--that is, direct exchanges between characters of either sex; in the quasi-direct discourse of bridge passages--the "hybridized, double-voiced dialogized heteroglossia of the author's own voice" in which the phenomena of "hidden polemic" and the "sideward glance" may be discerned (M and E 326)--and finally, a crucial focus of dissonance in Pym, in intertextuality in the Bakhtinian sense of embedded "other-author zones." Here the paradigms and ideologies of the literary tradition--a key component of the culture text for Pym--become a part of the essential texture of the novels. I will demonstrate how each of these discursive centres is a locus of contention, where cultural values and inherited "truths" which define femininity are interrogated when the divided female self meets the other on the boundary-line, the gap or seam of the text. Any one of the novels could be used to demonstrate Pym's characteristic agenda; A Glass of Blessings, Some Tame Gazelle and The Sweet Dove Died as representative of mid, early and late texts, however, will provide the primary exemplars.

The divisions evident in Pym as author, within her female protagonists, and in her extensive gallery of minor female characters, recreate the central debate of the novels--how to make a life as an intelligent, educated, middle-class woman in a society where the accepted norms have largely internalized "the female plot," and where there are only a limited number of alternate "costumes" which are culturally sanctioned. I have previously considered the disguise of "brown horse spinster" which permits the realization of the detached author-function or a "coming to writing" for the protagonist while she remains invisible on the margins of a culture. Fulfilling the function of novelist *manguée* through most of the text, she yet retains the capacity for metamorphosis to "married woman," thus inscribing a personal dichotomy in alternating between these "life-slots."

Both Pym as author and her fictional subjects as protagonists hesitate between succumbing to the pressures to live out the "ideal" of Romance as constructed by the heroine's plot by choosing marriage, and a rebellious desire to resist its constraints through the adoption of oblique strategies of evasion. There is a paradox involved in assuming each side of the sexuality/autonomy dichotomy in Pym. If her protagonists marry, the cultural "ideal" of Romantic love is nevertheless compromised, as rapture fades with time, and is inevitably eroded by the reductive reality of the sexual relationship and the pedestrian routines of daily life; the "poetic" myth of Romance is soon contested by the "prosaic" truths of the flesh. Her married heroines also lose much of their capacity for ironic distance once they move from the margins toward the blind centre of the culture. If her characters resist marriage, they can continue to cherish their internalized Romantic ideals, nourished by--for her many educated women--the literary canon up to the beginning of the twentieth century. Such culturally constructed ideals are always tempered and distanced by the ironic eye of the writer; single women must, however, make a life for themselves as best they can in the interstices of the dominant culture which consistently relegates all women who do not marry to the margins.

It is worth examining the biographical context for this quintessential conflict, as it is integral to the entire canon. Hazel Holt's biography of Pym, A Lot to Ask (1990), explores the paradoxes of Pym's relationships with men. Barbara Pym idealized and "fictionalized" many men in her life--Henry Harvey, Julian Amery, Gordon Glover, Richard Roberts--and, it seems, preferred to remain sexually aloof--to separate the "poetry" of the Romantic culture text from the "prose" of a physical relationship. Richard Roberts, a young homosexual friend, represented perhaps an ideal companion for Pym in later years--he was artistic, handsome and reasonably intelligent--but, as she writes in her notes preparatory to recreating the situation in The Sweet Dove Died, "She [Leonora] thinks perhaps this is the kind of love I've always wanted because absolutely nothing can be done about it!" (VPE 229). What becomes clear is that, in Pym, the protagonist discovers that the cultural ideal of Romantic love has little to do with the

kinds of relationships most women actually establish with the men who enter their lives.

Hazel Holt examines this characteristic behavior in Pym whereby she rejected many eligible suitors while idealizing other men who often had no serious romantic interest in her:

It was not really marriage that she wanted--in a way, she never had, certainly not marriage for its own sake, since she had rejected two possible husbands when she was younger. She was not very fond of children, was, indeed, uneasy with them...so that she certainly did not regret the lack of a family. What she really enjoyed--like Prudence [Bates of Jane and Prudence and A Glass of Blessings], the heroine whom she often said that she resembled--was being in love. She would go on being attracted ('attached') to men (often 'unsuitable') until the end. (A Lot 149)

That "being in love" and the "splendours and miseries" of the Romance plot are inconsistent with marriage (or even, one suspects, sexual consummation) is a constant in Pym.

The divisiveness occasioned by a longing for a culturally constructed Romantic ideal countered by a resistance to the realities of a sexual relationship, with its necessary emotional vulnerability and the loss of freedom that such a commitment entails for a woman writer, is a site of dialogic dissonance throughout the novels. The splitting of the subject in Pym as author is made explicit in the biographies. Its genesis is traced to her early days as a student at Oxford, where, it is suggested, in order to gain entry to the group of older, relatively sophisticated and bright young men of whom Henry Harvey was the centre (the circle included John Barnicot, Robert Liddell, and Count Roberto Weiss), she adopted a "daring" sexual persona or alter ego. This "mask," she felt, would perhaps make her accepted socially by people she really wished to relate to on an intellectual level. Holt records:

She had made a new persona for herself when she went to Oxford. This other self was called Sandra--in those days a rather romantic, East European name, an abbreviation of Alexandra. Her notebooks were labelled with the name, her cushions and evening bag embroidered with it... No wonder young men 'teased me a lot about my appalling reputation!' One is reminded of the description of the young Jane Austen as the 'prettiest, silliest, most affected, husband-hunting butterfly.' Not that Barbara and her Oxford contemporaries were hunting husbands. A few did become engaged while at university, many worked hard for careers that were at last being opened to them, but for others it was simply a delightful interlude in their lives, when academic pursuits were embellished and enhanced by rich and varied social activity. (A Lot 29)

Pym would draw upon this "delightful interlude" at Oxford for many of her novels, but it is her relationship with Harvey that sets the pattern for the particular tensions discernible in all her fiction, as she explores numerous alternate scenarios for her heroines in order to revise her own idiosyncratic, asymmetric love affairs. Moreover, in Pym's personal life, the cultural dichotomy which precludes women from being serious and sexual simultaneously is already marked in the Sandra/Barbara split.

Henry Harvey, it seems, maintained a discreet silence on the topic of his relationship with Barbara Pym, until a talk he gave to the PEN Club in 1985, which Holt cites in A Lot to Ask. Harvey is referring here to Pym's aggressive "tracking" of the object of her devotion, which was examined in Chapter Three as part of the investigative activities of the brown horse spinster characters:

In spite of chasing people who took her fancy and having no apparent inhibitions, Barbara was no houri, she wasn't voluptuous. She was without sensuality. Her passions, in so far as they were not kept back to being pretend play passions, stayed in her head and heart.

(A Lot 49)

This is a significant revelation.<sup>10</sup> As Hazel Holt notes of Pym's idealization of Harvey, "Barbara herself was not seduced by Henry, the actual young man, but by Lorenzo, her own creation, who might have stepped out of a seventeenth-century poem or play.... As long as the affair could be swathed in the drapery of Literature, Barbara was able to accept it--even to laugh at it" [emphasis added] (48-49). The importance of the literary canon to Pym's view of life cannot be overstated. Traditional literature--or "pretend play" as Harvey puts it--provided the paradigms through which she imaginatively "recreated" her romantic ideals while, in her more contemporary novels, she simultaneously undercut their authority through counterstatements and subtexts which obliquely articulate her acerbic realization of the slippage between the ideals of artifice and the real.<sup>11</sup> Hence the divisions so apparent in Pym's life and art. There are consistent tensions between the emotional and spiritual ideal of romantic love for which one part of her longs and the dry, pragmatic voice of the everyday. She is enmeshed in the coils of the culture text; these are the particular "nets" which the female author/protagonist must fly, or, more realistically, at least attempt to contest intellectually and emotionally through art in order to articulate the dilemma. The Rabelaisian, carnivalesque spirit recognizes the comic and grotesque gap imposed between spirit and flesh, the myths embodied in the paradigms of art and the comic realities of a sexual relationship as well as the "vast areas" of a woman's daily life which traditional art elides or negates.

Prior to Harvey's marriage, when she began Some Tame Gazelle, and immediately thereafter in her letters, Pym starts the process of fictionalizing and distancing this problematic relationship. The accomplished literary parodies that were her letters written in the style of Ivy Compton-Burnett or Stevie Smith, swath her affair with Harvey "in the drapery of Literature." It is pertinent that both these woman writers, who would have been viewed as peripheral or "minor" in the 1930's, share the capacity to treat what could easily be tragic material--focusing on women's lives--in the comic mode. Comedy becomes Pym's



survival strategy as well. Such parodies provide a Bakhtinian novelistic "distance" from her ideals, and juxtapose them with the co-extensive claims of the quotidian, thus initiating the ideological debates with the culture text which permeate her art. Harvey describes a characteristic dichotomy in the young Barbara:

I think the chief strand in my picture of her in the early days is the alternation in her between pretend play [the fictionalizing or paradigm-making impulse] on the one hand...and her trying or pretending to make her pretend play real.... It didn't work. 'Being in love' and 'being-in-Oxford' were better kept as pretend play. That way they could be turned into art. She was tempted I think sometimes though. Oh the luxury of giving up, of giving up pretend play with all its elaborations, of becoming just a participant, an actor in life, in mere lazy undemanding life. But the other side of Barbara won, the observing, creating Barbara doing her pretend playing in her writing and doing it so well. (A Lot 49)

Here, then, is the locus of the divided subject which results, in every Pym text, in a struggle to renegotiate the old dichotomies of Culture/Nature, Art/Life, Poetry/Prose and, at this time, perhaps the most painful conflict of all-- Wife/Writer<sup>12</sup>--and to transform them into some kind of compromise for her women which opens up the Bakhtinian ideal of multiple possibilities. Pym's art interrogates and disrupts both sides of these binary oppositions, and her texts at least gesture towards a potential for change. The tensions and dissonances are never resolved; all the negotiations are seen to be capable of any number of re-combinations and compromises, depending on the individuals engaged in the process. All the characters make choices but each retains, like Pym, the dialogic characteristic of "ending...on a query" and of living on into new possibilities.

The divided subject--what Anne Herrmann describes as "subject and object...woman and 'the other woman'"--which appears in the Sandra/Barbara split in Pym as author, is recreated in the female protagonists of her texts. Nearly all of the names chosen for her heroines reflect the split between the romantic ideal of womanhood inscribed in literary paradigms (embedded Bakhtinian other-author zones) and the cool, detached pragmatism of woman as comic writer or novelist *manguee*. This is clearly another variation on the beautiful (sexual) woman/serious (asexual) writer split mandated by the femininity text. This dissonance within a name can further be seen to reflect the partially internalized monologic or "poetic" point of view forged by the dominant discourses of the culture text placed in dialogic contention with the polyphonic, disruptive and "prosaic" voices of everyday life which Bakhtin finds exemplified in the English comic novel. The daily round which describes the realities of women's lives is further foregrounded in Pym to provide the "emphasis added" of the feminist text. Centripetal and centrifugal forces collide within her heroine's proper names. Consequently, Pym's fictional names have rich intertextual resonances and tensions, many being drawn from literary classics. The proper names of her contemporary heroines integrate and re-combine traditional allusions with the co-extensive claims of pragmatic daily living. Glynn-Ellen Fisichelli notes the transformation which occurs when Pym recasts life into art and where, as Henry Harvey has also indicated, the dispassionate eye of the writer contests the seductive lure of the heroine's plot:

But Pym, the satirist, tempers the affection which Pym, the idealist, feels for this kind of fiction [romance], and it is interesting to observe the recurrence of mock romantic themes and language in the notebook entries which she makes while writing short stories and novels such as Jane and Prudence.... For the modern novelist...Victorian sentiments become identified with escapist fantasy, comic nostalgia or the misplaced desire for a romantic vision, which, Pym reminds us, never did exist. (111)

The romantic vision did and does exist, however, in the canonical texts of the literary education which Pym and many of her female characters share; moreover, Pym paradoxically admires the Romantics and the Victorians. The sentimental "comforts" for misery, as well as the happy illusions and idealized images of women provided by the culture text, remain consistently more problematic for Pym and her female characters than Fisichelli suggests. Indeed, the tension between Pym's genuine affection for the literary tradition, the Church and the Academy, and her acute perceptions of the artificial and constricting images that these powerful cultural institutions construct for women is central to her art. Time and again, her heroines come to realize the fissures between the illusory world of the grand, the noble and the ideal--which frequently recur in the key texts of their academic training and cultural background--and the reality of their daily lives. Pym is ever torn between the voices of her "human (male) education" and her own, distinctly "feminine" and ironic vision of the relationships between men and women, and life in general.

So it is that the names of Caro Grimstone (AAO), Belinda Bede (STG), Catherine Oliphant (LTA), Prudence Bates (J&P), Jane Cleveland (J&P), Dulcie Mainwaring (NFRL), Emma Howick (FGL), Barbara Bird (CH), Ianthé Broome (UA), Cassandra Marsh-Gibbon (CTS), Flora Palfrey [brown horse spinster?] (CTS, Gervase and Flora), Wilmet Forsyth (GB) and Leonora Eyre (SDD) exemplify the phenomenon of the divided subject. Wilmet, Prudence and Leonora are interesting examples of Pym's novelistic "playing out" for her protagonists of the cultural tensions in an alternative "costume" to brown horse spinster--the beautiful, elegant, sexually cool protagonist. Of the three, only Wilmet is a married woman, and it is interesting to note that Pym names her as one of her favourite heroines. She writes to Philip Larkin: "Catherine [Oliphant] used to be quite a favourite heroine of mine but she now seems less real to me than Wilmet and Prudence (my own favourites)" (VPE 223). It is tempting to view all of Pym's women as alternate attempts to see as "real" the female in some culturally acceptable role that allows her to function as writer as well as "costumed" woman. The canon explores multiple solutions to these cultural dichotomies. At the same time, the

debate remains unresolved for all concerned, as it remains today for many professional women. This kind of "unfinalizability" for the female writer and character may have less optimistic implications, then, than Bakhtin's masculinist vision of the "great seminar of the world," where all of life is dialogic, and where no single point of view can prevail for long. When woman as subordinate enters into discourse, the debate, at least in the real world, is never equal, as the Ardener model demonstrates. The "real" woman, as author or character, cannot see herself, in Pym, unless she is "costumed" appropriately in order to "link" to the dominant discourse and thus recreate the dichotomies of the femininity text. The dialogic debate, however, continues within or behind the various masks or disguises of the characters--none of which completely coincide with the protagonist or the author.

Wilmet Forsyth in A Glass of Blessings is one of Pym's most overtly conventional characters, and thus, perhaps, most "real." As a beautiful, spoiled, married woman she coincides more closely with the femininity text--thus, her "costume" places her closer to the blind centre of her culture. She is consequently distanced from the role of novelist manquée to a greater extent than the brown horse spinster, and more closely allied with the longing for the romantic "ideal" than Jessie Morrow (CH) (J&P), for example. Jessie could never share Wilmet's hubristic blindness to reality. Because of an initial dissatisfaction with the limitations of her eight year marriage to a successful, if somewhat pedestrian, civil servant, Rodney, Wilmet seeks "Romance" elsewhere, in the person of Piers Longridge. That she considers "Romance" the only kind of happiness "suitable" for a woman, and that she cannot initially perceive the "glass of blessings" available in the everyday world around her, is consistent with her internalizing of the femininity text. She must be educated to see beyond its constraints as the novel progresses. The debate within Wilmet is consistent with Pym's central concerns. What can a reasonably intelligent, attractive, leisured (Wilmet does not work)<sup>13</sup> married woman without children do with her life beyond the premature closure of the Romance plot? Her marriage is ostensibly happy and she leads a comfortable life. But, (as Pym's diaries often

indicate concerning her own life) "it is not enough" (VPE 217). Wilmet and her friend Rowena met their husbands in Italy when they had been in the WRNS together; the young men at that time were "dashing army majors" (GB 33) but "now they were Harry going up to Mincing Lane every day and Rodney working from nine-thirty to six at the Ministry" (33). Both women have found the supposed satisfactions of the heroine's plot to be illusory. Wilmet longs for "Romance" beyond the female plot and thinks she may find it with Piers, Rowena's handsome, cultured, but mysteriously "failed" brother. Piers has not married and has held a succession of "dreary" jobs that seem beneath his considerable capabilities. What Wilmet, as one of Pym's blind, naive and beautiful protagonists cannot discern, is that the Byronic, "difficult" Piers--whom she had hoped to "befriend" or with whom she had even contemplated an affair--is a homosexual. This devastating (and funny) epiphany is postponed until late in the novel.

The divisiveness within Wilmet is reflected in her name. Its significance is addressed in the course of a conversation with Piers Longridge, and is a foreshadowing of the novel's comic anagnorisis. The gap between Romance and reality--one aspect of the mind/body split of the culture text--will become manifest when Wilmet discovers that Piers is not the Byronic hero she has "created" in her imagination or "draped" in literature. Piers has his own wisdom, however, and, as Bakhtin suggests, "self" learns from "the other" in all dialogic exchange. The context in which her name is discussed is significant. Wilmet meets Piers for a lunch at which there are a number of "clues" that he is not interested in her romantically; her vanity and rather smug innocence blind her to their significance, however. They go for a walk and come across an imposing building which is not what it at first appears to be. It turns out to be a furniture depository. Discussions of food and furniture in Pym are often oblique displacements for larger concerns--usually sexual. Indeed, the conversation between Piers and Wilmet is a fictional recreation, somewhat subdued here, of the kinds of fanciful speculations that Pym herself often shared on walks with many of her male friends (some of whom were homosexual).<sup>14</sup> Under some circumstances, then, this might be the kind of sympathetic discussion that

foreshadows a romantic liaison. Here, it is tinged with a dry irony that Wilmet cannot perceive:

We had not gone very far when a great and splendid looking building loomed up round a bend in the path. It was of rose brown brick, with minarets almost in the Turkish style. The facade was decorated with carved swags of fruit and flowers, and there were many windows, blank and blind looking, some a little open.

'What is it?' I asked in wonder. 'I never expected to see such a building here.'

'It's a furniture depository,' said Piers.

'But those minarets and Grinling Gibbons decorations--it's all too noble to be just that!'

'The birds have not respected it,' said Piers, and I saw that the rosy facade was white with their droppings.

'I wonder what it's like inside,' I said. 'Vast high-ceilinged rooms filled with huge shrouded bulky objects--great trunks of clothes, surely rather musty now, and books too.'

'Or a kind of sprawling decay--the furniture rotting and riddled with woodworm, legs of tables breaking off in your hand, chair backs collapsing at a touch...'

'I'm sure that couldn't be so when it belongs to such a very reputable firm,' I protested. 'And I suppose things couldn't be left there indefinitely.'

'You would have to pay, of course,' said Piers. 'It would be like keeping an aged relative in an institution.'

'Yes, that grand piano for which you've never found room in your new flat. It's rather sad, really, isn't it?'

'But Wilmet, life is like that, you know. Like your name--so sad, and you so gay and poised.'

I liked this description of myself and longed for him to say more.

'Did you know that my name came out of one of Charlotte M. Yonge's novels?' I asked him. 'My mother was very fond of them. But why do you think it sad?'

'Because it seems to be neither one thing nor the other,' he said, rather mysteriously, and then fell silent. (71-72)

Crucial tensions in Pym's work can be discerned in this passage, situated in the divided protagonist and her world view. Wilmet's bemused utterance, "'it's all too noble to be just that'" with its incredulous emphasis on the final pronoun, marks the "other woman's" longing for the ideal and her disbelief at the reductive nature of the real. The whole passage can be read as a metaphor for modern Britain, and Wilmet's (and Pym's) dismay at the decay of all of its cultural institutions. The "grand piano"--an idealized tradition--does not fit into the contemporary, constrained realities of her protagonists' lives. Just as one side of Pym reveres all that is purported to be "noble," the other, carnivalesque, side of her is cognizant that much is, in truth, a "façade." Piers will turn out to be no more noble or "romantic" than the deceptive building which "the birds have not respected." Wilmet, who does not share the author's reductive vision at this point, wishes to romanticize and fictionalize even the contents of the building. Piers is aware of corruption and decay, and his darker vision foreshadows Wilmet's imminent epiphanies.

A brown horse spinster is well aware of the deceptive "decorated" façade of what appears to be "noble," whether it be future husband and the institution of marriage, clergyman within the crumbling "architecture" of the contemporary Church of England, or academic within the pettiness of the Learned Society, "our Great Library" or red-brick university. Because Wilmet is a naive romantic, she has internalized much of the dominant "culture text" suggested by the "blank and blind-looking windows." Like the young Barbara Pym who created her "pretend play" Lorenzo, she is blind to much of the truth of the real world around her. The obsolescence and decay of post-war Britain suggested by the furniture depository, which stores noble pieces from the great houses which are no longer

viable, suggests a general cultural erosion.

A Glass of Blessings is thus a more subtle, oblique text than, for example, Some Tame Gazelle. The ironic perspective is found not so much in the protagonist, but refracted through the authorial voice and among the speeches of other, more worldly, characters. For example, Piers can perceive the bleaker realities of corruption, loss and decay which even the aegis of such a "reputable firm"--the British tradition--can no longer mask effectively. While homosexual, he is nevertheless male--he is beyond the gender constraints of the culture text which encourage reverence for authoritative institutions and the silencing of "unsuitable" criticisms in "feminine" women. It becomes clear that in Pym's cultural milieu, homosexuality is not the factor that determines marginalization for men from authoritative institutions; Piers's "failure" stems from grounds other than sexual orientation. Nevertheless, as an intelligent man disillusioned with the world around him, he can see its limitations in ways that beautiful Wilmet is not yet able to recognize.

Later, in a more overtly sexual context, Sybil Forsyth, Wilmet's pragmatic, widowed, mother-in-law, will bluntly voice her sympathetic cognizance of the homosexual element in the Church of England. Wilmet is blind to the hollow reality of much of what remains of a noble tradition because of her naive idealization of the clergy, just as she is blind to the same fact in her romanticizing of Piers. Pym, as author, is aware of these truths, however, and reveals them in this novel through a juxtaposing of points of view in other characters, as well as in authorial bridge passages. Another way of viewing this complexity in feminist terms is that, in this first-person narrative, Pym has negotiated the Writer/Wife dichotomy by largely reserving the contestations of the cultural milieu for the authorial voice and marginal characters rather than the heroine. Wilmet, by conforming to the conventional images of the culture text as a "beautiful--and Christian--wife" is denied perceptions of incongruities readily apparent to others. She cannot easily be conventional heroine and novelist manquée simultaneously--a split which Pym negotiates differently, and always with difficulty, in other texts. There is thus a subtle interplay of



diverse perspectives.

The furniture depository is an apt metaphor for the many (necessary) disillusionments Wilmet will face. She experiences numerous instances of genuine "surprisingness" through her misreading of many of the characters in the course of ultimately gaining some perspective on her "glass of blessings." For example, she cannot yet interpret others accurately because she continues to perceive them through the perspectives of her upbringing and education, which tend to elide some unpleasant truths about the men and institutions which she has been encouraged to idealize. She continues to view Piers (and the clergy) through dominant perspectives which have been largely internalized. Similarly, she views other women--and herself--through the dichotomies of the culture text. She is shocked, for example, when dowdy Mary Beamish becomes the bride of handsome Father Ransome, and when elderly Sybil Forsyth marries (elderly) Professor Root. Old and/or plain women are conventionally excluded by the femininity text from the heroine's plot which ends in marriage. Challenging these stereotypes is another aspect of Pym's contestation of inherited cultural dichotomies.

Piers notes that she is "neither one thing nor the other," and that is an apt description of the "uneven texture" (Vaeger) of Pym's art as she recreates what becomes, in the las. novels, an increasingly tragi-comic vision of the dilemma of her protagonists. Wilmet's name, which is borrowed from Charlotte M. Yonge, a favourite author of Pym's--such "richness" (VPE 263)--evokes the Victorian image of woman, partly internalized by many female readers, including Pym herself, as "the angel in the house"; she is innocent, self-sacrificing and "drearly splendid" (VPE 141). In fact, Wilmet cannot live up to these ideals, and, like other Pym protagonists--Mildred Lathbury (EW), for example--often feels guilty over an inevitable sense of inadequacy. Here is yet another source of divisiveness in many of her protagonists, should they attempt to conform to the unrealistic images of the culture text. At the same time, the richness of Yonge's novels imitates a world in which any acknowledgement of sexual ambivalence or homosexuality is necessarily suppressed. Internalizing an idealized image of the Christian woman, and sheltered in her marriage, it is not

surprising that Wilmet is an innocent in Piers's world, although it seems she might be willing to indulge in a "mild affair." Such a paradox is not inconsistent in Pym, where it is the flirting and the courtship that "every woman wants," not the "one thing" every man wants--the inevitably reductive sexual encounter. The Bakhtinian "other-author zone" also comes into play here; earlier, Wilmet evokes Coleridge when contemplating a somewhat drunken, glittering-eyed Piers and thinks of the Ancient Mariner. The Romantic vision of a sinner redeemed by learning to love will have an ironic relevance. Wilmet will not rescue Piers with her womanly offer of affection and comfort in the perceived tradition of the Victorian heroine. Instead, he will teach her to "love all things both great and small." The "small" creature she must finally accept with Christian love is Keith, Piers's engaging, if rather pathetic and common, young lover.

The split between the ideal "façade" of cultural norms and a prosaic reality is easily demonstrated in Wilmet's internalized speeches. In some instances, she is made aware of the "real"; in others, only the reader and the author recognize the dichotomy. It is possible to discern several voices embedded in the text. A typical example is expressed through the metaphor of landscape and reveals tangentially Pym's acute awareness of England in social transition. Wilmet is travelling by bus to spend the weekend with old friends, the Talbots, whose marriage has settled into a pedestrian routine which, it is implied, leaves both partners open to adulterous liaisons. Indeed, it will be the decidedly unromantic and faintly ludicrous Harry--his reductive name suggests his less than "ideal" persona--who attempts to initiate an affair with Wilmet in yet another episode which recreates Bakhtinian "surprisingness." Wilmet muses:

I looked forward to my weekend with Rowena and Harry as I sat in the Green Line bus on Friday afternoon. I had taken care to avoid the rush hour and should be there in time for tea. We travelled through some of the pleasanter suburbs and were soon in the country--tame country, really, though once I caught a glimpse of a mysterious Excalibur-like lake through

a gap in some trees, beyond which stood a great house now turned into a country club, with swimming pool and American bar, as the noticeboard proclaimed. (GB 33)

Wilmet's formal, fastidious tone establishes her "character zone." She "had taken care to avoid the rush hour" and to arrive "in time for tea." Wilmet is fond of comfort and not anxious to be placed in any situation which might ruffle her cool, calm elegance, such as traffic jams or the proximity of harried office workers. The literary canon is evoked again as she romanticizes her glimpse of a great house by "a mysterious Excalibur-like lake." Piers's enigmatic silence when discussing her name is also described by Wilmet as romantically "mysterious." Ironically, Piers later voices his perceptions of Wilmet in a devastating portrayal which shocks her profoundly. Not only is he immune to Wilmet's beauty, he informs her that, unlike her literary namesake in Yonge's novel, "'Some people are less capable of loving their fellow human beings than others...it isn't necessarily their fault.'" Wilmet is hurt and incredulous that "anyone could doubt my capacity to love!" (199)<sup>15</sup> It becomes increasingly clear that in order for any woman to "make a life" in Pym, she must first deconstruct the tradition of "Romance" and the images of women embedded in the femininity text. The confusion and pain that often result form the central polemic of the novels.

Such withering disillusionments are often obliquely suggested through literary allusion or "other author zones." The brief fragment of quasi-direct discourse in which Wilmet contemplates the passing landscape from a Green Line bus is characteristic. There is an explicit reference to literature--Malory's Morte d'Arthur, or the poetry of Tennyson, perhaps, in the Excalibur-like lake. This brief passage, like the description of the furniture depository, is thus embedded with an allusion or parallel to traditional literature. At the same time, the carnivalesque language of the everyday is evident in a satiric juxtaposition of "noticeboard" prose. The great house is now a "country club" for the nouveau riche enamoured of "swimming pools" and "American bars."

Wilmet's romantic "spinning" fantasies about a beautiful house in an evocative landscape reminiscent of Malory or Tennyson are here abruptly reduced by a crude and explicit "noticeboard." Unfortunately, Piers is not adorned with a similarly instructive written caveat proclaiming his sexual preference and "unsuitability" for romantic fantasies. In many ways, Wilmet "Forsyth" lacks "foresight." The implication is that women must learn to distance themselves from the cultural tradition in making realistic, pragmatic decisions about their lives. Much of Romantic and Victorian literature belongs on the bookshelf, to be enjoyed as "pretend play"; it can be dangerous and potentially destructive for women to try to apply the myths that traditional art perpetuates to their own, real-life relationships with men.

In these brief passages, then, it is possible to discern at least four sites of dialogism which demonstrate antimonies central to Pym's concerns: in the divided protagonist, in the different perspectives provided in direct discourse by Wilmet and Piers's antithetical speculations about the interior of the furniture depository (positive and negative, romantic and pragmatic, idealistic and worldly), in the quasi-direct discourse of the internalized description of both the depository and the suburban landscape, and in the often ironic or disruptive use of literary allusion.

Each of these locations invites a more detailed consideration. At this point, however, I wish to investigate further the dialogic interplay among heteroglot languages, the individualized speech of characters. Additionally, the relationship of various "character zones," particularly those associated with authoritative discourse such as the clergy, with other discourses--the Bakhtinian "compositional stylistic unities"<sup>16</sup> of the novel--will be examined. Because many of these forms of discourse or "stylistic unities" are drawn from everyday life in novelistic prose, Pym's carnivalized text gives special emphasis to diverse kinds of quotidian heteroglot "languages" in close proximity with authoritative speech, so that each provides a dialogic gloss or counterstatement to the other. In Pym's work, these mundane languages--frequently associated with women or men who are accorded little respect in the world of the novels--are

characteristically used to query or interrupt the "seamless" authority of various kinds of dominant discourse--the literary canon, moral discourse such as sermons, hymns, scholarly language and so on. It is useful to isolate and illustrate the dialogization of some of these potentially disruptive languages.

One of these "everyday" languages is what the Formalists (and Bakhtin) call "skaz"--oral, everyday narration such as colloquial speech or dialect--the language of the common people. Pym uses skaz when fashioning "the stylistically individualized speech of characters" which marks a discernible character zone. She employs one such example in an oblique interrogation of the Anglican Church, as Wilmet thinks out her relationship to that traditionally authoritative but fast-changing institution. In the process, Pym reveals deep conflicts within both author and protagonist as they struggle to demystify internalized cultural images of the dominant males and the languages associated with them. Dominant authority, in this context, is frequently synonymous with all that is perceived to be erudite, fastidious, upper-middle class and male. Churchwomen are consistently marginalized and can find their places only as helpmates or overtly uncritical admirers. Because only men may enter the priesthood, and because Anglican priests are traditional symbols of an idealized vision of the clergy as intellectually and morally superior to women, Pym's depictions of her clergymen are frequently opportunities for a subversive deflation and parody which is characteristically introduced through the insertion of various kinds of "everyday" speech which counter inflated or specious male rhetoric. Two exchanges--one between Wilmet and Wilfred Bason, the effete homosexual cook and housekeeper at the clergy house, and another involving Wilmet and the three priests, Father Thames, young Father Ransome and Father Bode--are characteristic. These are, in fact, subtle ideological debates concerning the nature of the "good" clergyman, which obliquely contest some significant flaws in the institution of the Church and its fundamental assumption of male moral authority.

A number of antinomies emphasized in Pym's novels are focused around the character and speech of Father Bode. The first point to be noted is that--as the High Church hierarchy in the fifties is exclusively male and shares a common

educational background--she must necessarily, in this instance, find a way to put everyday speech in the mouth of a male priest in order to contest the Church from within. Consequently, Father Bode is depicted as a humble, pragmatic and sincere priest--a phenomenon which the majority of Pym's texts suggest is rare. At the same time, Wilmet, and Pym herself, surely, while recognizing his moral goodness, cannot respect him as a male authority figure because of his humble origins and demotic speech. Wilmet knows that she is a snob, and is ashamed of herself as a Christian woman, but she cannot help herself. Women of her class and education have been taught to admire arrogant, opinionated and often superficially erudite men, and Father Bode is not consistent with this image. The conflict in both author and protagonist is apparent. While deploring a Church that is becoming increasingly irrelevant and removed from ordinary people, Pym does not particularly relish the prospect of the loss of the external beauties of language and ritual which the imminent retirement of Father Thames may fore "Bode." Father Ransome represents a priestly compromise between what has become spurious refinement and erudition in the Church (Father Thames) and a new, distressing vulgarity (Father Bode). The debate within the novels is contextual in that it is particular to the conflicts within a middle-class, educated, British Churchwoman in the 1950's, while gesturing towards a feminist interrogation in that it involves both author and protagonist in a polemic launched against an institution (the Church) and a religion (Christianity) which has systematically excluded women and helped both to form and to perpetuate the culture text. Mary Daly describes the Church and its dogmas--especially that of the all-male trinity--as "the epitome of male bonding ... the perfect all-male marriage, the ideal all-male family, the best boys club, the model monastery, the supreme men's association." She further reminds us that the Church and Christian symbolism have constructed a "male made-up femininity [which] has nothing to do with women" (Gvn/Ecology 38). Pym's texts constantly query the silencing and exclusion of women as exemplified in the Church hierarchy--an exclusion which has been theologically and historically justified on the basis of a dominant male assumption of a superior moral and intellectual authority. Every dialogic

encounter between her protagonists and the clergy explores the hypocrisy and comic slippage within this paradigm of subordination which is integral to the artificial dichotomies of the culture text. At the same time, the prose reveals the inner conflicts which result as internalized cultural norms collide with an intellectual astuteness which allows the female author and/or protagonist to see beyond them, while ever cognizant of their ubiquitous pressures.

Father Bode, a celibate, Anglo-Catholic, High Church clergyman, comes to be appreciated by Wilmet as a man of genuine humility and goodness in the course of her education in learning some aspects of true Christian love. His speech and tastes, however, are "common." Mr. Bason speaks uncharitably to Wilmet of Mrs. Greenhill, the simple housekeeper who preceded him at the clergyhouse, and links her plain cookery to humble Father Bode with ill-disguised contempt. The occasion is a parish social to welcome the new assistant priest, Father Ransome:

'She [Mrs. Greenhill] and that Verger woman are doing the refreshments tonight. I suppose that will be within her capabilities--she will make a good cup, as they say, and of course Father Bode does enjoy that; but Father Thames likes his Lapsang, which he takes correctly without milk or sugar. I prefer Earl Grey myself--find the Lapsang too smoky.'

'Do you?' I said in a rather cool tone, feeling that Mr. Bason needed to be put in his place. 'I suppose Lapsang is really an acquired taste. I am very fond of it myself.' [emphasis added]

(57)

The skaz is inserted here as an embedded character zone and illustrates one variation of Bakhtinian passive double-voiced discourse.<sup>17</sup> The phrase, "she will make a good cup, as they say" is the kind of language Mrs. Greenhill would use, or even, perhaps, Father Bode. Mr. Bason distances himself from such a vulgar expression by putting the phrase in "intonational quotation marks." This, he wants to emphasize, is not his language. It is the language of a character not

actually present. Mr. Bason--gourmet cook, failed civil servant, homosexual and kleptomaniac (he later "pinches" Father Thames's Fabergé egg)--despises "Bode," as he later calls him, for his humble tastes. Wilmet, who is fastidious and snobbish herself about food and drink--she had earlier internalized "the unworthy thought" that Father Bode might "prefer tinned salmon" to Father Thames's smoked salmon--nevertheless resents similar sentiments being voiced publicly by the presumptuous Mr. Bason. She "puts him in his place" by using speech associated with sophisticated food and drink, "an acquired taste," to suggest that his social class, unlike her own, has not afforded him the opportunity to become accustomed to Lapsang.

As always in Pym, a seemingly trivial conversation about food or drink is highly significant. Skaz--associated with "good" Father Bode--is used as an ironic counterstatement to the effete, affected language of Mr. Bason and the authoritative speech of Father Thames. Here, the language of food, differentiated by class, is utilized to juxtapose Father Bode's humble simplicity with Father Thames's questionable aestheticism. A dialogic debate, in which the author's voice is placed at various distances from the speech of the characters, ensues, and the questions which are raised are, it is important to note, carried from text to text and given the benefit of different perspectives through various "character zones" throughout the canon: Should a clergyman--even a High Church clergyman like Father Thames--be indulging in a taste for Lapsang, smoked salmon and Fabergé eggs? This is an on-going debate in Pym, who admires the beauty and opulence of the rituals of the High Church but is all too aware of the slippage between the spiritual "ideal" of an ascetic Church and the self-indulgent reality of many of her clergymen who are fond of the delights of the world and the flesh. Mr. Bason has "promised them (the priests) a coq au vin" (60) but Wilmet has doubts about the "suitability" of such gourmet fare in the clergyhouse. Once again, a discussion of food in Pym is a displacement for sexuality, and the rarified palate of Father Thames obliquely links him, too, with sexual ambivalence. Here one can see the "distance" between author and protagonist. Pym implies, in this context, that the "celibate" clergyhouse (like the High



Church) is increasingly effete and homosexual." Just as Wilmet is blind to Piers's sexual orientation, so also she cannot "read" the suggestive markers in the parodied language of Mr. Bason--"The state of that kitchen, you wouldn't believe it!" (57) Father Thames's speech and intonation are also sexually ambivalent: "'Do you know,' he lowered his tone, 'he has promised us a coq au vin?'" (60). Piers's speech, we note, is enigmatically neutral in this regard.

Later, when the three clergymen speak in close proximity, *skaz* is used again to identify Father Bode. Father Thames as "dominant male" in the parish is "holding forth about the accommodation problem at the clergy house" (50):

'I wonder how many people realize that we haven't as many rooms as you might think... On the ground floor is the dining-room, a room we use for meetings, and a small cloakroom with a washbasin--cold tap water only; also the kitchen, of course, and the little room Mrs. Greenhill had which we are using as a storeroom.'

I wondered what they would be storing.

'Then upstairs there is my study and bedroom, the oratory, Father Bode's two rooms, and spare bedroom--very poky--for visiting clergy. We are really very cramped! And,' he paused impressively, 'this will surprise you--there is no basement! Now, would you have believed that? ... It was built in 1911 and was never intended as a clergyhouse at all. Its first occupant had five children!'

None of us seemed able to comment suitably on this.

'Things are very different today,' said Father Bode at last, his rosy little face beaming. 'No kiddies about the place now! I can see Mrs. Greenhill at the urn. Now we can get on to the main object of this gathering, eh, Ransome?' he added jokingly.

Not the most felicitous of remarks, I thought, wondering how Father Ransome would take his badinage.

'I'm sure everyone will be glad of a cup of tea,' he said, in a curious, almost ironical tone. It occurred to me that he must be

very tired of being introduced to people; perhaps even his flow of clerical small talk was beginning to dry up.

'Ah, Mrs. Greenhill!' Father Bode stood rubbing his hands as she approached, attended by a kind of acolyte bearing cups of tea on a tray. 'The cups that cheer! I hope you've made mine extra strong with plenty of sugar.'

'I think it will be just as you like it, Father,' said Mrs. Greenhill comfortably. Her rather pinched features relaxed into a smile. 'I know you like these iced buns.' [emphasis added] (59-60)

Neither the fastidious Wilmet nor Father Thames can drink the strong tea, and Wilmet feels she can't "tackle one of the large brightly iced cakes which were offered" (60). In contrast, good (and presumably heterosexual) Father Bode enjoys his vulgar fare and innocently blunders into murky waters, his voice once again identified through skaz. He speaks of "No kiddies about the place now" and somewhat tactlessly informs the guest of honour--"eh, Ransome?"--that the refreshments are the real motivation for the occasion, especially the "cups that cheer."

What are the dialogic queries raised by this encounter between an effete authoritative discourse (Father Thames) and skaz (Father Bode)? They might be stated as follows, after looking closely at the excerpts: Why is Father Thames exaggerating the "cramped" quarters at the clergyhouse? Would Father Bode find the space confining? Why was such a house considered adequate in the past for a married clergyman with five children but is viewed "now" as unsuitable for two celibate priests and a housekeeper? Why is Father Thames not anxious to share the clergyhouse with young Father Ransome? Would Father Bode object? Why would a celibate clergyman, who is presumably committed to a rejection of worldly things, need large storage areas? Would Father Bode also require a storage space? Should an Anglican priest complain of "poky" bedrooms and "cold" water? Mr. Bason later "bursts into a peal of laughter" when giving Wilmet and Rodney a tour of the clergy house and confides, "There's plenty of room really, you

know" (108). On that occasion, Wilmet sees that Father Thames's rooms are like "a rather crowded museum" and filled with "a great many objects arranged in glass-fronted cabinets and on the mantelpiece" (108). Should a priest be a collector of rare objects? What are the cultural implications of the description of his rooms as a "museum"? Should young Father Ransome be speaking in an "ironic" tone in regard to the social duties of meeting his parishioners? Should priests find this kind of socializing with their flock "dreary"? Would Father Bode feel the same way?

All of these contesting queries are set in play in the dialogic "debate" among the heteroglot voices in the text. Bakhtin explains the "double-voicing" in heteroglot dialogic:

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. (Dialogic 324)

Bakhtin's concept of a necessary "refraction" in novelistic prose is thus one key to an analysis of Pym's oblique style, and sheds further light on the ways in which the woman writer may carry the parody of authoritative or ideological language one step further, when the variable of gender is added to other centrifugal or dispersive factors brought to bear upon the direct word of a dominant discourse.

Let us examine how this particular incorporation of heteroglossia works. In this context, Father Thames as the senior priest is (ironically) the dominant male in the parish. Consequently, his speech is authoritative, as he represents the Church of England. He speaks in a characteristic manner and his speech is

not Pym's or Wilmet's or Father Bode's. Thus, the author "incorporates into the novel" a discourse that is "another's speech in another's language." Nevertheless, Father Thames's dialogue "serves authorial intentions" in an oblique or "refracted" way when his speech is parodied as passive double-voiced discourse. How does this happen?

His very name--Thames--and the fact that he is close to retirement suggest that, perhaps more than the younger clergy, his "voice" symbolizes the prevalent, enfeebled tone of the Church of England. The fact that his character (and character zone) is carried over into more than one novel, also implies the centrality of his characterization in Pym as a typical clergyman, though the Anglican Church also includes simple men of integrity like Father Bode. Father Bode lacks refinement and erudition, however; paradoxically, he may "bode" the diminishment of the traditional beauties of the Church's language and ritual. Father Thames is cultured, refined, independently wealthy, selfish and of dubious sexual orientation. His complaints of discomfort, self-indulgent aestheticism and the mean-spirited way in which accommodation and Christian hospitality are denied to Father Ransome are characteristic. His subsequent rationalization of his behaviour when he is "holding forth" to an attentive circle about the "cramped" clergyhouse undermines his authority as a spiritual leader.

Neither Pym nor her protagonist, Wilmet, overtly query this kind of behaviour in a priest. Both Churchwomen, they mimic a discrete, exemplary "silence." Instead, "heteroglossia" challenges him when his speech is placed among others. Father Thames's intention--"the direct intention of the character who is speaking"--is to justify his actions by attempting to prove that the clergy house is too small to accommodate Father Ransome. But once his speech is incorporated into the novel, something very different takes place. Simultaneously, "the refracted intention of the author" comes into play and the speech becomes "double-voiced." It now carries a subtext--the contesting intention of the female author. It "serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions." Far from justifying his behaviour, his speech can be seen to provide a critique of the Church--insofar

as he is its representative. Pym's oblique intentions--to question such behaviour in a clergyman who represents a spurious claim to authority in an institution which has, in fact, traditionally mythologized and marginalized women as inferior spiritually, morally and intellectually--are thus refracted through "another's language." The polyphonic or dialogic novel can accomplish this subtle phenomenon; monologic speech (i.e. poetry) cannot. Authorial refraction in the novel is unique:

In Bakhtin's ideal case, the poet writes in a directly intentional language, one that means what he wants it to mean, while the prose writer's intentions are of necessity "refracted" at various angles through already claimed territory. Authorial refraction is central to the light-ray metaphor Bakhtin uses to illustrate the complexity in reading a prose communication. Every word is like a ray of light on a trajectory to both an object and a receiver. Both paths are strewn with previous claims that slow up, distort, refract the intention of the word. A semantic "spectral dispersion" occurs, but not within the object [as would be the case with self-enclosed poetic tropes] but before the word reaches the object in the "occupied territory" surrounding the object. In any novelistic prose one can trace...the "angle of refraction" of authorial discourse as it passes through various other voices, or voice and character zones. (Holquist ed., Dialogic, Glossary 432)

It seems clear that to Bakhtin all novelistic prose comes to constitute "a special type of double-voiced discourse" because of the phenomenon of refraction. When a consideration of gender is incorporated into the "refracting media," however, what often results in addition to the more obvious kinds of ironic double-voicing is the inscription of the feminist oppositional text. This has been described differently by various critics as "the palimpsest" (Gilbert and Gubar), "emphasis added" or "the feminist signature" (Nancy K. Miller) and

"demaximization" (Annette Kolodny). Dialogic analysis enables this additional component of the woman's text--the recreation of cultural dichotomies which are exhibited and placed in interaction with a feminine consciousness which resists them--to be more clearly isolated and examined in Pym.

Because the Church is often an important factor in her fictional characters' strategies for "making a life," it is inevitable that marginal women in Pym--married or unmarried--interact on many occasions with the clergy. Much like her domestic set pieces, the languages of daily life help provide a structural palimpsest--other stories--which challenge the dominant discourse. Thus the mind/body split of the culture text which traditionally excludes women from intellectual pursuits or authority in scholarly/spiritual hierarchies is intensely parodied in Pym's texts. Another way of understanding this emphasis is to see it as Pym's strategy for reminding her readers of the absurdities of a pervasive ideological dichotomy which continues to mandate the sexuality/autonomy split. Women are not expected to be both beautiful and vocal and/or critical at the same time. Consequently, none of Pym's women (plain or conventionally attractive) can easily or openly launch any effective challenge to the clergy; it is not "suitable" for one of their class and education. It is tempting to conclude that, in Pym's conservative milieu, one of the few ways a woman could mount any "serious" criticism was to be both plain and, paradoxically, comic--thus the brown horse spinster within the comic mode. Everyday speech becomes just one way of demystifying "serious"/masculine institutions from a "comic"/feminine perspective.

Non-literary speech, which is present in all novels, is thus foregrounded and assumes a particular kind of polemical emphasis in Pym's texts. Because such languages are frequently associated with the private sphere--the realm of the body relegated to women, as opposed to the realm of the mind reserved for male authoritative discourse--Pym uses them to contest the inflated, frequently hollow rhetoric of dominant speech. In Pym's texts, it is the languages associated with the quotidian, the "feminine" world of the flesh, which are often shown to be more valid articulations of experience than the elegant but constricting

languages of the Church or the Academy. Pym uses many examples in A Glass of Blessings. In addition to skaz, noticeboard prose and the semi-literary "journalistic prose" of the Church Times, she also stylizes the parish magazine and Father Thames's parish letter (26), Sybil's collection of newspaper cuttings which are pleas for donations from the clergy in poor parishes (24), fashion magazine prose (Vogue or Harper's) (29), Crockford (44), a "funny guide book" (248), knitting book instructions (203), letters (97, 187), a sympathy card (115) and so on. These non-literary languages--many of the household, the marketplace or the street--all serve to insert the pragmatic perspectives of daily living, and combine with other deconstructive strategies to contest the smug and "tranquil realms" of clerical authoritative or monologic speech. In this way, Pym initiates a dialogue which pushes to make the reader more aware of the very real pressures of forced, ideological dichotomies for all women. Her heroines make a life for themselves in a way which can be seen to equate her goals as woman writer with those of J.S. Frye as feminist (and Bakhtinian) literary critic:

Dialogue--between disciplines, between systems and individuals, between literature and life--becomes, then, a kind of definition for my eclectic perspective: a resistance to dichotomies through setting them in interaction with each other. (11)

It is in a closer examination of the insertion of the dominant discourses, however--what Bakhtin terms the "literary, extra-authorial speech of moral, philosophical, scientific, and literary languages"--that it is possible to locate many of the central sites of dissonance and ambivalence in Pym's texts. The most important ones are, characteristically, those associated with the Church and the Academy--moral discourses such as the sermon, the liturgy, the hymn, scholarly language, and, most importantly, the literary canon of Pym's undergraduate education.

Pym's texts are saturated with the poetry and prose of the pre-modernist

patriarchal canon of English literature; at the same time, she draws heavily on the work of largely non-canonical women writers necessarily working within that tradition, and interrogates "the constraining grids" perceptible in the writings of both the male-dominated tradition and peripheral texts. Moreover, though modernist and contemporary texts are an important addition to her literary storehouse, Pym's formal education at Oxford in the 1930's was in the tradition where "Literature came to a full stop with Matthew Arnold" (A Lot 276). Hence, the moral and liturgical languages of the Church often stand alongside those of the literary canon of Pym's "Oxford interlude" in the novels. As Olivia Berridge, Middle English scholar and fiancée of the curate, Mr. Donne, says in Some Tame Gazelle, "I think that English Literature and Theology can be very happily combined" (STG 238). Both, of course, also combine to perpetuate the femininity text. Pym both stylizes and parodies the paradigms and tropes of the literary canon, as she positions the authorial voice and her characters dialogically among the many languages of authoritative discourse which are "novelized" within the texts. We have already seen how such languages of heteroglossia become refracted and double-voiced once they are inserted into the prose matrix of the novel. It is possible to isolate a focus of particularly fertile polyphonic activity in Pym whenever literary allusion, explicit or embedded, is inserted within the text. Unresolved dissonance is marked and foregrounded at these locations where the centripetal forces of monologism collide with the centrifugal forces of the woman's oppositional subtext. Here Pym continues to illustrate the incongruities which result when contemporary women attempt to make their lives within the binary oppositions mandated by an essentially moribund and constricting literary and theological tradition.

The tension in Pym at these locations is always acute. In addressing the role of allusion in her work, Kathleen Browder Heberlein notes the ambivalence-- Pym wishes to "connect" to the tradition, but simultaneously to maintain "distance":

It [allusion] demonstrates Pym's desire to link her novels to the



larger corpus of English literature and it elevates the realistic particularity of her novels to a higher level of generality by connecting them--at a carefully controlled distance--to established types and forms, authors and works. (270)

This "carefully controlled distance," sometimes stylized and suggesting essential "agreement," at other times intensely parodied to indicate an authorial contesting of the discourse, is a mark of novelistic prose, again suggesting its especially enabling characteristics for women writers. There are always other voices within the texts to express divergent points of view, however, so that monologic speech is constantly queried but never "destroyed" in Pym. Heberlein goes on to discuss this subversive use of allusion in terms which coincide with what some feminists have called the "palimpsest" in women's writing. She notes that in Pym the use of allusion is "frequently ironic" i.e. parodical, and continues:

Characters and readers are continually brought up against the realization, in Barbara Pym's words, that "neither characters, nor love, nor destiny is as grand as it has been portrayed." As her commonplace book, diaries and literary notebooks show, Pym admired this kind of comic deflation in the work of such novelists as Elizabeth Taylor, "Elizabeth," Elizabeth Jenkins, E.F. Benson, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Angela Thirkell, and, of course Jane Austen. These writers, mostly women, like Barbara Pym make important the trivialities that occupy most of us most of the time at home, at work and in love--the trivia that most male writers do not find significant--while they point out, often allusively, the essential unimportance of much of what is commonly thought essential. (270-271)

It is interesting to note that none of the works of these predominantly

women writers, with the exception of Jane Austen, would have been considered canonical texts during Pym's undergraduate years, when the works of Matthew Arnold marked the chronological boundary between "Literature" and popular culture. Most of the novels which value "the trivia that most male writers do not find significant" were encountered by Pym and other educated women beyond the Academy. Pym's penchant to juxtapose the everyday reality of women's lives beyond the culture text with canonical allusions to traditional male-authored texts is, then, frequently ironic and comically incongruous.

A characteristic example of the parodied use of allusion occurs in Some Tame Gazelle. In this case, the literary discourse is located in the words of a hymn much loved by Pym, "New Every Morning," by John Keble. Here, it is possible to discern clearly the contesting voices of the patriarchal Church and a woman's perspective, and to see, in microcosm, a "reduced" and felicitous illustration of the antithetical forces struggling within Barbara Pym. The tone is light, however, the context characteristically pragmatic. Belinda is reflecting on one of the small joys of life--producing successful ravioli pasta. She calculates, "Twenty minutes more kneading, and perhaps it would be of the consistency of the finest chamois leather." Then:

The trivial round, the common task--did it furnish quite all we needed to ask? Had Keble really understood? Sometimes one almost doubted it. Belinda imagined him writing the lines in a Gothic study, panelled in pitch-pine and well dusted that morning by an efficient servant. Not at all the same thing as standing at the sink with aching back and hands plunged into the washing-up water. (STG 227-228)"

Reality for a secluded, cosseted, Victorian Oxford scholar and the reality of the "kitchen-sink" world of the everyday for a Belinda Bede have almost nothing in common. Keble's conception of the "trivial round, the common task" which he pens as "universal truth" in authoritative, theological discourse has no real

credibility in Belinda's world. Yet she (like Pym) loves the hymn and her "centrifugal" interrogation is gentle and characteristically qualified: "Sometimes one almost doubted it." The authorial voice, however, does not coincide wholly with Belinda's. Pym almost certainly doubts Keble's ability to "imagine" the life of her women, who inhabit the "wild zone" of the kitchen on the margins of culture, in the same way that Belinda, thanks to her brief "interlude" at Oxford, is able to "imagine" his at "the still point of the turning world" for the patriarchal academy. As Ardener reminds us, women have access to masculine reality through the symbolic order but men do not know what is in the wild. Nevertheless, the discourse is not entirely discredited--only queried, and introduced into the debate of the text.

In the same novel, the parodic deflation of Archdeacon Hoccleve's pretentious "Dies Irae" sermon is a further concrete illustration of novelistic critique of an ideological discourse--in this case literary and theological (moral). The Archdeacon's pompous and pedantic rhetoric is shown to be largely irrelevant in the real world inhabited by his mild, morally innocuous and less well-educated female parishioners.<sup>30</sup> His penchant to lard his sermons with obscure literary allusions is well known. Belinda "loyally" (but there is a refracted authorial subtext) defends him:

'His knowledge of English literature is quite remarkable for a clergyman.'

'His sermons are full of quotations,' said Harriet bluntly.

'I consider Mr. Donne [the curate] a much better preacher.' (STG 237)

It is not only Belinda, then, who has divided loyalties in regard to the literary canon. Pym recreates in her fiction again and again female characters who, on the one hand, admire erudition and the beauty of literature, but on the other, are aware of its often comic distance from their own lives. The Archdeacon is relentless. His sermons are "a long string of quotations, joined together by a few explanations..." (109-110). He begins at the seventeenth century--"Belinda

reflected that if he had gone back any further, the sermon would have assumed Elizabethan proportions"--and works his way up to the eighteenth. Belinda, though "she was delighted to hear him read about thirty more lines of Flatman's poem," nevertheless "began to worry about the beef. It would be roasted to a cinder now" (111). The "noble" and the pragmatic are again characteristically juxtaposed. It is the beef that will be burning in many a village oven, rather than the flesh of the parishioners in the eternal flames of Hell. In preparing his congregation for the day of wrath, the Archdeacon inevitably quotes from Young's Night Thoughts:

He seemed to be implying that each person listening to him this morning was little better than the unknown Lorenzo, for whose edification the poem had been written. Even Belinda thought the Archdeacon was going a little too far when he likened his congregation to such as "call aloud for ev'ry bauble drivel'd o'er by sense." Whatever it might mean it certainly sounded abusive. He concluded his reading from Young by flinging a challenge at them.

... Say dreamers of gay dreams,  
How will you weather an eternal night,  
Where such expedients fail?

He paused dramatically and the sermon was at an end. (111-112)

The bemused congregation, most of whom "have been dreaming gay dreams most of the morning" now "fidgeted angrily in bags and pockets for their collect money. One or two even let the plate pass them, waving it on with an angry gesture" (112).

Although the "Dies Irae" sermon is parodied in a light-hearted manner, it is a good example of the conjunction of biography with art noted earlier in the idiosyncratic recreations of Henry Harvey. First, he is envisaged in Pym's youthful imagination as a seventeenth-century Lorenzo, and here, is fictionally recreated as the Archdeacon who quotes inappropriately from Young's Night Thoughts, written for "Lorenzo." At this point of structural tension, it is

possible to see Pym distancing herself through dialogism not only from the often ludicrously inappropriate (for her women) world of the literary canon, but also from her idealization of Harvey. We recall that Henry Harvey consistently made Pym feel stupid and inadequate both intellectually and sexually. As a young, impressionable undergraduate, Pym accepted this kind of arrogant abuse from one she idealized as her superior; her insecurity and cultural conditioning encouraged her to do so. Her writing, however, recasts these humiliating scenarios, so that it is the Harvey/Hoccleve figure who is shown to be woefully inadequate. Bakhtin's description of what happens in the oppositional text when "persuasive discourse," i.e. the sermon or poetry, is fictionalized and put into the mouths of characters in the novel is particularly germane to female authorial distancing:

This process--experimenting by turning persuasive discourse into speaking persons--becomes especially important in those cases where a struggle against such images has already begun, where someone is striving to liberate [herself] from the influence of such an image and its discourse by means of objectification, or is striving to expose the limitations of both image and discourse. The importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One's own discourse and one's own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other's discourse.  
(Dialogic 348)

This description has a particular relevance to the liberating and cathartic effect of writing for a subordinate who is essentially powerless and muted or inarticulate within dominant culture. Women, who have often been "objectified" or "reified" through cultural stereotypes in the patriarchal "House of Fiction," may, by objectifying authoritative male discourse within the novel through a

vigorous parody, "turn the tables" in a distanced, critical examination of the internally persuasive word which is inserted within the text. Bakhtin explains this novelistic process of liberation:

A conversation with an internally persuasive word that one has begun to resist may continue, but it takes on another character: it is questioned, it is put in a new situation in order to expose its weak sides, to get a feel for its boundaries, to experience it physically as an object. Novelistic images, profoundly double-voiced and double-languaged...seek to objectivize the struggle with all types of internally persuasive alien discourse that at one time held sway over the author....[and achieve] just such a liberation from this discourse by turning it into an object. (Dialogic 348)

The "Dies Irae" sermon is but one instance where Pym has taken the language of both the Church and Academy and begun the process of liberation from such discourses by parodying them in a satiric context. These are "alien" discourses as women and their perceptions are largely excluded from them. Silent, and excluded from authority in Church or Academy, the female protagonist can nevertheless query dominant speech obliquely through dialogism and show it to be moribund. By fictionalizing and parodying such languages in the character of the Archdeacon--"turning persuasive discourse into speaking persons"--Pym objectifies them by ironically distancing the author, and thus also begins a liberation for her female protagonists from their influence.

The Archdeacon, then, who, unlike Pym's silent or muted women, "liked the sound of his own voice" (110) attempts to situate his flock within the Procrustean bed of ecclesiastical dogma and the grand and terrible tropes of the greater and lesser English poets. He is a ludicrous figure to those who do not love him:

'The Judgement Day,' he almost shouted, so loudly that Harriet

had to take out her handkerchief to stifle her inappropriate amusement... 'Dies Irae.' (108-109)

The author, Harriet and Belinda are liberating themselves--in Harriet's case through carnivalesque laughter--from the influence of an "alien" persuasive discourse; in this context it is that of the sermon and ecclesiastical language. The utilization of the Latin title is appropriate when one recalls the mystification and exclusion which this patriarchal rhetoric of power appropriated for the Church for many centuries: "Belinda saw Edith Liversidge purse her lips disapprovingly at this Romish expression" (109).

The hymn which precedes the sermon sets the tone; it informs the congregation that "the world is very evil" (108). The world may be very evil--one dialogic "truth"--but it is also a fact that the composition of the Archdeacon's congregation contests this inappropriately "grand" or "heightened" point of view:

The Archdeacon paused impressively and peered at his congregation; a harmless enough collection of people--old Mrs. Prior and her daughter, Miss Jenner, Miss Beard and Miss Smiley in front with the children, ever watchful to frown on giggles or fidgets--the Bank Manager, who sometimes read the lessons--the Misses Bede and the guests from the vicarage [Dr. Parnell and Mr. Mold]--Count Bianco--Miss Liversidge and Miss Aspinall.... (108)

The hymn, "translated from the Latin" (109)--the Archdeacon is showing off his supposed erudition--is hardly appropriate as a description of this group of sinners. Nevertheless, the Archdeacon reminds them that "the times were waxing late" (109) and that the hour of judgement is at hand. He begins with "Thomas Flatman's lines written in 1659, to show how poets of the latter half of that century had imagined that the Judgement Day was near." Then:

'Tis not far off; methinks I see  
 Among the stars some dimmer be;  
 Some tremble as their lamps did fear  
 A neighbouring extinguisher... (110)

In the prose which follows, written in quasi-direct discourse, Pym offers a graphic example--because the thoughts of the congregation are actually voiced--of what is often only suggested in the refraction of direct discourse. It is possible to see clearly "the conversation with an internally persuasive word [the Archdeacon's sermon and Flatman's lines] that one has begun to resist" (Dialogic 348):

That had been in 1659, they thought, and nothing had come of this man's noticing that some of the stars were dimmer. Why even the Archdeacon himself was forced to admit it! 1659. (110)

The congregation are beginning to hold a dialogic "conversation" with authoritative speech. The "internally persuasive word...is questioned, it is put in a new situation [the present day] in order to expose its weak sides, to get a feel for its boundaries" (Dialogic 348). Flatman and the Archdeacon are not credible, think the congregation, who "smiled complacently" (110). Even if some people assert that the stars are dimmer, the last day did not, in fact, arrive between 1659 and the present. The Archdeacon's doubtful argument that 1660 was in itself a judgement is seen as another Procrustean bed of spurious logic: "But here was the Archdeacon trying to tell them that the Restoration was itself a kind of Judgement Day" (110). Dominant discourse is dialogized and contested. The Archdeacon's sermon and Flatman's poem are "unmasked" as archaic and irrelevant, as the internalized voice of the congregation--ironically largely female--rejects their authority. More importantly, a male-dominated discourse which pretends to universal truth has been examined and found vulnerable by both the female author and her protagonist.



When the Archdeacon concludes by comparing his mild flock to those who "call aloud for ev'ry bauble drivel'd o'er by sense" (112), it is too much for even the devoted Belinda who feels he is "going a little too far" (112). Set against the rhetorical tropes of sermon and poem, once again, is the deflationary language of the everyday--the discourse of common opinion or common sense dialogized in the congregation's and Belinda's speech.

Where is the author positioned in relation to her characters? Clearly, she does not coincide with Belinda's point of view at this juncture:

Of course dear Henry had not really meant to insult them. He had obviously been carried away by the fine poetry, and naturally meant to include himself among those he condemned. (112)

Here is an example of internally dialogized, double-voiced discourse of the "active" kind.<sup>22</sup> Belinda launches a "hidden polemic" as she "cringes" and takes a "sideward glance" at the anticipated response of another voice which is beyond the grammatical construction of the sentence, in which only a single voice is actually, stylistically visible. This "other voice," which, it is implied, represents everybody who doesn't love the Archdeacon, is saying (in effect), "This selfish, pedantic hypocrite insulted us in an obscure, tedious sermon which caused our Sunday dinners to be ruined." Belinda argues with this hypothetical voice, but she has lost control in this case as she is well aware that her own argument--"he hadn't really meant to insult them"--is not true. The author stands "alongside" the voice of Belinda and the implied other; Pym both likes and dislikes this kind of rhetoric. Contemplating the ruined dinners of all those who had been detained by the Archdeacon's prolixity, however, Belinda recalls that the vicarage is having a duck for dinner. The chapter ends with her ironic meditations on this revealing fact:

'And of course,' she said thoughtfully, as she watched her sister carve the over-cooked beef, 'duck needs to be very well done,

doesn't it? It can't really be cooked too much.' (113)

This epiphany, doubtless partial for Belinda, exhibits the Archdeacon's blind selfishness to the needs of others, not unlike that of Father Thames in the later novel, A Glass of Blessings. The shepherd will eat well regardless of the leathery Sunday fare awaiting his flock. The authorial voice is somewhat closer to this satiric "unmasking" of the imperfections of an idealized male clergy.

Treated playfully here, striking a more sombre note in later novels, Pym's contesting of patriarchal languages and institutions remains open to dialogue. While clearly questioning the Archdeacon's excesses, she elsewhere distances herself from the categorical rejection of the heightened felicities of literary language. Harriet Bede's irritation at the Archdeacon's self-serving erudition and spurious motivation in delivering such pretentious sermons--"the Archdeacon glanced round the congregation with what appeared to be a look of malicious amusement on his face" (107)--is countered in A Glass of Blessings by Wilmet Forsyth's wistful comment that perhaps one could be grateful in the 1950's for an address such as "a certain Archdeacon Hoccleve" (GB 109) used to deliver. By the time we encounter the Anglican Church in the later novel, the sermon is more likely to be demotic and stripped of all erudition. Rather than the "heightened" horror of "Dies Irae," embroidered with literary allusions which at least some of the congregation could recognize, if not apply, the topic may well be a diminished, "dry teaching" on "the Significance of Evensong" (109). Indeed, elderly Father Thames is aware that his allusion to Trollope may only be intelligible to "the older" ones among you. Similarly, while Pym clearly presents kindly Father Bode in a sympathetic light, she, like Wilmet, resists and regrets the conclusion that simplicity and integrity must necessarily be synonymous with demotic speech and an erosion of literacy in the Church.

Pym's polyphonic stance does not ultimately finalize her response to imperfection in people or institutions.<sup>22</sup> Critic Edward Said's post-structuralist maxim that "all systems leak" seems to be acknowledged by Pym to the point where Robert Emmet Long could ask her sister, Hilary, if she was an

"Anglican atheist" (Long 225). At the same time, it is characteristic of her texts that the Christian ideal is recreated beyond the institutional clergy in the less than exemplary but church-going and cultured Piers Longridge's remark to Wilmet: "But aren't we all colleagues, in a sense, in this grim business of getting through life as best we can?" (GB 198). The patriarchal word, like all other words in Pym's polyphonic texts, remains, in Bakhtin's terms, "contested, contestable, contesting" as she alternately stylizes and parodies moral discourse or the literary canon.

In addressing the key concern of her texts--how her women may arrange their lives within the constraints of their class and culture--Pym strives to approach the Bakhtinian ideal within her novels. Every point of view co-exists with other, contesting voices; each text continues and modifies the idiosyncratic debate. Consequently, authoritative discourses, particularly those of the literary canon, undergo intense scrutiny and contestation in Pym's novels as they interact with the divisions occasioned in both author and protagonist by the dichotomies of imposed cultural alternatives.

Bakhtin points to one particular kind of discourse, however, where this process of dialogization is most subtle and most characteristic of the novel in demonstrating the liberation of multiple viewpoints on the world. Genuine "novelness" is found not primarily in "compositionally expressed dialogues" among individual characters but in the "hybridized, double voiced, dialogized heteroglossia of the author's own voice" (M and E 326). Bakhtin explains this unique capacity of the novel:

Inside this area a dialogue is played out between the author and [her] characters--not a dramatic dialogue broken up into statement and response, but that special type of novelistic dialogue that realizes itself within the boundaries of constructions that really resemble monologues. The potential for such dialogue is one of the most fundamental privileges of novelistic prose, a privilege available neither to dramatic nor to purely poetic zones. (Dialogic 320)

In women's fiction, one would again expect to discover additional voices, arising from the many loci of contradiction grounded in imposed cultural dichotomies. The struggles occasioned by the phenomenon of the split subject in both female author and her heroines should be particularly acute in such internalized areas of orchestrated interaction.

In order to examine this particular kind of hybrid discourse, it is appropriate to turn to what is perhaps Pym's most problematic novel in terms of the intense inner struggle of both author and protagonist with many of the patriarchal discourses of her culture, The Sweet Dove Died. I will consider Leonora Eyre, the protagonist, in more detail in Chapter Five in another context. Here, however, one set piece in particular demonstrates the presence of multiple voices, including those of the literary canon, in contention with each other--as well as interrogating that of the author. Nowhere is the agonized debate, grounded in culturally imposed contradictions which reverberate in women's lives, more sharply polemic and disturbing than in this text. Leonora, at this point of epiphany, realizes that James is involved in an affair with Ned, and is deeply fearful of losing him as a charming companion. It is late at night and he has not returned 'home' to his flat in her house. The three authorial "bridge passage" paragraphs which conclude Chapter XIX will be considered as hybrid constructions illustrating active double-voiced discourse within a feminist context:

Leonora went to bed at eleven, determined to be 'sensible.' She read for a little while then dropped off to sleep, the book--a large volume of Victorian memoirs--falling heavily to the floor. After some time she woke with a start--there had been a noise somewhere. James was going up to his flat, surely. Or had a burglar got in and was he even now creeping up the thickly carpeted stairs? She put on her dressing-gown and slippers, opened her door and stood listening. All was silent with the dead quiet of the middle of the night. Perhaps it had been James coming in; she would just tiptoe up and

see if there was a light showing in his flat. But when she got there she saw that a parcel and some letters she had put there earlier still lay outside his door. (SDD 160-161)

The hidden polemic of active dialogism is already apparent in this first paragraph. When Leonora goes to bed "early," determining to be "sensible," two voices--one of which is only implied and not actually present--are discernible. The first internal voice is resistant to the implicit cultural pressure of the Romance plot and the heroine's text which prescribe that the long-suffering woman await with dreary resignation the return of the philandering or fickle husband or lover. The fact that the unusual relationship Leonora hopes to maintain with James is, in fact, not a socially sanctioned variation of the heroine's plot but a problematic revision of it, adds a further dimension of dissonance. Here is the "emphasis added" of the imperfect fit of the oppositional text within the Romantic trope. Leonora evokes the everyday voice of common sense to strangle the voice of the "Romance" text which sounds beyond the grammatical construction. She must be "sensible" and go to her (single) bed. The pull between recognizing commitment by assuming the role of spurned "love" and denying it by maintaining the role of aloof spinster is thus already in contention. The Victorian book of memoirs introduces a third "silent" voice from the culture text. Here, Leonora, like many of Pym's women, turns nostalgically to the ponderous, comforting and sentimental certainties of the pious book of memoirs to help allay her growing terror of isolation. This is the literature of consolation, with its illusion of a lost, homogeneous, stable community. There is an irony here as well. Leonora will find no comfort for her "unnatural" and "unsuitable" attachment to a bisexual man young enough to be her son in that volume. Her situation clearly does not coincide with the monologic world of a Victorian clergyman's memoirs. If she were truly to listen to that voice, she would unselfishly "give up" any claim on James.

The next voice is that of another "embedded" genre--the detective novel--perhaps even a murder mystery. All the language becomes saturated with sinister

overtones. This genre is parodied, as we read a string of clichés: "woke with a start," "a noise somewhere," a burglar... "even now creeping up thickly carpeted stairs," "all was silent with the dead quiet of the middle of the night." Leonora is frightened; she dreads the theft of "someone" she loves and the "murder" of the sweet dove of affection. This terrifying voice is a counterstatement to the problematic solace of the Victorian book of memoirs. Further juxtaposed with this threatening voice is the voice of wishful thinking contested by the claims of common sense. "Surely" it was James. It is not. Then, another voice is introduced--familiar in Pym--that of the private eye or romantic investigator "tracking" the object of affection. This is a voice of self-justification for unwarranted curiosity. There is a subtext behind this voice, clearly another deflationary voice of common sense or "public opinion" that whispers she is making a fool of herself and that, furthermore, she has no business checking up on James. Leonora will "just tiptoe up" to see if there is a "light showing." The next voice seems to be yet another subtle "embedded" discourse--a reductive form of everyday speech. It is suggestive of a nursery rhyme--"But when she got there" ...the cupboard was bare? Is she "Old Mother Hubbard?" Is her behaviour childish? The text remains elusive. What is certain is that she will get nothing--James is not in. The authorial voice is enigmatic here. Does she sympathize with Leonora? with James? with both?

So far, it is possible to isolate at least seven distinct languages representing different points of view being explicitly or implicitly brought to bear upon this situation, excluding for the moment, the author's. New voices are introduced in the next brief paragraph:

'James?' she called softly, but she knew that he was not there. It was three o'clock in the morning and he was with Ned. Was that better or worse than if he had been with Phoebe? she asked herself, trying to look at the situation calmly. Of course, in those days when he had his own flat she hadn't known where he was at night. Would it perhaps have been better not to have that knowledge now?

Now Leonora articulates to herself many conflicting feelings--the internal dissonances within the protagonist. The hidden polemic becomes intense as she argues with each of these voices in turn; she "cringes" before the pathetic image of herself conjured up by these derogatory languages which attempt to "slot" her. She fights desperately--much like Dostoyevsky's Underground Man--against all cultural efforts to fix and finalize her in the femininity text. Here she tries to evade the humiliating implications of being viewed as an aging, abandoned, ugly, despised woman. "James?" is the hesitant voice of hope; simultaneously, she knows this to be a vain query. Two voices coincide within the single utterance--text and antithetical subtext. Suddenly, the brutal voice of cold fact is inserted, almost suggesting a physical blow--the prose recreates the emotional assault Leonora fears from a "burglar." The cruel thief who has stolen one of Leonora's perfect "possessions," beautiful James, as well as her image of herself as "cherished woman," is Ned. "It was three o'clock in the morning and he was with Ned [emphasis added]." The last four monosyllables fall like crushing hammer blows. There is no fictional "embroidery" of allusion to soften their brutal impact.

Immediately, Leonora begins a psychological salvage operation--an increasingly desperate hidden polemic. She must distance and insulate herself from this harsh reality if she is to survive without emotional devastation. The queries begin, as she frenetically tries to neutralize the truth. Would a heterosexual rival have been easier to deal with than a homosexual liaison? Would she have been better off not knowing? The voice of reason tries to "look at the situation calmly."

The final paragraph introduces a veritable cacophony of voices, foregrounding the dissonant "languages" battling within the protagonist. She struggles at this turning point in the novel to "make a life" which includes "something to love," while retaining her sense of dignity and self-worth:

Suddenly a piercing cry rang out. Frightened, she huddled beneath the bedclothes, until she realized that it was only one of Liz's

cats. Now she was wide awake for the second time and there seemed nothing for it but to go down and make tea; a drink she did not much like because of the comfort it was said to bring to those she normally despised. Yet there was something by no means disagreeable about being in bed with the electric blanket on and the tray of tea on the bedside table. She sat up, with a pleated chiffon bedjacket round her shoulders and thought she might read a little Browning, 'Two in the Campagna,' perhaps. The memory of its remote beauty and pleasing images comforted her, though she lacked the strength to open the book and find the poem. After a while she began to see things more steadily; had there been anyone to hear her she might have said 'I am Leonora Eyre,' as she had at Vine Cottage. Things would be 'better' in the morning. She decided to say nothing to James about his not coming in. She had tried to be understanding about Phoebe; she would be even more so about Ned. (161)

Leonora charts an interim strategy in order to try to keep James. She will be "understanding," much like a long-suffering Victorian heroine being "drearly splendid." Again the analogy is ironically inappropriate, considering the nature of the relationship. Initially, then, before deciding to swallow her pride and anger, Leonora does battle with many voices. The cry of one of Liz's cats reminds Leonora of one alternative scenario for an older woman when a man has "behaved badly." When Liz's marriage broke up--"All that love wasted" (SDD 58)--she lavished all her affection on her Siamese cats. Leonora despises this "life-slot" for a spurned older woman. Liz's voice (beyond the grammatical construction of the sentence) is saying, "You have been treated cruelly. Don't try to hold on to James. Look elsewhere for something to love." This vision is so terrifying to Leonora, that she then turns to other similarly despised "spinsterish delights" for comfort. But this is equally frightening because she now comes up against another "life-slot" associated with "pathetic" women she normally views with contempt. This voice--often sounding elsewhere in Pym's work



with other, more positive accents--counsels: "Have some tea; turn on your electric blanket; seek comfort in Romantic love poetry where you can 'pretend play' with love, and keep it safely at a distance in 'remote and pleasing images'. Don't risk misery, rejection and hurt pride by forcing the situation to a confrontation." So shattered is Leonora's image of herself--her whole sense of identity as cool, cherished, beautiful and self-sufficient--that she must keep repeating to herself desperately "I am Leonora Eyre." Two more voices sound as we become aware of the irony of the literary allusion. Leonora is aging though still beautiful, not young and plain like Jane Eyre, and her "love" is hardly a Byronic figure like Mr. Rochester, but is James of whom Leonora herself has said, "one doesn't think of you as a male exactly" (59). Is there a third, even more poignant, Jacobean echo of tragic betrayal? "I am the Duchess of Malfi, still." Finally, the voice of common wisdom sounds once more, "Things would be 'better' in the morning." This, too, however, has a hollow ring--it is another effort to seek comfort and solace from a withering desolation in platitudes.

And where is the author in the midst of these many voices? Leonora's situation parallels Pym's deeply unhappy feeling of rejection when Richard Roberts ended their friendship. She, too, kept her true feelings hidden: "Fortunately, all the fury and bitterness I sometimes feel has stayed hidden inside me and R. doesn't--perhaps never will--know!" (VPE 235). In the aftermath of an earlier failed relationship with Gordon Glover, a passage in her diary is an eerie echo of this artistic recreation of personal experience.<sup>23</sup> In this novel, she works out subtle alternatives to personal feelings of devastation. Tea, electric blankets and Browning are certainly not "despised" by Pym herself, or cats either, for that matter. Pym's consistent position as "polyphonic" author, however, lets Leonora imply that she despises these comforts and even evokes our sympathy for her. Leonora is the coldest of Pym's heroines, and the most unconventional in that she is "incapable of passion but capable of heartbreak" (Cooley 40). Yet she is treated with scrupulous objectivity by Pym. Kathleen Browder Heberlein notes that Pym's art "forces us as readers into an awareness of multiple moral perspectives concerning social behaviour by showing

us the same actions (and characters) through the eyes of various figures, in various fictional communities, as well as through the eyes of the narrator. The result of this insistence on the validity of multiple points of view is a certain moral relativism, and, ultimately, charity" (264). What Heberlein is describing here, in strikingly similar terms, is Bakhtin's polyphonic author. Pym creates in Leonora a radically unconventional heroine by a negative re-accenting of all the familiar components of the Pym microcosm, while moving towards what will be an unconventional closure in terms of the Romantic or comic plot.

The authorial voice, then, moves elusively back and forth between various degrees of parody and stylization, demonstrating what Bakhtin terms an "artistic reworking" of the languages of the text:

When heteroglossia enters the novel it becomes subject to an artistic reworking. The social and historical voices populating language, all its words and all its forms, which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are organized in the novel into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia of [her] epoch. (Dialogic 300)

The novel becomes a locus of evaluation where the author positions herself within many languages and authoritative discourses. By distancing herself at various degrees from these languages and thus holding them up to scrutiny and critique--accepting some perhaps, and vigorously interrogating others through a spectrum of stylization and parody--a novelist such as Pym constantly questions and examines many aspects of her social and cultural environment from the dialogic boundary line between the divided self and the other. Her texts become, in this process, thoroughly dialogized and democratically polyphonic.

The "emphasis added" to dialogic prose when it is authored by a woman provides further dimensions to the contestation of "the social and historical voices populating language." In a sense, Pym's protagonists are fighting for

their lives every time they do battle with the traditional voices which have sought to define women within the rigid dichotomies of the culture text while simultaneously excluding them from all but marginal participation in its most powerful institutions. Barbara Pym's "immediately recognizable" voice is shaped both by gender, genre, and very specific cultural variables. Dialogic analysis discovers not only the characteristic manifestations particular to Pym of the deep divisions which seem implicit and inevitable in women's writing, but also helps to explain the polyphonic dispersion which marks the civil tolerance of her art. The divisions and ambivalences which typify her texts show a pervasive conflict between a deep, frequently sentimental, attachment to the inherited discourses of a male-dominated tradition and a burgeoning feminine--and feminist--consciousness.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Mikhail Bakhtin, "Towards a Reworking of the Dostoyevsky Book," Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics (PDP), ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 283-301.

<sup>2</sup> See J.M. Lotman, "Point of View in a Text," trans. L.M. O'Toole, New Literary History 6 (1975): 341.

<sup>3</sup> Polyphony is a unique characteristic of prose literature whereby several contesting voices representing a variety of ideological positions can engage equally in dialogue, free from authorial judgment or constraint. The author is democratically positioned among or "alongside" (Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics 6) the speeches of the characters so that no single point of view is privileged.

See Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics, especially 32-36.

Monology is the reduction of multiple voices and consciousnesses to a single version of truth. In "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoyevsky Book" (1966) Bakhtin muses in his notebook fragments: "What monologism is, in the highest sense. A denial of the equal rights of consciousnesses vis-a-vis the truth (understood abstractly and systemically)" (PDP 285). Novelistic prose is best able to surmount monologic thought through dialogism, which is anti-systemic and polyphonic in its insistence on the surrender of authorial control.

<sup>4</sup> For a more extensive discussion, see Anne Herrmann, The Dialogic and Difference, "Introduction" 1-20.

<sup>5</sup> See Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell UP) 1985 and This Sex Which Is Not One, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell UP) 1985.

<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin's masculine subjects are gender-neutral because it is assumed that the masculine is the norm, and thus the female is inevitably positioned as "the other" or as object, rather than as subject. In Herrmann's formulation, once gender is introduced into a discussion of prosaics, further divisions in point of view result because the female subject is always divided or split. One aspect of this division can be accounted for in terms of the inner conflict that results when the female author and/or protagonist reflect the attempt to reconcile the contradictions imposed by the culture text. Herrmann further notes, in her study of Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf, that either the woman writer or her protagonist must be sacrificed to one or the other side of the love (marriage and motherhood)/work (writer as artist) dichotomy.

<sup>7</sup> Double-voicing: (dialogism): Bakhtin uses this term in two senses. In the first sense, double-voicing is a characteristic of all speech in that no discourse exists in isolation but is always part of a greater whole; it is necessarily drawn from the context of the language world which preceded it. Bakhtin's second sense of the term is especially relevant to a study of novelistic prose: "The chief subject of our investigation, one could even say its chief hero, will be double-voiced discourse, which inevitably arises under conditions of dialogic interaction, that is, under conditions making possible an authentic life for the word" (PDP 185). In Bakhtin's discussion of dialogue in the second sense, double-voicing is an element discernible in discourse where the speaker wants the listener to hear the words as though they were spoken with "quotation marks." The novel is constructed almost exclusively with this kind of internally dialogized language, that is, language which contains two voices within a single grammatical construction. In Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics,

Bakhtin distinguishes between utterances spoken without "quotation marks" (monologic and single-voiced) and those accented with "quotation marks" (dialogic and double-voiced).

The single-voiced word is spoken without "quotation marks" and is perceived by the listener as direct and unmediated. The speaker says directly what he wishes to say without any recognition within the utterance that there is another perspective on his discourse, a contesting or different language of heteroglossia which might be an equally valid way of addressing the "referential object" (PDP 185). Professional language is an example of single-voiced discourse. It pronounces authoritatively on the object by suppressing both the scaffolding of pre-existing language which is necessarily cited in any speech as well as the awareness of an alternative point of view which might render the utterance ironic or qualified. Consequently, it is not possible for the listener to detect the "quotation marks" which indicate another discourse within the utterance, although all speech is inescapably "shot through with intentions and accents" (Dialogic 293).

Conversely, the double-voiced word includes the pre-existing scaffolding of another's voice and allows it to sound as part of the "architecture" of the utterance, so that it is perceived by the listener. The second voice is part of the intention of the speech and therefore deliberately incorporated into its construction. Words spoken ironically provide examples from everyday speech. Within the novel, in order for a discourse to be truly double-voiced, the character who speaks must be aware of the second voice within the utterance and enter into dialogue with it. The character may agree or disagree with this second voice, but it must be perceptible and a part of the "project of the utterance." Bakhtin views the capacity to account for such constructions crucial to any adequate analysis of prose discourse: "the central problem in prose theory is the problem of the double-voiced, internally dialogized word, in all its diverse types and variants" (Dialogic 330).

<sup>8</sup> The extent to which the realist text can be understood as essentially dialogic (polyphonic) in order to help explain unresolved dissonance in a female comic novelist such as Pym is still problematic. Nevertheless, current critical revisions argue that the modern novel written in the realist tradition is as radical in its disruptions as the modernist avant-garde text.

British writer and critic David Lodge, for example, reads "polyphonic" as an alternative formulation for "dialogic," and finds its characteristics not only in his analysis of modernist texts such as Joyce's Ulysses or D.H. Lawrence's Women In Love, but also present in "unfinalizable" aspects of the classic realist text (George Eliot's Middlemarch) and in modern novelists writing in the realist tradition (Evelyn Waugh, Henry Green, Ivy Compton-Burnett). Such works contain "an amazing variety of discursive texture, and a surprising degree of interpretive freedom for the reader" (After Bakhtin 86). When American feminist Patricia Yaeger argues of women's texts that "The interruptions...acquire the status of transgressions which the [female] novelist must weave into the uneven textures of her work until what is challenged by this unevenness is the very idea of logocentrism, of any single, patrilocal claim to truth" (187), we recall Bakhtin's criterion for the polyphonic novel that all voices must remain "contested, contestable and contesting" (Dialogic 332), irreducible to a single authorial world view. Indeed, his final reformulation of a prosaics seems to allow at least the inherent potential for polyphony in all novelistic prose.

<sup>9</sup> In her study of Virginia Woolf and the specular subject, Herrmann comes to the conclusion that Woolf's attempt to deconstruct gender by "erasing the historical subject through androgyny or anonymity" failed, and ended in the author's suicide because, within her culture, her female subjects "have no precedent, no name, no appropriate costume." I have already noted the significance of disguise or "costume" in Pym, whereby her women adopt alternate identities (i.e. old brown horse spinster or excellent woman) in order to postpone the Romance Plot.

Herrmann suggests that for Woolf, "subjectivity transcends history, which ultimately amounts to changes in costume, (147), but that her attempt to evade a gendered subject through androgyny was doomed because there was no "costume" precedent for such a compromise. Pym explores many culturally constructed costumed alternatives for her women, but none coincide completely with their true selves--hence dissonance and dialogic tension with the split subject between self and any other woman. Pym and her women, however, survive within the comic plot (Marcia Ivory is the exception) and avoid the death which awaits character or author within Herrmann's specular theory whereby one survives at the expense of the suppression of the other. (Herrmann, "Conclusion" 146-150)

<sup>10</sup> Leonora Eyre (SDD) comes closest, perhaps, to articulating Pym's own ultimate attitude to the sexual aspect of a relationship: "Leonora liked to think of her life as calm of mind all passion spent, or, more rarely, as emotion recollected in tranquillity. But had there ever really been passion, or even emotion? One or two tearful scenes in bed--for she had never enjoyed that kind of thing--and now it was such a relief that one didn't have to worry anymore" (SDD 16). For Pym, of course, there clearly had been passion "in her head" as Harvey puts it, in many of her relationships. Characteristically, however, she places her passions (or recollected passions) within the artifice of literary allusion--a Miltonic "calm of mind all passion spent."

<sup>11</sup> The "drapery of Literature" is already swathing Pym's undergraduate affair with Harvey when she records a tryst in his flat on the Banbury Road:

9 May [1934] In the morning I worked hard in Bodley.... Then Henry wrote in German on some of my Milton notes "Kommst Du-Ja?" and a few other things. I went and he was extremely nice--but Jockie [Robert Liddell] came in and caught us reading 'Samson Agonistes' in bed with nothing on. Really rather funny. (VPE 40)

It is clear that the romantic image of reading Milton in bed with Harvey is what is important to the young Barbara and not the awkward sexual encounter which preceded this idyll. The carnivalesque impulse to recast the relationship between men and women into the comic vision is also evident--"Really rather funny."

<sup>12</sup> Holt writes of Pym's situation after she had helped Harvey to finish his thesis at Oxford by working through the night typing, correcting and taking dictation for three weeks. He was characteristically unappreciative of this "thankless task," a typical scenario recreated in the novels--after all, he wasn't in love with her. After Harvey and John Barnicot left for a holiday in Scotland, she found solace in her writing, which became "the mainspring of her life" (A Lot 61). At this point Pym wrote in her diary:

I must work at my novel, that is the only thing there is and the only way to find any happiness at present.... I want Liebe but I would be satisfied if my novel could be published. (61)

She also wrote to Robert Liddell, her friend and literary confidant:

Would one rather be loved by Henry or have a novel accepted? (A Lot 61)

<sup>13</sup> Leonora Eyre (SDD) shares Wilmet's attitude to paid work: "The only thing to be said for work was that it gave one less time to brood and it was supposed to be satisfying for its own sake to the middle-aged" (SDD 17).

<sup>14</sup> 7 July (1967) Oxford with Bob. Pusey House. Lunch at the Randolph. Pitt-Rivers Museum to look at cross-bows (all dusty and locked away). Blackwells. (VPE 243).

<sup>15</sup> Heberlein notes of Wilmet and her departure from most of Pym's (or Charlotte M. Yonge's) heroines:

In many respects atypical for a Pym heroine, Wilmet is married, she is affluent, she is vain of her appearance; she seriously considers having an extramarital affair (adultery is present in fact/or in fantasy in every Pym novel, but rarely with the protagonist as one of the principals); and her church is unabashedly High. Most Pym heroines lead blameless lives; Wilmet becomes "increasingly aware and ashamed of her flaws." (144)

The conflict between trying to imitate the saccharine ideal of the "good" woman in the culture text of Victorian literature and the reality of shortfall is present in Pym's realization that she cannot always be "drearly splendid," and is recreated in her heroines. Of herself she says, "The knowledge might come to me--and I daresay it would be a shock--that one wasn't a particularly nice person (selfish, unsociable, uncharitable, malicious even)" (VPE 194). Wilmet says, "And then sometimes you discover that you aren't as nice as you thought you were--that you're in fact rather a horrid person, and that's humiliating somehow!" (GE 205-206). Pym will explore this "other woman" within the divided protagonist most fully in her creation of Leonora Eyre in The Sweet Dove Died.

<sup>16</sup> Bakhtin writes:

We list below the basic types of compositional-stylistic unities into which the novelistic whole usually breaks down:

- 1) Direct authorial literary-artistic narration (in all its diverse variants);
- 2) Stylization of the various forms of oral everyday narration (skaz);
- 3) Stylization of the various forms of semi-literary (written) everyday narration (the letter, the diary, etc);
- 4) Various forms of literary but extra-artistic authorial speech (moral, philosophical or scientific statements, oratory ethnographic descriptions, memoranda and so forth);
- 5) The stylistically individualized speech of characters (Dialogic 262).

<sup>17</sup> Bakhtin further distinguishes among the different kinds of double-voiced words which exist in the novel. For example, he identifies both passive and active double-voiced discourses but finds the active type of most interest. In the passive variety, the author allows the second voice to sound but is essentially in control of the other's speech within the utterance. Nevertheless, dialogism is present; though the speaker or author may be in control and even ultimately agree with the second voice, the very act of interrogating it and thus putting it to the test changes the nature of its authority and produces authentic dialogism.

There is a wide "spectral dispersion" (Dialogic 277) of infinite gradations in the relationship between the speaker and the other in passive double-voicing. However, if the author is more or less in agreement with the second discourse, the utterance is said to be stylized. Disagreement, on the other hand, produces parody. In stylization, the author's intention is "to make use of someone else's discourse in the direction of its own particular aspirations." The author's thought "does not collide with the other's thought but rather follows after it in the same direction... (PDP 193). Bakhtin terms stylization "uni-directional" double-voicing. Conversely, parody or ironic discourse sets up an opposition:

"The second voice, once having made its home in the other's discourse, clashes hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve a directly opposing aim" (PDP 193). Parody is thus "vari-directional" double-voicing. Both stylization and parody are forms of passive double-voicing.

<sup>18</sup> Pym writes to Robert Smith:

You thought perhaps that I might have retained some idealized vision of the clergy and perhaps, in a sense, I still do, just as I still even now at my age tend to believe what people tell me--it's just a quality in oneself. But I am under no illusion about church people, on the whole... (VPE 245)

See also Charles Burkhardt's paper "Glamorous Acolytes: Homosexuality in Pym's World." Burkhardt writes that a re-reading of Pym caused him to revise his initial impression that, "One is happy to report, for the sake of that institution, that in Barbara Pym's church there are no homosexual clergyman," to the more accurate conclusion that "the church is not pictured as a hotbed of or refuge for homosexuality but Barbara Pym knew that it was there" (Rossen 100-101).

<sup>19</sup> Keble's hymn (STG) provides a microcosmic exemplar of many tensions in Pym: her love of the Church and the beauty of its rituals coupled with her acute knowledge of its many real deficiencies and its blindness to the reality of women's lives; her affirmation and dedication to Christian (and Bakhtinian) hope and "possibility" joined to a rueful insight into the narrow parameters of the alternatives actually available to women; her love of Oxford and all that it represents juxtaposed with the comic incongruity of "noble" academic ideals and the pragmatic dailiness of most lives; the grotesque incongruity of privilege and the monologic authority of a patriarchal academic and theological elite counselling humility and self-sacrifice to women for whom there is, in fact, little choice in the matter. Verses one and three are particularly apt:

1. New every morning is the love  
Our wakening and uprising prove  
Through sleep and darkness safely brought  
Restored to life, and power, and thought.  
.....
2. The trivial round the common task  
Will furnish all we ought to ask  
Room to deny ourselves, a road  
To bring us daily nearer God.

John Keble 1792-1866

<sup>20</sup> Diana Benet comments on Pym's perceptions of the failure of the Church to communicate, emphasizing that its discourse is, in Bakhtinian terms, "aging, dying, ripe for change and renewal." She notes in "The Language of Christianity in Pym's Novels":

Pym presents a church hampered by three language-related problems: a stock of pious words that has been devitalized, outmoded devotional forms that often do not appeal to the modern sensibility, and a clergy that has difficulty communicating the ancient faith to its contemporary flock. (505)

<sup>21</sup> Whenever there is an appreciable tension or struggle within the utterance, whereby one voice vigorously contests and resists the other's attempt at parody, and where it escapes authorial control, the speech becomes a variety of active double-voicing. Such speech is intensely internally dialogized and close attention must be paid to style, syntax and tone in order to locate the competing



point of view. Moreover, an essential difference between parody in passive double-voicing and active double-voicing is that in the latter case the other discourse is actually beyond the utterance and thus "exerts influence from without" (PDP 199).

Bakhtin discusses many kinds of active double-voicing, but his first example should be noted, as it introduces two important attributes--that of "hidden polemic" and the "sideward glance." Here, the author's discourse "is directed towards its own referential object," but at the same time "a polemical blow is struck at the other's discourse" (PDP 195). The speaker is anticipating an antagonistic response from the listener; he seems to "cringe" or take a "sideward glance" at another's hostile point of view. This type of discourse is common in everyday speech whenever we employ "barbed" words, "make digs at others" or use "self deprecating overblown speech that repudiates itself in advance" (PDP 196). Bakhtin's exemplar of this and of many other kinds of double-voicing in the novel is Dostoyevsky's *Underground Man*, who resists dialogically all attempts to fix or finalize him. For example, after advancing increasingly shrill arguments to an implied listener who is not actually present, he "cringes" before the anticipated response:

...I'll bet you think I am writing all this to show off, to be witty at the expense of men of action; and what is more, that out of ill-bred showing off, I am clanking a sword, like my officer.

After citing this excerpt, Bakhtin remarks that "the entire style of the 'Notes' is subject to the most powerful and all-determining influence of other people's words" (PDP 229).

" Benet writes: "Typically Pym keeps a reserved distance from her clergymen. The quality or even existence of their faith is most frequently, and ominously, not remarked. The reader is left to draw his own conclusion" (510). This is another way of describing the polyphonic positioning of the author.

" Pym is thinking of Gordon Glover in 1943 during the London Blitz:

It was a very hot night--at about 2 a.m. the sirens went and there was gunfire in the distance. I lay awake thinking of Gordon, wondering where he was and if he was awake and longing hopelessly for him and panic came over me at what I had done and the life that was before me. But I thought--well this is the worst time to think of things. Everything seems gloomy and dark when you're lying awake in the middle of the night. One day perhaps quite soon--it will be better. (VPE 136)

## CHAPTER V

I Live Still!: Rewriting the Heroine's Plot<sup>1</sup>

Reality as we have it in the novel is only one of many possible realities, it is not inevitable, not arbitrary, it bears within itself other possibilities.

Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, "Epic and Novel"

Now I try to make things to look forward to, however small. At lunch yesterday I read this in Trivia...

So I never lose a sense of the whimsical and perilous charm of daily life, with its meetings and words and accidents. Why, today, perhaps, or next week, I may hear a voice and, packing up my Gladstone bag, follow it to the ends of the world.

Pym, A Very Private Eye

Bakhtin's emphasis on the unfinalizability inherent in novelistic prose grounded in an "unrealized surplus of humanness" (Dialogic 37) and shaped by the carnival spirit is encouraging in the study of a woman writer such as Pym. Just as she finds personal inspiration and hope in the "whimsical and perilous charm of daily life," which is recreated in the surprising possibilities latent in the lives of her fictional characters, so she shares Bakhtin's insistence that the open-ended "genre-shaping significance" (PDP 131) of the comic novel's laughter arises from a vision that can liberate as well as comfort and advise in everyday existence. The form-shaping laughter of the novel "cannot change existence, so to speak, materially (nor can it want to)--it can change only the sense of

existence" ("Speech Genres and Other Late Essays," Morson and Emerson 453). The "stoic truth" of the comic spirit is evident in Pym's characteristic reflections on her own reaction to disappointment and unhappiness, an attitude that shapes her art and life: "I've never before felt so conscious of 'making a life for myself.' I suppose the continuous effort is good for me, some people probably have to do it all the time" (VPE 121).<sup>2</sup> The laughing truth of comic affirmation can similarly, through a continuous effort, make a life for her female characters by joining a positive "sense of existence" with the opportunities for narrative revision available within the art of fiction.

I have already considered in detail some of the ways in which Pym revises various literary conventions which tend to limit options for women in fiction: her provisional de-centering of the heroine to the margins in the character of brown horse spinster; the foregrounding of the pressing claims of quotidian reality; the democratic positioning of the author among the heteroglossia of her characters which precludes the imposition of a single ideology or world view on the novel. I wish to conclude with a consideration of some additional strategies which Pym adopts in her contestation of the received time-space relationships which tend to determine the choices available to her protagonists within the teleology of the heroine's plot. Bakhtin terms such time-space relationships chronotopes; the possibilities available for change within the comic novel depend in part on a recasting of traditional narrative expectations which, in turn, permits a re-working of conventional closures. It will be useful at the outset to note briefly the observations of Northrop Frye and Frank Kermode concerning some characteristics of genres which seem to coincide with Bakhtin's perspectives. The feminist revisions of plot described by Rachel Blau DuPlessis in Writing Beyond the Ending (1985) and Joanne S. Frye in Living Stories, Telling Lives (1986) are equally relevant to a study of Pym's narrative transformations.

Bakhtin, and, more recently, Kermode in The Sense of An Ending, point to the novel as a genre offering optimal opportunities for flexibility and innovation in the writer's attempts to revise arbitrary closure in what the latter terms a "changing fiction." Just as Bakhtin celebrates dialogism and the

disruptive carnival spirit in the novel as aspects of a struggle against authoritative discourses which attempt to fix living speech into calcified structures of "static and dead" language (Dialogic 343), so Kermode argues that novels (fictions) are "agents of change" as opposed to myths which are "agents of stability" (Kermode, Sense 39).

Northrop Frye, in his discussion of the "green world" that Shakespeare creates in many of his comedies, equates carnivalesque space with "the dream world that we create out of our own desires." This world, where hierarchies are turned upside down, coincides with Bakhtin's concept of the liberating spirit of the carnival in the novel and Kermode's recognition of this same capacity in his discussions of fiction. Frye goes on to describe an essential function of literature within the context of Shakespeare's plays:

Thus Shakespearean comedy illustrates...the archetypal function of literature in visualizing the world of desire, not as an escape from "reality" but as the genuine form of the world that human life tries to imitate. (Anatomy 184)

All three critics, then, see comedy and/or the novel as life-affirming, enabling structures that are particularly resistant to linguistic or formal pressures to constrain or limit the representation of diverse, evolving visions of truth. Thus, the comic novel is perhaps best equipped to push against the Procrustean bed of obsolete or moribund traditions which are inadequate to express marginal perceptions of reality.' While offering opportunities for revision to both male and female authored texts, the comic novel--which is, after all, part of a primarily male novelistic canon--nevertheless best facilitates the feminist agenda of the oppositional woman's text. Comic structure is particularly receptive to the "emphasis added" of feminist contestation of paradigmatic constraints.

Nevertheless, as Blau DuPlessis, among others, has pointed out, the traditional teleology which is available to female characters within fiction,

especially in the nineteenth-century Victorian novel, is particularly restrictive. Pym, as has been noted, was an avid reader of Romantic poetry and Victorian literature, and a good part of her formal education was devoted to their study.<sup>4</sup> The female protagonist in the nineteenth-century novel is preoccupied with dichotomies which are pervasive, and her dilemma may be partially explained as a struggle between two kinds of quest plot. These two plots traditionally have been viewed as antithetical and mutually exclusive. DuPlessis summarizes:

In nineteenth-century fiction dealing with women, authors went to a good deal of trouble and even some awkwardness to see to it that Bildung [the quest plot of education] and romance could not co-exist and be integrated for the heroine at the resolution.... This contradiction between love and quest in plots dealing with women as a narrated group...has, in my view, one main mode of resolution: an ending in which one part of the contradiction, usually quest or Bildung, is set aside or repressed, whether by marriage or by death.

(4)

Pym was well aware of the cultural limitations still placed upon women in England from the 1930's to the 60's.<sup>5</sup> One of her idiosyncratic, comic letters written in 1938 to Robert Liddell in Compton-Burnett style, reflects a social environment still markedly consistent with the world of the Victorian novel. Here she "fictionalizes" a Pym family visit to relatives. About this time she is already beginning to construct her evasive brown horse spinster persona as the social pressure to marry increases:

'Mrs. Minshall seems to want us all to be either dead or married,' said Mrs. Pym to her daughter as they drove home in the car.

'Well, I do not see what else we can be,' said Barbara in a thoughtful tone. 'I suppose we all come to one state or the other eventually. I do not know which I would rather be in.'

'Oh, there is plenty of time for that,' said Mrs. Pym comfortably. (VPE 80)

Pym is already ironically subverting the alternatives by collapsing the dichotomy and wryly equating marriage with "death"; even at the age of twenty-four, she is beginning to wonder thoughtfully "what else we [women] can be." Such musings foreshadow the preoccupations of her novels; her fictions tentatively begin to recast these options for her protagonists and to imagine how to foreground an idiosyncratic kind of quest instead of Romance. It is in this sense that she will embrace the possibilities of the novel's implicit resistance to the culture text, as well as its capacity to modify traditional forms of plot and characterization.

It is ironic that, for Bakhtin, the nineteenth-century novel, particularly the Bildungsroman as developed by Goethe, becomes his ideal of the liberating novel of historical emergence. In the formulation of his theory of chronotopes--time-space relationships that are artistically expressed in literature (Morson and Emerson 367)--Bakhtin sees the nineteenth-century realist novel as one in which, "problems of reality and human potential, problems of freedom and necessity, and the problem of creative initiative rise to their full height" ("The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism," Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel 24). The Bildungsroman is clearly a novel of emergence for the hero, but the liberation of human potential for the heroine is somewhat more problematic.

I have already dealt at length with one of Pym's strategies for overcoming this impasse--that of her character of excellent woman or brown horse spinster who, by "going underground" sexually, is freed into the quest or adventure plot for the duration of the novel and perhaps even beyond. Moreover, the Romance plot need not be ultimately repressed or rejected. In Pym, it becomes

peripheral, double-voiced and ironic. Indeed, it is the omission of irony--the doubled perspective of the mature woman which marks the oppositional feminine consciousness of a Pym protagonist--that is often lacking in the contemporary Romance plot. In later years, Pym became a reviewer of Romance fiction and wrote to Philip Larkin:

The one thing they [Romance novels] lack is humour or irony--and of course one does miss that. But in a way they do seem to reflect some aspects of life that may be valid for the fortunate ones. As much as Doris Lessing or Edna O'Brien or even B. Pym. (VPE 280)

Pym's tolerance for alternate points of view is characteristic. She thus negotiates a number of compromises. Blau DuPlessis places such a strategy within the main agenda of contemporary writers of fiction:

It is the project of twentieth-century women writers to solve the contradiction between love and quest and to replace the alternate endings in marriage and death that are their cultural legacy from nineteenth century life and letters by offering a different set of choices. They invent a complex of narrative acts with psychosocial meanings, which will be... "writing beyond the ending"... Some [contemporary women writers] use narrative to make critical statements about the psychosexual and sociocultural construction of women [and] the romance plot, as a major expression of these social practices, is a major site for their intrepid scrutiny, critique and transformation of narrative. (4)

Pym mounts this disruptive project with typically oblique weapons of transgression. She is clearly a woman still fundamentally divided, one who has partially, but by no means wholly, internalized the dictums of the social and literary female plot. It is within the liberating language and structure of the

comic novel, however, that she is able to identify the seams and gaps in her culture and begin an unrelenting interrogation of its contradictions and reductive dichotomies on behalf of her characters. Pym is particularly interesting in this regard as she is so patently a writer who is gesturing towards ways of modifying the heroine's plot while working within conventional paradigms. In this, her central quest as author, she opens up many unorthodox possibilities for her heroines.

Critical studies of Pym attest to the intriguing antinomies in her work which confound consensus in interpretation and defy any attempt at reductionist readings. Opinions concerning closure in Pym's novels are, consequently, inevitably divergent. It is interesting to note, for example, that Bruce Jacobs, in his study of Pym, elides the *Bildung* in Blau DuPlessis's two quest plots when he notes that "Most critics agree that the plot structure of most of her novels revolves around a traditional romantic quest for love" (109). This oversimplification cannot fix Pym in the frame of conventional plotting, however. Consequently, Diana Benet can speak of the novels as affirmations which involve the quest for "something to love, with the central decision confronting her protagonists that of choosing whether or not to love" (163), while Robert Emmet Long characterizes her narratives rather unequivocally as failed quests. He writes, "Almost all of Pym's novels involve a quest, but it can lead to no great self-realization because it is countered by a pervasive sense of paralysis, and her men and women typically remain at a distance from one another" (215).

The ambivalent closures of Some Tame Gazelle, Excellent Women and The Sweet Dove Died suggest their consideration as key texts which can serve to highlight Pym's innovative and idiosyncratic recasting of the co-extensive claims of the *Bildung*, quest or adventure plot and the Romantic paradigm. Moving from the sprightly wit and light-hearted laughter of her first published novel, Some Tame Gazelle, to the darker tones and the reduced laughter of The Sweet Dove Died, affords an opportunity to observe her pushing toward ever more challenging and unconventional resolutions to received narrative teleologies for women in fiction.



How, then, do Pym's novels attempt to negotiate the divide between Bildung and Romance while gesturing towards integration and affirmation? Because Some Tame Gazelle is her first published novel, it is worth examining some of the initial solutions to this dichotomy as paradigmatic to her work.

Perhaps Pym's most obvious departure is that by making her protagonists middle-aged, she is already writing beyond the ending of the Romance plot. Belinda and Harriet Bede should, presumably, already be married or dead but they are neither. They are very much alive and intensely interested in the world about them. It should be noted as well that here, in her first novel, Pym is experimenting with the strategy of the collective [or dyadic] protagonist, by making two affectionate sisters her heroines, though Belinda is the "feminine consciousness" of the text. Blau DuPlessis discusses this technique in connection with speculative or utopian fiction, but what she has to say concerning this tactic for "writing beyond the ending" is applicable to this novel, as well as to Jane and Prudence and at least one other by Pym: "These fictions [with collective protagonists] replace individual heroes or sealed couples with groups, which have a sense of purpose and identity, and whose growth occurs in mutual collaboration" (179).

Though Belinda and Harriet remain a "couple" by rejecting matrimony, their close relationships with a group of friends of mixed sex (Dr. Parnell, Count Bianco, the Hockleves, Edith Liversidge etc.) and with the Church community, expand their focus of interest. Late in Pym's career, Quartet in Autumn will experiment more extensively with the technique of the collective protagonist, as well as with the unusual strategy of envisioning all of the protagonists as elderly and about to retire from the workplace. They, too, find their small satisfactions in mutual concern for each other, and are cast in stories which evade or revise the Romance plot. In Some Tame Gazelle, when Harriet rejects Mr. Mold's proposal, Belinda is poignantly overjoyed:

'Of course, I couldn't accept him,' said Harriet rather loudly, for she had expected Belinda to show real interest, instead of just standing and staring at the floor.

The look of relief that brightened Belinda's face was pathetic in its intensity.

'Oh Harriet...' again she was speechless. However could she have thought for a moment that her sister would do such a thing?

(STG 142)

Pym is consistent in her novels in preventing any of her excellent women from stooping to folly by making an unhappy marriage. Indeed, every proposal actually depicted in the canon is refused. Clearly, this is a departure from the expectations of the comic or Romance plot, and is another example of Bakhtinian surprisingness as well as a displacement of Romance into the adventure plot in which "Anything can happen to the adventure hero[ine] and [s]he can become anything" (Bakhtin, PDP 94). Ironically, when her own sister Hilary's marriage to Sandy Walton ended in divorce, life imitated art, and Barbara and Hilary lived very happily together until Pym's death in 1980. Hilary Pym writes of "the shared life of 'Belinda and Harriet,' which started well and ran a good course" (VPE 5).

Pym is well aware that romantic love seldom runs "a good course." Belinda solves the problem of romance in a fashion that is idiosyncratic to Pym. For nearly all of Pym's protagonists, the rapture of romantic love--the love celebrated by traditional Western literature and the culture text--is firmly, if often regretfully, distanced by being irrevocably placed in the past. This does not mean that the protagonist cannot love or be loved; it means that the ideal of romantic love has been tested and found wanting. It has little to do with the realities of daily living (or loving) and cannot stay the course.

Most of Pym's women have known the "splendours and miseries" of romantic love in their youth, embroidered with appropriate allusions from canonical love poetry. They never regret these often frustrating and painful experiences; on

the contrary, they cherish the bittersweet memories, much as Pym did herself, of the men they have idealized. A passage from A Verv Private Eve is characteristic, and was written at the time that she was first drafting Some Tame Gazelle and beginning to distance herself from her own love for Henry Harvey:

Old brown horse, she says, we have had our moments you and I, and she is singing in a faded voice an old song she is remembering and it is all about great big moments of happiness and such. (VPE 67)

Hazel Holt writes of Pym's brief romance with Julian Amery: "They had spent only twenty hours together--Barbara carefully noted the amount of time of each meeting--but they provided, as she wrote later, 'twenty years of memories'" (A Lot 75). Nevertheless, in Pym, it is always a mistake to marry a man one idealizes, particularly if it is a relationship of unequal affection. Belinda Bede has distanced her love for the Archdeacon by letting another woman marry him and reap the disillusionment that marriage inevitably must bring to the unrealistic expectations that the whole tradition of idealized love has perpetuated. Marriage, then, in Pym, collapses the alternatives of the Romance plot into a kind of death--a death to romance. As Bruce Jacobs notes:

In Pym's satiric arsenal, marriage is perhaps the crowning irony of [a woman's] life; eagerly sought by some, vaguely dreamed of by most, it is portrayed as an emotional cul-de-sac that often promotes unhappiness in people who have been misled by social pressure and unrealistic romantic ideals. (112)

Something very interesting, then, has happened to what might be called the Romance-quest chronotope in Pym's work. It has undergone a radical modification and displacement. The time sequence of Romance has been disrupted. We have seen already, in the writer's diaries and letters, the social pressure on a young woman to marry. Pym, in her Compton-Burnett style letter which parodies a family

friend's comments on her age, clearly felt embarrassed that she was still single at twenty-four. Aging her protagonists (Belinda and Harriet are in their fifties), Pym modifies the expectations of the Romance plot. Many of Pym's women can, in fact, marry--or find other forms of emotional satisfaction--well past middle age, should they so choose. This is one aspect of Bakhtinian surprisingness with which Pym recasts the Romance plot. In this particular novel, aging spinster Connie Aspinall's unexpected marriage in the closure to Bishop Grote, as well as the union of the curate, Mr. Donne, with (older) Middle-English scholar, Clivia Berridge, ironically and nominally fulfil the structural expectations of comic closure. However, the protagonists, Belinda and Harriet, both thwart the constraining grids of the comic or heroine's plot by refusing their respective (and unexpected) suitors, thus combining two kinds of surprisingness, and displacing the conventional Romance plot to the margins.

Romance, then, is de-centered and parodied in a number of ways in Some Tame Gazelle. It is relegated to the "archaic" past where, in terms of Belinda's own life, she "fossilizes" romance in ironic fragments of traditional poetry or song:

Belinda read in her programme that he [the curate, Mr. Donne] was to sing "Believe me if all those endearing young charms" and The Lost Chord, both very suitable songs and particular favourites of hers. Like all sentimental people she cherished the idea of loving a dear ruin, and found her eyes filling with tears as he sang the affecting words. (43)

Belinda weeps comfortably over sentimental memories of Tennysonian, youthful "days that are no more" in songs and poetry, but makes sure that she keeps her own "dear ruin"--the Archdeacon and the Romantic images and "stories" of the literary canon--at emotional arms' length in her everyday life. She relegates Victorian plots enshrined in literature to memories of the past--both personal and literary.<sup>7</sup> It is in this sense that Pym "creates an aesthetic out of romance" (Rossen 149); Belinda keeps her memories of the Archdeacon as a kind of

flowery "relique," symbolically pressed between the leaves of canonical books of poetry. Romance and sexuality are displaced into the Library--often into the bedside bookcase--an idiosyncratic motif which repeats in each of Pym's texts. Romance, then, becomes for many of Pym's women part of an anachronistic past associated with canonical texts and obsolete "stories" studied within the Academy and cherished in one's youth. The "delightful interlude" of the golden days at Oxford comes to symbolize the happy illusions of an unrepeatable past.

Bakhtin speaks of this distancing as a novelistic phenomenon which he finds in the English comic novels of Sterne and Thackeray; he calls it an intervallic chronotope. It is another variation of novelistic hybridization whereby more than one kind of time-space is incorporated into the novel. The intervallic chronotope "interrupts" the predominant chronotope of the work. Clearly, traditional Romance is not the predominant narrative chronotope of this novel. In Pym, the main chronotope is a special modification of the "heroine's plot" collapsed into the adventure plot; the protagonist "survives" Romantic love, and makes a life beyond the dichotomies of the erotic narrative.

Furthermore, by displacing the conventional Romance plot and modifying comic structural expectations, Pym has accomplished Bakhtinian unfinalizability. Morson and Emerson comment on this phenomenon in relation to the intervallic chronotope:

By foregrounding the possibility of viewing action from two different chronotopic perspectives, [the intervallic chronotope] highlights the fact that each chronotope is one of many possible chronotopes. (FTC 165) (Morson and Emerson 404)

By treating the Romance plot as only one kind of "story" available to the protagonist, Pym opens up the same kind of multiplicity. Her novels thus participate in that characteristic of the Bildungsroman--the novel of emergence--which "understands anachronism and its relation to personality; that is, it understands why personal types [and ossified plots and chronotopes] are not

repeatable from age to age and culture to culture" (M and E 411). Rosalind Coward notes that Romantic novels are no longer the story form which investigates the significant changes in women's lives (190) and describes the Romance chronotope in terms which explain why. She writes:

In most novels of this early period [eighteenth and nineteenth-century] there is a crucial moment for the individual, embodied in the choices around marriage. For the individual heroine, it is a brief moment where significant events may happen, after which her choices and identity are lost for ever. (176)

One way of viewing Pym's strategy for increasing the possibilities for her heroines is to note how she displaces or marginalizes this "crucial moment" from the climax of the novel. In Some Tame Gazelle, for example, Belinda is already well past the "brief moment" in which she might have married the Archdeacon. That "significant event" occurred thirty years before the beginning of the novel. The pragmatic proposals she and Harriet receive from Bishop Grote and Mr. Mold are deflated and parodied; she thus inverts the Romantic climax by treating the comic proposals as significant moments only in that by firmly rejecting such suitors, she and Harriet can continue on as before without the doubtful benefits of a loveless marriage. If considered in this light, it is possible to see that while the Romance plot is present in Pym's novels, it radically changes as it interacts with other plots; it becomes an ironic secondary chronotope for the heroine rather than the primary one. Even in novels where it assumes more prominence--No Fond Return of Love, perhaps--the ideal of Romance has become ironic and parodied as part of an unrepeatable past for her heroines. If her heroines, like Dulcie (NFRL) or Mildred (EW) marry, it is usually "beyond the ending" of idealized love, and "Romance" has been thoroughly contested and revised. Even comic structure, which often ends with a "party or festive ritual....weddings are most common" (Anatomy 163), is characteristically reduced either by postponement or by de-centering to minor characters (Connie Aspinall

and Olivia Berridge in Some Tame Gazelle). The marriage of Ianthe Broome (UA) is the exception, but Ianthe is genuinely loved by John Challow, who was to have been "much worse" as a character; Pym typically refuses to put her heroines into potentially destructive marriages.

Just as Belinda distances herself from Romance, so her sister Harriet procrastinates to evade the marriage trap. Her elderly, faithful suitor, Count Ricardo Bianco, can provide all the trappings of courtship. He adores her, and "He was wealthy and he had a beautiful house and garden; and, moreover, as Agatha had remarked that morning, he came of a very old Italian family" (41). "Romance," in Pym, need not be--indeed almost never is--synonymous with sexual passion. Consequently, the intellectual or emotional glamour of Romance can survive for the older protagonist in these peripheral attractions and pleasures of love. The charming Count proposes periodically, and is gently refused, as Harriet's real interest lies in doting on young and endlessly replaceable curates. This kind of love--the celibate flirtation so pervasive in Pym's texts--once more breaks the time-space sequencing of the Romance chronotope. Like the patchwork geometric of the everyday with its daily rituals (eating, drinking, church-going, gardening, cooking etc.), it is endlessly repeatable and can provide "small joys" and "spinsterish delights"--many milder significant moments which have no discernible ending--unlike the Book of Old Plots.

Just as Pym's men can easily substitute one woman for another, in any number of casual flirtations, so Pym's women often reject obsessive, exclusive relationships for repeatable and replaceable attachments. The culture text in the 30's and 40's is still powerful, however, in precluding for her women the possibility that such relationships be sexual and thus "promiscuous." Clearly, this is the kind of affectionate relationship beyond the "sealed couple" of conjugal bonding which Pym will explore in a darker context in The Sweet Dove Died. Leonora's love for the beautiful young bisexual James ensures that "nothing [sexual] can come of it." Similarly, it is true that in Some Tame Gazelle both women choose to dote on safely unavailable men, but Pym provides other alternatives in other texts. At the same time, permanence and stability

are available in the relationship between the two sisters. Blau DuPlessis calls such an alternative to romantic thralldom a "sustaining relationship between 'companionate women' which can survive more temporary arrangements" (67). Both women, moreover, live rich inner lives, enjoy each other's company, are financially and emotionally independent, are keenly interested in the life of the village community and are thus very much "alive." Belinda, the more restrained sister, still has eyes that shine at the thought of "the smattering of culture acquired in her college days" (7); Harriet has a hearty appetite and wears colourful dresses suggesting a vital joy in living: "Tropical flowers rioted over her plump body" (11). She, too, retains a little of the Latin and Greek she once studied. The intellectual beauties of literature and culture are rewarding for a woman, it seems, as long as she does not try to make them coincide with the reality of her daily existence. As noted elsewhere, the education of both sisters enriches them emotionally and intellectually but is shown to be almost totally irrelevant in their daily lives subsequent to the "delightful interlude" of their Oxford days, except as it links them to the male friends of their youth--Dr. Parnell [Robert Liddell], for example.

Here, then, is another kind of community with which Pym's women can participate outside of the institutionalized link with the larger community that marriage symbolizes. An expanded community is available through the agape of friendship. In this novel, the genuine love and amity of the two sisters, enriched by the friends they have retained from their undergraduate days as well as erstwhile or rejected lovers, form the "multiple centres" that diversify their lives. It is important to recall that this first novel is a roman à clef, each of the characters representing one of Pym's young Oxford friends projected years into the future. It is also significant that Pym wanted Henry Harvey's "friendship," even after any romantic connection was out of the question, and that she kept it all her life. This was true of her intellectual friendship with Robert Liddell and the bonds she formed with many others outside the fictional recreations of this particular text. The importance of women making and maintaining connections outside of the limitations of the Romance plot is thus



a constant in her novels and foreshadows the present feminist insistence on the importance of a wider supportive community for women beyond the "sealed couple." Pym's community, moreover, includes both genders.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, it seems that intellectual friendships, nurtured and maintained on paper, in many ways come to represent for her a more viable option for making a life than the cul-de-sac that conventional marriage often proves to be for women in her novels who have unwisely entered into such a partnership.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, inversion or displacement of the Romance plot becomes the actual quest or Bildung of Pym's protagonists. Janice Rossen touches upon this carnivalesque reversal when she states of the novels that they "are 'how to' books on falling out of love" (139). They ironically echo their Victorian precursors in that they focus "on the aspect of renunciation of passion and romance through moral strength of will" (138).<sup>10</sup> In closure, moreover, the heroine's affirmation may assume a variety of resolutions. She may choose to marry at some point beyond the ending of the text, but she does not view her future mate through the eyes of Romance as an idealized, god-like figure, but as an imperfect human being nevertheless embraced with Christian love: Ianthe Broome (UA), Jessie Morrow (CH and J&P), Mildred Lathbury (EW), Dulcie Mainwaring (NFRL), Emma Howick (FGL), Catherine Oliphant (LTA). She already may be married, and learn to accept and "bear the burden" of her married state, which is far from idyllic, with a mature resignation reflecting Christian "forgiveness": Jane Cleveland (J&P), Wilmet Forysth (GB), Caro Grimstone (AAQ), Margaret Cleveland (CH), Cassandra Marsh-Gibbon (CTS). She may reject marriage, or any other relationship which threatens to become destructive, oppressively constraining or emotionally traumatic: Belinda and Harriet Bede (STG), Leonora Eyre (SDD). The education or "Bildung" of a Pym protagonist in her growth from innocence to maturity involves a coming to terms with the lure of the culture text of Romance and negotiating its subsequent displacement from the centre of existence to the periphery.

Consequently, Pym's women grow up before they marry--if they marry. It is in this sense that they reflect the pattern of education in the Bildungsroman as

described by Bakhtin whereby "it is not the cycle youth-to-age that shapes identity but the path from idealism to skepticism and resignation" (Morson and Emerson 410). Life becomes a school of experience "through which every person must pass and derive one and the same result: one becomes more sober" ("The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism" 22) (M and E 410). In order to grow up emotionally, however, Pym's heroines must be able to deconstruct the "sociotext." This is very difficult, as all the cultural pressures and paradigms for women in the historical time-frame of the novels (1930's to 1970's) mitigate against it. Pym's women may still echo Jane Eyre's "Reader, I married him," but they do so only after having undergone the trial or "test" of the adventure plot. Slaying the dragon of the sociotext by surviving "Romance," they view marriage not as a longed-for culmination to the erotic plot, but somewhat ruefully, with the benefit of a mature insight, as a very real limitation on their personal liberty. Marriage is a loving sacrifice for a Pym heroine, not a prize.

In one of Pym's early novels, Civil to Strangers, published only after her death, the heroine, Cassandra Marsh-Gibbon, is married to Adam--a Henry Harvey figure. He is a difficult and selfish writer of obscure novels, but regarded with loving tolerance by his intelligent young wife. At one point, she ponders the rector's recital of the culture (Christian) text concerning marriage:

'It makes one realize what a blessing marriage is,' observed the rector.

Cassandra said that marriage was certainly a blessing, although one could have too much even of a blessing. (CTS 87)

Cassandra loves her husband, but from her vantage point as wife she can see marriage realistically. There follows a particularly wry and witty passage whereby Pym writes beyond the ending for Cassandra. In this case, it is marriage itself that is the "testing-time" for the heroine. She thinks--ironically while in Church--of the "comforts" of widowhood.<sup>11</sup> It is a characteristic Pym

inversion of the heroine's plot, where advanced age mercifully liberates a woman from gender constraints and tyrannical male dominance:

There was something pleasing about the idea of being really old--say between seventy and eighty, but not infirm or a nuisance to anybody. To have money and leisure to sit in a lovely garden, enjoying the sunshine and doing Jacobean embroidery; to be a comfortable widow, not recently bereaved, but one whose husband had been ten to twenty years in his grave and whose passing was no longer deeply mourned, would not this be a delightful existence? Cassandra asked herself. ... She sighed as she thought how very far she was from being a comfortable old widow. Forty years and more, she thought. But it was nice of the rector to have suggested to her what peace and comfort the far distant future might hold. (CTS 91-92)

This is Pym at her most ironic and comically ambivalent. Cassandra, overtly an idyllic model of cultural expectations, "the angel in the house," secretly dreams of a time of real liberation well beyond the chronotope of youth and Romance--a time when her difficult husband is "comfortably" dead.

Northrop Frye notes that one of the oldest themes in comedy is the freeing of a slave (Anatomy 180); Pym rewrites this trope by releasing her heroines either from the romantic thralldom of an unwise passion or, in this case, by suggesting that Cassandra, who has clearly already reached this stage of maturation in her education--she can view her spouse with a devastating detachment--may have to wait well beyond the novel's closure for "the delightful existence" of a comfortable widowhood. It is apt, in this context, to consider Frye's observation that "the action of comedy, like the action of the Christian Bible, moves from law to liberty" (181). Sitting demurely in Church, Cassandra's imagination takes her from the law of matrimony to the liberty of the merry widow. Of course, Pym (and Cassandra) are having great fun with these flights of fancy, which are not serious--there can be no death in this purely comic

context; these early, happy comedies keep the tragic story firmly distanced. Adam is not about to die, and Cassandra will continue to keep him in the dark about her rebellious moments: "In places like Up Callow wives did take husbands seriously, in public anyway" (CTS 34). Furthermore, Pym's middle-class women must have economic security and good health to realize a life which, she implies, can be comfortably, or at least reasonably, satisfying beyond the grids of the sociotext. Consequently, Cassandra is dreaming of the state already enjoyed by Belinda and Harriet Bede at the resolution of Some Tame Gazelle--economic and emotional independence.

In these youthful and light-hearted novels, Pym also begins a tentative revision of the pejorative terms "spinster" and "widow" which imply that women without husbands must necessarily be enduring inadequate or miserable lives. Belinda Bede, like all Pym's heroines, has internalized society's views of the spinster to some degree--hence the ambivalence felt in the tension between reality and social norms. She contemplates Mrs. Hoccleve and recalls with some satisfaction that when Agatha knits socks they are "not quite long enough in the foot" (STG 248). It is an irony in Pym that one of the most shameful shortcomings of an excellent woman who knits--and most do--is to produce an article made with affection for a man which "does not fit." On a symbolic level, women "collude" to produce clothing for the dominant, monologic perspective which always coincides with their view of themselves. Excellent women, on the other hand, often are costumed in shapeless, ill-fitting clothing. Such clothes not only render them sexually "invisible," but also--in the context of Bakhtinian possibility--allow them, like Gwendolyn Fairfax in Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest, who is "not perfect" (or fixed and finished), to "develop in many directions" (Wilde 55). Belinda's sense of superiority as a knitter seems short-lived, however, as she reflects on how she, as a spinster, is nevertheless viewed by her society:

She had suddenly seen Agatha as pathetic and the picture was disturbing. Now she knew that there could never be anything

pathetic about Agatha. Poised and well-dressed, used to drinking champagne, the daughter of a bishop and the wife of an archdeacon-- that was Agatha Hoccleve. It was Belinda Bede who was the pathetic one and it was so much easier to bear the burden of one's own pathos than that of somebody else. Indeed, perhaps the very recognition of it in oneself meant that it didn't really exist. Belinda took a rather large sip of champagne and looked round the hall with renewed courage. (STG 248)

Does Belinda recognize her "pathos" and thus avert it? Pym's tongue-in-cheek ambivalence is subtle and ironic. Agatha possesses all that her upper-middle class society deems desirable for a woman. But the novel has made very clear that Agatha is more to be pitied than Belinda, who has a kind of independence that Agatha has forfeited for the social, not necessarily emotional, rewards of marriage. Belinda's humble posture as brown horse spinster is deceptive, as we have seen. Frye explains that comic tradition which stretches from Menander to contemporary soap operas "often incorporates a heroine who is forced to suffer indignities" (183). Belinda is pitied and patronized as a "spinster" and has suffered the indignity of being rejected by the Archdeacon as his "helpmate" in favour of Agatha. Nevertheless, "the action of comedy moves towards a deliverance from something" (178). Pym's unorthodox rewriting of comedy and the heroine's plot delivers Belinda and Harriet from the kind of romantic thralldom that leads to Agatha's (and Cassandra's) bleak portion of catering to men like the Archdeacon or Adam Marsh-Gibbon "'til death do us part"; divorce is clearly not a viable option in Pym's conservative Anglican world of the 1930's.

The whole literary tradition of a "chaste constancy" (French 119) for the comic or tragic heroine which Marilyn French sees reflected in Shakespeare's plays is consequently revised. Pym's fictional heroines may remain "chaste" but not necessarily constant, like Harriet, or comfortably constant in turning love into artifact, like Belinda. Because Pym's men, who are looking for "helpmeets," seem able easily to substitute one woman for another--men are not constant--she

claims the same kind of enviable emotional detachment for some of her fictional women. For example, Belinda muses on the validity of the literary conventions of love when Mr. Donne entertains with a song after supper at the vicarage:

Harriet, who accompanied him, was anxious that he should try an Elizabethan love song, and after a rather faltering beginning he sang quite charmingly, Belinda thought, but without much conviction.

Love is a fancie

Love is a frenzie

Let not a toy then breed thee such annoy....

Perhaps there was no frenzy in his feeling for Miss Berridge, and love was hardly a toy. Surely Count Bianco's affection for Harriet could not be so described, or Belinda's for the Archdeacon? And yet tonight she had the feeling that there might be some truth in what the poet said. It was excellent advice to those of riper years, especially when the imagination became too active. That intimate note in the Bishop's voice, for example, and the way he had seemed to look at her during the reading of the poem. It might just as easily have been Connie Aspinall he was looking at. (STG 208-209)

When Bishop Grote later makes his "surprising" proposal to Belinda and is refused, he soon does, indeed, transfer his "quest" to Connie Aspinall. Connie, though of "riper years," lacks Belinda's mature feminine consciousness:

'Yes, I'm so happy,' said Connie. 'Theodore [Grote] told me that as soon as he came here he felt that he was destined to find happiness, and that when he saw me he knew it was to be.' She gave a mysterious emphasis to these last words.

Belinda was silent for a moment in thankfulness and wonder. She did not now resent the Bishop's quoting of her favourite hymn

God moves in a mysterious way. It was manifest, that He did. (STG 239)<sup>12</sup>

Belinda is thankful for her merciful deliverance from becoming the drudge of such a one as Theodore Grote. In these two passages, many of the tensions of the women in Pym's novels who are searching for love are delineated. On the one hand, Romantic love, far from being available to every woman, is rare and ephemeral. Even if the "fortunate ones" do find it, it is doomed to death within the bonds (and burdens) of matrimony. Her heroines treasure whatever experiences they have had of it and "put it on the shelf"--often the canonical bookshelf. Pym's comic, sexual displacement of eroticism into spinsterish bedside reading material is associated with other desiccated and dead "reliques" of the Golden (and illusory) past. The Elizabethan love song warns that the Romantic "frenzie" of youth precludes comfort and banishes the alternate joys of daily living. The canonical poet speaks at least "some truth" in this, thinks Belinda, out of all the nonsense that has been written about Romantic love. Romantic love is not a "toy" precisely because the indoctrinated longing for it in a woman can cause so much real misery--for many years, in some cases. Pym devises many strategies so that "Love" with a capital "L" learned partly from Literature with a capital "L" will not "breed thee such annoy" for her enlightened, grown-up protagonists.

On the other hand, a totally selfish and loveless match is not to be entertained for her heroines either. If a woman is to bear the burden of becoming a wife in Pym, she is not necessarily entitled to erotic passion (many of her men seem incapable of such a feat anyway) but she can expect, at least, a minimum of genuine affection and agape. That is why the words "respect and esteem" sound the death knell to any suitor in Pym's novels who is unwise enough to incorporate them into a proposal of marriage. Not only does the Bishop suggest to Belinda that respect and liking should be enough for one "of riper years," especially if "she is not fair to outward show" (223), but he also makes the tactical error of quoting Milton--a patriarchal, canonical icon--to literate Belinda:

'But a man does need a helpmeet, you remember in Paradise Lost...'

Belinda interrupted him with a started exclamation, 'Paradise Lost! She echoed in horror, 'Milton....' (224)

A Pym protagonist may be middle-aged and she may be plain and ordinary, but she flings out an unapologetic "Non Serviam" to the suggestion that she become household (or parish or scholarly) drudge to any man who does not love her. The recollection of the depiction of Adam and Eve, "He for God alone, she for God in him," or of Milton's wretched daughters as humble scribes perhaps springs to Belinda's mind. These are the niggardly rewards of respect and esteem. In her diaries, when her romance with Gordon Glover seemed destined to end, Pym personally (and passionately) rejects a less than ideal alliance:

The nicest lover I never had, and the rest of it and a ring is round  
and not round enough and the sea's deep but not deep enough and I  
will fight for what I want and if I can't have it, then I will have  
nothing, but NOTHING! (VPE 127)

She is not so uncompromising with her protagonists, however. She negotiates alternatives for her female characters which allow them hope, "the tender green leaves" (VPE 127) which blossom in comic resolutions incorporating more pragmatic alliances. Pym's older women can then regard the "fancie" and "frenzie" of Romance with the same lack of "conviction" displayed by Mr. Donne in his rendition of the Elizabethan song, which reflects the culturally constructed artifice of courtly love. In other words, Pym's fictional women try to appropriate some of the self-interest and pragmatism common to her male characters in the contemplation of a marital alliance, and thus begin to contest the culture text.

Consequently, in the closure of Some Tame Gazelle, neither of the marriages which nominally satisfy the structure of comic closure is strictly conventional. Pym is consistently recasting generic and social expectations. She produces two



couples for the harmonious ending, a middle-aged couple and a young couple, and while she focuses on the youthful pair, there are interesting departures and teasing ambiguities. In this case, Olivia Berridge is not only older than the young curate--often a distinct advantage in the power politics of heterosexual relationships--but Belinda suspects that she has taken the initiative, and, in a daring inversion of the protocol of courtship, has herself proposed to Mr. Donne. On the other hand, however, it is possible that Olivia, like Jane Cleveland in Jane and Prudence, has written her last piece of scholarly research, and that there will be no more offerings on doubtful readings in The Owl and the Nightingale which, after all, "doesn't seem very good training for a wife" (90). Is it ominous as well as ironic, for example, that the formidable Olivia is "given away" by her Professor of Middle English? Knitting Mr. Donne's socks, cooking his meat and typing his sermons could well be her "thankless tasks" in the years to come. But novelistic possibility ensures that this scenario is not wholly predictable; there may indeed be hope for change within the burden of matrimony, because the aggressively plain Olivia is older, "suitably" pragmatic, and far more intelligent than her husband. Nevertheless, Belinda imagines a less than idyllic future, as Olivia makes a speech of thanks to the parish for a wedding present to the happy couple of a chiming clock, which the Archdeacon hopes will "ease the burdens they will be called upon to bear in their new life" (STG 235). The clock is an ironic reminder of the marital tedium which stretches "'till death do us part" beyond the blissful closure of the heroine's plot:

Her voice was clear and ringing, as if she were used to giving lectures or addressing meetings... 'Edgar and I are simply delighted...' there was comfort in the words as if she were protecting Mr. Donne in a sensible tweed coat or even woollen underwear. It was obvious that she would take care of him, not letting him cast a clout too soon. She would probably help with his sermons too, and embellish them with quotations rarer than her

husband, with his Third Class in Theology, could be expected to know. A helpmeet indeed. (STG 235)

The reality is that the women in Pym's novels are just as gifted (on average) intellectually as the men, but they are not idealized or romanticized for being, or pretending to be, clever; this attribute, however, is part of the conventional make-up of the Romantic hero.<sup>13</sup> A clever woman does not coincide easily with the heroine's plot. Just the opposite is the case. We recall pragmatic Miss Lord reminding Dulcie Mainwaring (NFRL) that even well-educated men don't like women who "read too much" (NFRL 232) and that if she wants a husband her time will be better spent buying cosmetics or going to the hairdresser. Nevertheless, perhaps Olivia can combine her own scholarly work with the embellishment of her husband's mundane sermons.

Part of Pym's reductive re-writing of the Romance plot, then, also involves a revision of the figure of the Romantic hero. Just as the heroine and those who fill her comic structural role are revised--the "helpmeets," Olivia Berridge and Connie Aspinall are not the protagonists and "not Jane Eyre"--so the concept of the Byronic hero is parodied in many of Pym's novels. Rosalind Coward is helpful in summarizing the tradition. She comments on the attributes of the hero--Jane Austen's Mr. Darcy is a literary prototype--whose "characteristics are found in male protagonists across a number of media":

Arrogance, power and social status are consistently offered up as attributes which women desire.... Power and dominance, if we are to believe the articles, are synonymous with sexiness in a man... . Equally crucial is the fact that these fantasies about the adoration of male power have a curiously regressive quality...in the sense that the stories are directly reminiscent of infantile fantasies. (Desire 191)

We are reminded of E.M. Forster's description of Jane Eyre as "the passionate dream of a fine but still undeveloped woman" (Aspects of the Novel, 16). Pym's female Bildung necessitates a quest to overcome these "infantile fantasies," which are encouraged by the cultural tradition, in an effort--and it is always a painful effort--on the part of her women to grow up emotionally beyond the idealization of a man and the premature closure of Romance. Pym herself consistently fell in love with handsome, vain, arrogant and "difficult" men who did not love her as she loved them. Belinda says to Bishop Grote:

'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  
223)

If this was "infantile" in Barbara Pym, she did her best to help her protagonists avoid her personal weaknesses. The Archdeacon is handsome, so is Fabian Driver (J&P), Rocky Napier (EW), Aylwin Forbes (NFRL), Piers Longridge (GB) and James Boyce (SDD), but her women love them while nevertheless seeing their faults of character very clearly. Some are in positions of nominal power within the Church, the Academy or the Military, but others are relative failures in the world's eyes--Piers, for example. Some are arrogant; most are conceited. Every single one, however, is or has been idolized by a woman while being, in fact, somewhat "Second Class." Pym writes a poem about Gordon Glover that reflects the tensions between culturally constructed images of the hero and heroine and her ironic perceptions of the contemporary (1940's) realities:

Introducing--You in the Radio Times,  
Successful, Byronic, rather second rate,  
Me in the Wrens pretending to be a sailor,

Drearly splendid, bravely accepting my fate.

(or romantically celibate?) (VPE 163)

Pym contests portraying her women as "drearly splendid" in her fiction; she had played that role too often herself.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Belinda (STG), Prudence (J&P) and Leonora (SDD) utilize and revise some variation of the culturally sanctioned posture of being "romantically celibate" in order to avoid a loveless match. Belinda provides one illustration in refusing Bishop Grote; she attempts to negotiate an exit by ironically appropriating one component of the heroine's plot to neutralize the more lethal alternative:

'I'm afraid I can't marry you,' she said, looking down at her floury hands. 'I don't love you.'

'But you respect and like me,' said the Bishop, as if that went without saying. 'We need not speak of love--one would hardly expect that now.'

'No,' said Belinda miserably, 'I suppose one would not expect it. But you see,' she went on, 'I did love somebody once and perhaps I still do.'

'Ah...' the Bishop shook his head, 'he died, perhaps? A very sad thing.'

They were both silent. He died, yes, it was better that the Bishop should think that, it sounded more suitable; there was even something a little noble about it. She never married...Belinda began to see herself as a romantically tragic figure.

'Of course, as Lord Byron says,' began the Bishop, and then paused.

Could Lord Byron have said anything at all suitable? (STG 224)

Belinda evokes Romance to avoid Romance--she has to find a socially acceptable alternative to matrimony borrowed from a literary paradigm. She can assume this

tragic "literary" death-in-life option to avoid marriage to the Bishop, because though she may not expect love--the whimsical and perilous charm--she will not marry without it. Lord Byron can have nothing to say that is "suitable" to such a loveless proposal.

Similarly, Jessie Morrow in Crampton Hodnet repeats this characteristic deflation of the "crucial moment" in the Romance chronotope with the young, handsome clergyman Mr. Latimer:

'But do you love me?' asked Miss Morrow quietly.

'Love you?' he said indignantly. 'But of course I do, haven't I just told you so?'

'You have said that you respect and esteem me very much,' said Miss Morrow without elaboration.... Oh, no, it wouldn't do at all! Even Miss Morrow's standards were higher than that, so high, indeed, that she feared she would never marry now. For she wanted love, or whatever it was that made Simon and Anthea walk along the street not noticing other people simply because they had each other's eyes to look into. And of course she knew perfectly well she would never get anything like that.... And then, how much more sensible it was to satisfy one's springlike impulses by buying a new dress in an unaccustomed and thoroughly unsuitable colour than by embarking on a marriage without love. For, after all, respect and esteem were cold, lifeless things--dry bones picked clean of flesh. (CH 94)

The quotidian alternatives to a loveless match, in Pym, need not be "death-in-life." Indeed, one of her central artistic projects is to inscribe life-affirming and positive values into the joys of the everyday. The limited, but nonetheless pleasurable, alternatives to marriage available to Pym's women, consistently offer Life instead of Death to those who choose them.

Later, in this same novel, when Simon Beddoes, the young, ambitious lover of Anthea Cleveland, "dumps" Anthea in a rather pretentious and brutal letter, Jessie, who has had an opportunity to read it, thinks about romantic love:

She put the letter back on the sofa and looked out of the window. It was a pity, she thought, that romantic love didn't last. 'The Blessed that immortal be from change in love alone are free.' And not even Belgravia and North Oxford, however blessed they might be in most things, could expect quite as much as that. (CH 201)

It is a liminal experience, in Bakhtinian terms. Looking out the window, Jessie experiences an epiphany on the path to maturity and ponders the same dilemma facing Belinda. She wants love but knows romantic love is not a long-term phenomenon. Bakhtinian novelistic possibility will provide yet another "significant event" in a revision of the Romance plot through her considered decision to marry Fabian Driver in Jane and Prudence; she marries Fabian, in spite of his faults, because she finds a kind of love--not "ideal" love--but a genuine affection nevertheless. Here, then, is another strategy Pym employs in writing beyond the ending of the Romance plot; she carries over her characters from one novel to another. In the world which the canon has created, other stories and other Bakhtinian "possible realities" rupture the borders of the text.<sup>14</sup>

The closure of Some Tame Gazelle, like that of Crampton Hodnet, thus marks significant transformations within the conventions of both comedy and Romance. Safely "spared," the Bede sisters can regard the conventional marriages of other women with an ironic detachment; moreover, both protagonists are not only alive, but happy. Harriet's "face radiated joy and happiness" (250) as she notes that the new young curate is "dark and rather Italian looking, paler and more hollow cheeked than the others." Moreover, "Now Belinda understood her sister's joy and suddenly she realized too that she was happier than she had been for a long time" (250). Harriet is quick to invite the frail-looking curate to dinner--"He says

he is fond of boiled chicken" (252), and the celibate flirtation "closes" the text:

'Now I'm sure you don't remember Queen Victoria,' he [the curate] said gallantly.

'We older people remember a great deal more than you think,' said Harriet coyly.

'Oh, come, now,' laughed the curate, and although his voice was weak as a result of his long illness, Belinda was overjoyed to hear that it had the authentic ring. (252)

Closure finds the sisters "overjoyed," included in the village community that gathers to celebrate a wedding, but grateful that it isn't theirs. The idyllic village of pre-war Britain becomes a kind of Shakespearean "green world" in which is enacted "the triumph of life and love over the wasteland" (Frye, Anatomy 182). Pym's wasteland is a wry inversion, as it is implied that the blessed state of matrimony as proffered by Bishop Grote, Mr. Mold and even Mr. Donne is far more frequently a barren stretch of time than the world of quotidian possibility that yet remains available to the Misses Bede. They appear in a later text, An Unsuitable Attachment, "carried over" not only beyond the margins of the novel, but also beyond the bounds of their rural parish, when they appear in Italy as elderly women on vacation, still active and involved in the daily round. Both sisters find solutions to the Book of Old Plots that are satisfying for them, and Bakhtinian "surprisingness" is still available in their lives. Simply by depicting the sisters as unmarried but vibrant and happy in closure, Pym begins a revision of stereotypes and inscribes another "possible reality" for women. Their idiosyncratic negotiations and compromises with the culture text show Pym, at the very beginning of her career, initiating a paradigmatic critique of narrative and ideology by breaching received conventions of closure.

These are some of the ways, then, that Pym uses what Donna Haraway terms "infidel heteroglossia"<sup>15</sup>--that is, oppositional or contending voices and

modified tropes within her texts which, when juxtaposed with social, literary or cultural convention, produce the dissonance and contradictions of a woman's oppositional text. The survival of Pym's women and the comic affirmation they claim subverts the expectations of the heroine's plot in gesturing toward alternate narrative teleologies for women. Pym, then, breaks silence, and from the frontier or border-line of culture writes of contradictions within herself, and produces contradictions and multiple readings when she contests the rigid parameters of her intellectual and social environment with her own divisiveness; as polyphonic author, she takes her place "alongside" the other voices, whether patriarchal (N. Frye, structuralist) or infidel (Bakhtinian, feminist, post-formalist) which debate within the text.

When Pym moves from the light-hearted transformations of Some Tame Gazelle to her subsequent revisions in Excellent Women, for example, the tone, in keeping with the lessons of Bildung, changes and becomes more "sober" as the tensions intensify and Pym foregrounds the structural contradictions of tragi-comedy. Frye reminds us that every comedy contains a potential tragedy and that tragedy and comedy "throw their shadows" (Anatomy 64) in a counterpoint within every text. Like Bakhtin, he can locate the depth or "richness" in a text--"our sense of the subtlety of great literature"--in the reader's ability to perceive "a modal [or generic, narrative, discursive] counterpoint" (Anatomy 50). Feminist readings insert the added counterpoint of gender or "difference" into the intrinsic unfinalizability of any work of art.

Pym pursues the same disruptive strategies introduced in Some Tame Gazelle in Excellent Women. Mildred Lathbury, as middle-aged excellent woman, employs the oppositional Bildung by "evading or breaking the cruel law" (Anatomy 178) of the comic [or Romance] plot in fighting against and overcoming her self-destructive love for handsome, shallow, Rocky Napier. Rocky is rather unhappily married to Helena--an anthropologist whose academic interests he cannot share--but he can still cause feminine pulses to race when he turns on his considerable charm. In the war, as a Navy officer, Rocky had brightened the lives of many dowdy Wren officers in "ill-fitting uniforms." Mildred, like the Wren officers,



must learn to treasure the idealized memory of Rocky and the fleeting moments of genuine happiness the Romantic illusion can bring. The symbol for such ephemeral love is the spray of fast-wilting mimosa which Mildred buys on impulse, as spring "mixes memory with desire"--just as she purchases "Hawaiian Fire" lipstick in a moment of Romantic rebellion against a mature understanding of "suitability" in love.

Texts in which Pym's women have only imperfectly come to terms with the longing for romance begin the shift into tragi-comedy. Pym's vision insists upon the querying of this dilemma in the lives of each of her protagonists. The extent to which they become reconciled to a revision of romance determines the generic emphasis, comic or tragi-comic, within individual texts. Consequently, as Pym's voice interacts with the sociotext in her novels, we note the querying that always crystallizes around the two words which repeat in her texts more than any others--"suitable" and "unsuitable." Her heroines query and contest their cultural environment and "the other" voice of rebellion in themselves, as they negotiate around these words which are embedded with class and gender constraints.

Pym adheres to the Romance plot by inserting the strategic moment within the text of Excellent Women, rather than historicizing it thirty years in the past as she did for Belinda Bede. But Rocky is already married--though in an unstable relationship--and therefore safely unavailable in real, physical, sexual terms for Mildred, a "clergyman's daughter." Moreover, she is invisible to him as an erotic object in her costume of brown horse spinster. In a gender inversion of the courtly love tradition, however, the unavailability of the beloved makes him only more attractive and desirable. Pym's women are vulnerable to an emotional, chaste, romantic thralldom whereby they idolize a man who is often oblivious to them and who may even treat them cruelly--intentionally or, more often, unintentionally. Because this was the romantic trap that Pym often fell prey to in her own life, she gives her heroines the necessary discipline to "kill" their self-destructive loves in what is always a painful, slow, wrenching away from the culture text of Romance. As Rossen notes, she re-writes Jane Eyre

in this novel by having her heroine reject the romantic hero (Rocky-Rochester) for the more aloof and cool alternative (Everard-St. John). Mildred, like Belinda and Harriet, is "not Jane Eyre." Romance, in Pym, never brings lasting happiness and creates far more misery and agony in a woman's life than it may be worth. It encourages an asymmetric relationship that allots to the woman the humbler part of sacrifice, silent suffering and emotional trauma. Mildred has to wrestle this cultural option to the ground and, like Woolf, strangle the "angel in the house" in order to make a life that is worth the living. Rocky is cavalier about Romantic love, and, characteristically, the literary canon provides the patriarchal counterpoint to feminine "chaste constancy":

'Once you get into the habit of falling in love you will find that it happens quite often and means less and less,' said Rocky lightly. He went over to my bookcase and took out a volume of Matthew Arnold which had belonged to my father.

Yes! In the sea of life enisled,  
With echoing straits between us thrown,  
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,  
We mortal millions live alone,

he read. 'How I hate his habit of emphasizing words with italics! Anyway, there it is. (EW 136)

As a man, Rocky doesn't take Romantic love seriously, as women do. In another of Pym's debates with the literary canon which she so admired, Arnold is associated with such a masculine attitude of ultimate transcendent isolation beyond the Romance plot. The poet is symbolically associated with her father, who was "a theological student" (136). Mildred's reaction--'What a sad poem,' I said. 'I don't know it' (she is less literate than Pym)--suggests her determination not to "know it" in her own life as a woman, and not to be left alone within a relationship or rendered bereft as an abandoned, isolated victim of love "in the sea of life enisled." Pym's women want the human community that

a narrow focus on the sparse and fleeting rewards of romantic love often denies. Men soon leave women "alone," literally, or in emotional abandonment; romance is only a brief part of their adventurous existence as human beings, whereas, for women, it can become an all-consuming obsession. Mildred and Rocky discuss the differing attitudes of men and women to love. Mildred has met one of the Wren officers who once had fallen hopelessly in love with Rocky. Characteristically, he has forgotten all about her:

'Oh, Mildred,' he looked at me seriously, 'there were so many. I couldn't possibly recognize her from that description--"not pretty but quite a pleasant face"--most Englishwomen look like that, you know.'

I realized this was probably how I looked myself and was sad to think that after a year or two he might not remember me either.

(EW 137)

Mildred wants to know if Rocky had thrown them "any scraps of comfort," as the many Wren officers who idealized him were unhappy in love, but Rocky replies, "I'm afraid women take their pleasures very sadly. Few of them know how to run light-hearted flirtations--the nice ones, that is. They cling on to these little bits of romance that may have happened years ago. Semper Fidelis, you know" (137). Mildred laughs as she recalls, aptly, that Semper Fidelis is the motto of a girls' school and that, "Dora and I used to have it embroidered on our blazers" (137). Rocky associates such sentiments with the archaic past in an unflattering analogy with the title "of a Victorian painting of a huge dog of the Landseer variety" (137). Good women are like those noble, faithful dogs of Victorian art (or Charlotte M. Yonge's novels?). Rocky thinks that women should imitate these old-fashioned ideals, however; he continues, "but it's very suitable for a girls' school when you consider how faithful nice women tend to be." Mildred concludes by meditating on Semper Fidelis and ruefully admits to

Rocky, "I suppose it was too much to expect that you would remember that girl" (138).

Rocky, as a handsome but shallow man, is not faithful; he has a short memory for "light-hearted flirtation." "Nice women," however, according to social convention, have deep emotions when they love and are (boringly) constant and prepared to suffer. Again we note romantic love and the Victorian image of women inscribed as artifact--here a Victorian painting--which reflects a literary and cultural image against which women must struggle within themselves, as they have been indoctrinated with it and most have partially internalized it. When we remember that Harriet Bede has been given a short memory for love by Pym, one other aspect of her oppositional strategy to romance in women's lives becomes clearer. Women must learn to protect themselves in emotional relationships, like men, through cultivating a new kind of self-interest and a more mature detachment which can arrive only after painful experience. In Pym's men, such self-interest is associated with an infantile tunnel vision reinforced by the dominant culture; in her women, it is a hard-won indication of maturity gained after a difficult contestation of dominant images and cultural constraints imposed on the female sex. What Pym begins to do is to appropriate for her women some--not necessarily all--of the masculine prerogatives within intimate relationships. Pym's women start practising emotional detachment and attempt to revise the social imperative that they be "nice" and self-sacrificing in relationships with men, the same strategy Lily Briscoe longs to try out on Charles Tansley in To The Lighthouse, but which the weight of the culture text defeats.

In Excellent Women, then, Mildred practices refusing requests from Everard Bone that she help him cook dinner. Whether in response to marriage proposals or requests for feminine help in thankless tasks, Pym's women practise saying "No." What Mildred is really doing here, of course, is trying to postpone the "burdens" of marriage--both sexual and pragmatic. Images of men being helpless before a joint, or even an egg, abound in Pym, but she is aware that this helpless pose is a myth. Men can cook and take care of themselves as well as women, and they can certainly take care of their emotional integrity much better.

Harriet Bede lavishes her affection on frail clergymen because she chooses to do so, but in a marital relationship any element of choice is over. At first, Mildred resists, when she thinks Everard is selfishly trying to use her as domestic drudge. Everard and Mildred discuss marriage:

'Of course,' he went on, with a note of warning in his tone,  
'I shall probably marry eventually.'

'Yes, men usually do,' I murmured.

'The difficulty is to find a suitable person.'

'Perhaps one shouldn't try to find people deliberately like that,' I suggested. 'I mean, not set out to look for somebody to marry as if you were going to buy a saucepan or casserole.' (EW 188)

The word "suitable" in this context is contested by Mildred. She resists the calculating, pragmatic search for a wife as though one were picking up another useful kitchen utensil. Men in Pym usually marry because they want women to work for them and look after them. She is suspicious that Everard wants a woman only to "cook his meat" and do his typing. This reminds us of Bishop Grote's wife-hunting--anyone "suitable," within rather rigid cultural criteria, will do. Mildred may have to give up the idea of getting a man like Rocky--and her rational self tells her that this is just as well--but she's not about to settle for Everard if there is no "love"--the "dry bones" (Everard Bone?) of which Jessie Morrow speaks in Crampton Hodnet. Mildred resists the very strong pressures of the Romantic culture text, and she herself is ambivalent and divided about how to respond. She fights the temptation to allow herself to be emotionally diminished by neglect in return for marriage. Pym's men are powerful, not in their sexual dominance, but in their capacity to treat the heroine cruelly through neglect, coldness or insensitivity, consequently rendering her diminished or "invisible."<sup>16</sup>

There is a difficulty in Excellent Women, then, that is central to all Pym texts--how to read the closure? Her success as polyphonic author resides

precisely in this difficulty in reaching any clear conclusion about the contradictory voices contending in the majority of the texts. Though unorthodox, there is no doubt that Some Tame Gazelle ends in affirmation. So, I believe, does Excellent Women, though the dialogism of contending voices is much stronger in this text. Mildred has--poignantly--rejected the possibility of Romantic love--but we know that this never survives marriage in Pym's vision. She still has her happy memories of Rocky. She has also rejected Julian Malory, the rector. He tried some Keats on her--"I cannot see what flowers are at my feet," said Julian softly" (212)--but this only after his engagement to selfish Allegra Gray ends in disaster. He doesn't love her, and she discourages him "bluntly" (212). The ability to quote Keats isn't enough in this case. She wants love.

Everard is the husband Mildred will accept "beyond the ending," once she has "grown up," and the reason is that, though far from a warm personality, there are clear signs that he genuinely loves her. Even these reductive, pragmatic signs are characteristically oblique and ambivalent, but they may "stay the course" and bring Mildred a measure of comfort and happiness. She seems divided, however, because it is always possible to interpret these gestures of mild agape in more than one way. She also loves Everard, though she is afraid to admit it to herself because then the "burden" of marriage will surely ensue. What, then, are the textual "clues" that Everard loves Mildred?

Everard has "respect and esteem" not for Mildred but for Esther Clovis, the formidable secretary of the Learned Society who has "hair like a dog" (EW 190). He doesn't make the tactical error of Mr. Latimer (CH) or Bishop Grote (STG) in suggesting that this should be good enough for Mildred. On Mildred's part, she is thinking of sending a "suitable" postcard to Everard from her holidays, "something of anthropological or archaeological interest, some stone circle or barrow or curious local custom, perfectly serious, of course, no jokes about windows marked with a cross or fat ladies" (193). The "stone circle" might sound ominous as a symbol of marriage, but sending postcards is always a positive sign in Pym. When Everard rings up Mildred to invite her for dinner, however, she is still defensive and wary of a selfish motivation:

'Hullo, Mildred. This is Everard.'

I was instantly suspicious....

'I rang up to ask if you would come and have dinner with me in my flat this evening. I have got some meat to cook.'

I saw myself putting a small joint into the oven and preparing vegetables. I could feel my aching back bending over the sink.

'I'm afraid I can't tonight,' I said baldly. (EW 218)

Whenever a Pym protagonist is "blunt" or "bald," she means business. As noted in Chapter Two, "transformational links" in women's language form propitiatory bridges to the male perspective. When they are omitted, the woman is "not interested" in pleasing a man. The answer, at this point, to Everard's overtures is "No." Mildred feels guilty, however, as such "masculine" behavior is unorthodox, and when she later goes to Everard's flat, she is jealous because she suspects Esther Clovis will be there. Men, after all--especially educated, good-looking ones--can always get another woman to cook their meat. However, not only is Miss Clovis not there, but Everard has actually gone to some (minimal) pain to entertain Mildred. Nevertheless, it is perhaps still ominous that "the woman" has put the bird in the oven--Everard's dismissive tone is dangerous here, suggesting his categorizing of all women as menials. All Mildred will be asked to do (at this point), however, to the meat is to "take it out--at about half-past seven, I believe." Moreover, there is wine and sherry, and Mildred and Everard get along with each other very well. The conversation is prosaic, but comfortable. Everard thinks that the oven cloth will be hanging on a nail by the cooker:

Not an inspiring conversation, I thought, but it would do. We sat quite peacefully drinking sherry until I suddenly remembered about Esther Clovis. No doubt she would be arriving just before dinner, when I was taking the casserole out of the oven. No woman is at her

best when taking something out of the oven, and I couldn't even correct proofs or make an index. (253)

Yes, thinks Mildred, "it will do" and they sit "peacefully." There will be no inordinate suffering in this relationship though it may be somewhat dull. Pym revises romance in having Miss Clovis--with hair like a dog--as the rival who is the other woman in the hero's life, usually more suited by background for matrimony than the heroine. Miss Clovis is proficient in correcting proofs and making indexes. A further revision is that Everard is not a conventional hero. When Mildred is persuaded to shoulder the burdens of academic drudgery he then speaks "eagerly" and his response is "'Oh, splendid, How very good of you!'" Mildred has, "never seen Everard so enthusiastic before" (EW 255). Comically, Everard is carried away at the thought of Mildred compiling an index rather than at the thought of taking her in his arms. But, as Mildred says, "it will do." Everard is grateful, and they will be good to each other. Everard is far from being an egotistical monster of selfishness like the Archdeacon (STG) or Adam Marsh-Gibbon (CTS). Closure, however, is wry and rueful. After the prophetic image of the President's wife falling asleep at the Learned Society, Mildred thinks:

And then another picture came into my mind. Julian Malory, standing by the electric fire, wearing his speckled mackintosh, holding a couple of ping-pong bats and quoting a not very appropriate bit of Keats. He might need to be protected from the women who were going to live in his house. So, what with my duty there and the work I was going to do for Everard, it seemed as if I might be going to have what Helena called 'a full life' after all. (EW 256)

Vulnerable and infantile (speckled mackintosh, ping-pong bats), Julian has escaped marriage to the attractive, ruthless widow, Allegra Gray, who would have turned his mild spinster sister, Winifred, out of the rectory; part of Mildred's



commitment and "duty" to the Church community will be to "protect" him from such unscrupulous husband-hunters. Most of Pym's women are benign, but Allegra, who is "fair of face" but morally deficient, has bungled her "strategic moment" in this text. Beyond the ending, in A Glass of Blessings, we hear that she has moved to a parish with three "celibate" priests in the clergyhouse. We are told that she will probably manage to snare one of them, but the marriage that might result is postponed beyond the margins of the text, as is Mildred's more fortunate alliance. Closure, then, suggests that Mildred's "full life" can include both a commitment to marriage and to the wider community symbolized by the Church. Marriage consists of "duty" and "work" but can, nevertheless, provide a peaceful and comfortable life for a mature woman.

While Pym's women achieve "Bildung" and grow up and out of the more lethal dangers of the Romance plot, it cannot be denied that this is accomplished at a price--and that the price is often sexuality. Women achieve power in the Romance plot when "fleetingly" men are rendered helpless and dependent by an illness, perhaps, and become like children:

But this momentary impotence allows the woman to acquire power, the power of a mother caring for a child. And the concluding marriage is a symbol of the woman achieving power. The men are castrated and then restored. The power which the heroine achieves is the power of the mother; the daughter has taken the mother's place. (Coward 196)

It is tempting to conclude that Pym's men are permanently castrated and never restored. They are perpetual children. Fantasy scenes of men falling sick or needing protection or help abound in Pym, and the closure of Excellent Women incorporates one of them. Mildred, in this light, can become both wife and mother at one stroke. Caring for the clergy--Harriet Bede, Wilmet Forsyth, Mildred Lathbury, are only a few examples--lets Pym's women "mother" men without the real danger of being physically and emotionally dominated that sexuality introduces into the equation. The clergy are safely "castrated" in that many are

very young (curates), some are "celibate" or even, it is suggested, homosexual, and all are replaceable.

At the same time, it is hard to escape the conclusion that married women in Pym are all depicted as fulfilling more the role of sister or mother than that of sexual partner. Most of Pym's male characters are little more than selfish children who are never required to grow up--unlike her female protagonists. Jessie Morrow--one of Pym's more unscrupulous and vulgar heroines--is the exception to the motherly paradigm. She sleeps with Fabian Driver, and demands nothing less than marriage and fidelity (Semper Fidelis) while Prudence Bates wants only the romantic trappings of courtship--flowers, dinners for two and so on--and because she may be too emotionally and materially demanding, loses Fabian. Of course, Pym also implies that this is no real loss and that the selfish, shallow Fabian and the unscrupulous Jessie richly deserve each other. Prudence is "spared" here, rather than deprived.

Nevertheless, Pym's wives are clearly mothers, and it is equally obvious that the dearth of children in Pym's texts is illusory as the "the kiddies," in Father Bode's words (GB), are all disguised as men. The Romantic hero (and his sexuality) is displaced and historicized--i.e. rendered impotent, symbolically and literally. He no longer has the "power" to hurt or to "kill" the heroine in marriage or death; causing a few sentimental tears is the extent of his ability to wound the protagonist. Thus, the Archdeacon in Some Tame Gazelle can remain Belinda's fantasy lover while he has become Agatha's (his wife's) child. Pym achieves Nancy K. Miller's "the power of the weak" for her protagonists, at least in part, by disempowering her male characters permanently through deconstructive strategies of characterization, plot and discourse. In this case, Pym's men are often "enfants terribles" but "enfants," nevertheless. Again, Pym's diaries, tracing her traumatic affairs, reveal the genesis of the pattern. She writes to Henry Harvey:

I am fed up with the whole business. Of writing gay, flippant letters to you and expecting you to see that I didn't really feel

that way... Of having my peace disturbed to no purpose...and of finding that as time goes on you don't improve or grow any older--I mean grow up.... In fact, I daresay I've become thoroughly selfish and I feel like staying that way.... As you said, we have never been real to each another.... But however much Jock [Liddell] may be responsible for the state of affairs between us, I can never forget that he saved me a great deal of unhappiness by his way of looking at things, which I adapted too, at least in our correspondence and conversation [swathing Romance in the drapery of Literature]. It is an amusing game, and I don't see why it should affect one's real self unless one wants it to...although I've learned to treat things in his way [comically], the other side of me is still there to be brought out when necessary. (VPE 56-57)

It is all here: the divided self, the childish "blind" lover, the longing for "comfort" and "peace" in lieu of the miseries of unrequited love, the necessity for a woman to become "selfish" in order to attain peace, casting the Romance plot within the comic vision and historicizing it within the literary canon where it loses its ability to "kill," and, finally, the fact that the "other" side of Pym (and her protagonists) can be "brought out" when necessary.

Perhaps all writers have only one story to tell and each work is a revisioning or retelling of the same tale. This is surely true of Pym, and, while she is absolutely consistent in casting her work within the comic structure, the "other side," or perhaps one of the other sides of Pym, is "brought out" in The Sweet Dove Died. This novel, written when she was much older (51), shows that in her own life she had still not "grown up" out of longing for "the other thing," the glamour, if not the substance, of "Romance," and that the divisions are still evident in her life and work. Here, she invokes Bakhtinian possibility and surprisingness in depicting the platonic but no less potentially traumatic relationship between a beautiful, aloof, older woman and a young, handsome bisexual companion.

In The Sweet Dove Died, Pym recasts the personal grief of her failed relationship with Richard Roberts into a fiction that interrogates and disrupts almost all aspects of the Romance (or comic) plot, and produces a brilliant and complex novel in which tragedy and comedy vie for structural and thematic dominance. Contradictions and dissonances are artfully orchestrated within the novel and raise many unresolved questions and contesting voices in the sociotext. The heroine is older, sexually cold and in love with a problematic desire for perfection. Pym breaks nearly every convention in the character of Leonora and yet somehow manages to maintain sympathy for a heroine, who, in closure, refuses not to "forgive"--Christian Pym can't quite go that far--but to "take back" into her life, James, the companion she had tried to keep constant in emotional loyalty and comfortable agape. James, of course, rewrites the characterization of the Romantic hero; though handsome and charming, he is also homosexual, younger than the heroine, morally weak and vacillating, "totally uneducated in English literature" (SDD 169) and, as Leonora states baldly on the occasion of his move from her home after his affairs with Phoebe and Ned, "really...rather stupid" (172). Sex--though even this aspect of the relationship is teasingly problematic--seems not to be a major factor in the equation. Nevertheless, James has "betrayed" her trust--first with Phoebe, then with Ned--a character reminiscent of Raoul Duquette in Katherine Mansfield's story "Je Ne Parle Pas Française" or Julius King in Iris Murdoch's A Fairly Honourable Defeat, in his cold, deliberate and malicious meddling in the lives of others in order to destroy their fragile happiness. Ned is the closest Pym comes to depicting evil in her comic world; he is also somewhat like the diminutive Iachimo in Cymbeline. "Little" Ned deliberately plays puppet-master to a scenario in which he easily manipulates James, whom he takes as a lover, into humiliatingly "dumping" Leonora and terminating the companionable and satisfying (in many ways) relationship they had established together. Ned, like Mansfield's Duquette, sadistically delights in watching the agony of others, and hopes to see Leonora suffer. Her stoic courage, admirable British reserve and emotional self-discipline work in her favour in this case and allow her to keep her pride; she does not break down and

weep in front of American Ned--a major triumph. Structurally, this scene reflects the heroine's fight to break the "cruel law"--the obstruction in the comic plot that in this case requires the heroine to sacrifice self and to remain "constant" to her love, regardless of the suffering and humiliation involved. In rewriting the comic plot of Romance, Leonora refuses to accept the heroine's traditional role, whereby, as Northrop Frye notes, the happy ending is usually brought about "by some act of humility, represented by a slave or a heroine, meanly disguised" (Anatomy 210). Beautiful Leonora is no brown horse spinster, and she resists their oblique strategies of subordination, as played out in other Pym texts. On the other hand, Leonora's female friends--Liz and Meg--have both been "treated badly" by men. Liz now loves her cats and Meg caters to Colin, her promiscuous, lower-class, homosexual "friend," who wounds her emotionally by repeatedly abandoning her for his latest sexual encounter. Meg takes him back every time, as women are expected to do. Leonora does not take James back when he is, in turn, "dumped" by Ned, who has told transparent lies in order to return to America and thus evade other promiscuous entanglements.

Leonora's tears are, nevertheless, "comic" tears because of the unconventional way in which Pym rescues her from misery. Like Pym's other heroines, Leonora can still love "in her own peculiar way." Nevertheless, she has killed the "sweet dove"--and for Pym it is sweet and beautiful--of romantic thralldom, even in the unorthodox context of a May-December relationship between an aging woman and a young homosexual. Pym disrupts the Romance plot in every one of her novels, but never more so than here. The profound ambivalence of the closure is characteristic, but heightened with deep and painful tensions. On the one hand--viewed from one aspect of the culture text--Leonora's decision is conventional. She has, after all, rejected an "unsuitable," even "unnatural," alliance and turned to widower Humphrey Boyce, a heterosexual suitor of her own age, class and aesthetic tastes. She does not become isolated in a perverse relationship but fulfills the comic closure by seemingly adopting the moral dictates of the dominant community in choosing a conventional admirer. But, on the other hand, we know that Leonora does not want a conventional relationship,

and finds Humphrey's sexual overtures distasteful, though at one point she had thought she might allow him to kiss her and they "might even have ended up in bed and it could have been cozy and comforting for her" (SDD 168). Leonora wants her sex--if she permits it at all--to be "comforting," not emotionally devastating. She has had to "grow up," however, in the Pym rewriting of *Bildung* and *Romance*, by killing, perhaps forever, the sweetness of a deep emotional attachment which is nevertheless displaced from conventional eroticism. James, Leonora finds, can wound her emotionally just as much in a chaste relationship as sexual relationships threatened to hurt her in the past, and so this Pym heroine must learn to be cautious and, like the author, practice "not allowing [herself] to get [foolishly] fond of anybody" (A Lot 213). Indeed, it is easy to read this as tragic material. In previous novels, "love" can be salvaged as "agape" and somehow retained in Pym's alternative displacements--literature, friendship, reliques. Here, Leonora tries to keep James as a perfect artifact but fails; he is rejected like the vase he gives her, symbolically decorated with forget-me-nots, which she subsequently notices is similarly flawed.

All of Pym's novels to this point counsel loving in spite of imperfection--the kind of Christian charity mandated by St. Paul. But the other side of Pym--the side that never really asked for much in relationships with men but now wants to live "peacefully," and who must learn to be rebelliously "selfish" in order to slay the dragon of emotional subordination--is dominant here. The female stereotype, the heroine's plot, Christian charity, "chaste constancy"--all these cultural and literary pressures and paradigms are contested in the character of Leonora and her unorthodox decision as the novel ends.

Leonora wants to keep her financial and emotional independence and live "peacefully" and "comfortably" surrounded by beautiful things in her elegant home. She rejects being humiliated over and over in the name of "love." She doesn't want to be a Meg or a Liz--the kind of characters often presented as "noble" or transcendent in Pym's other novels. She enjoys being treated well by men--being wined, dined and entertained--in fair exchange for enjoying her beauty and elegance and the pleasure of her company, short of sexual favours.

Meg's advice rings true for most of Pym's heroines, as she and Leonora discuss their common fates--being abused (emotionally) by men. Leonora has broken down in front of Meg with the tears she refused to shed in Ned's presence:

'My dear, I knew how it was,' Meg murmured. 'I guessed--about James. You put such a brave face on it at Christmas, but I knew. He's gone, hasn't he...?'

Leonora did not need to answer.

'So like Colin,' Meg went on. 'I've been through it all so many times. But they always come back in the end, you'll see.'

'No...' Leonora was surprised at her own vehemence. 'It could never be the same again.'

'That's what you think at the time', said Meg, 'but you'll see--it'll be all right. You mustn't expect things to be perfect, Leonora, they never are.' (SDD 202)

Things may indeed never be perfect, but if imperfection entails the kinds of emotional suffering and putting on of a brave (comic?) face that Pym's heroines often endure in ingenious attempts to fit into the "interstices" of the dominant expectations of feminine behaviors, perhaps it is time simply to say "no." Leonora acts out in this fiction what Pym was seldom able to do in her own life or in her art: she severs the painful ties that inflict so much misery by refusing to be "drearily splendid" and accommodating. Leonora, like Pym at times, is "fed up with the whole [painful] business":

'Goodbye, James,' Leonora was saying. 'It was sweet of you to come.'

The sight of Humphrey with the peonies reminded her that he was taking her to the Chelsea Flower Show tomorrow. It was the kind of thing one liked to go to, and the sight of such large and faultless blooms, so exquisite in colour, so absolutely correct in

all their finer points, was a comfort and satisfaction to one who loved perfection as she did. Yet, when one came to think of it, the only flowers that were really perfect were those, like the peonies that went so well with one's charming room, that possessed the added grace of having been presented to oneself. (SDD 208)

Such a closure was very difficult for Pym to write. She rewrote it many times and at one point had Leonora accepting James back after his needlessly cruel and weak defection. The "other" side of Pym knew the dangers of such a radical departure from convention, but she seems rather defiant in one of her manuscript notes for the novel: "why not for a change have a woman behaving badly to a man?" (Bodley MS 26) (Fisichelli 134). Leonora's voice, detached and cold through Pym's use of the third person pronoun, "one's charming room," "oneself,"--becomes another Bakhtinian "unresolved consciousness" in the canon. All the cultural voices oppose it as "unnatural," perhaps because it assumes the masculine prerogative of self-love. Leonora tries to become, and presumably succeeds in becoming, as "selfish" as the masculine figures in the novels. Or is this simply judicious self-interest? All of her men expect to be lionized and catered to, but somehow this proclivity is unacceptable in a female character. Leonora's taste for being pampered and delight in an elegant life style hurt no one in any essential way, unlike the selfish behaviors of James and Ned. She gives as much as she gets in a fair exchange of delightful comforts. It is true that Pym makes Leonora blunt and thus "masculine" in ways her other heroines seldom are, and that she initiates a genuinely cruel act--turning elderly Miss Foxe out of her home. Pym "spares" Miss Foxe within the comic structure, however, when she finds suitable alternate accommodation at St. Basil's Priory, a "delightful country house for elderly people run by Anglican nuns" (SDD 110). Here is the counterpoint of Pym's own generous nature. She cannot bring herself (or Leonora) to doom Miss Foxe to the grim fate of the distressed gentlewoman. Ned, on the other hand, has hurt many people in the course of his amorous career, and feels no remorse, as he is always the first to tire of a relationship and so



"exits" in a position of power. Leonora claims the same option--though her dignity is not intact, as she has already been badly hurt. She says "no" to the culturally sanctioned role of suffering, subordinate heroine in love, and retains the power to remain emotionally free.

Fisichelli sees the novel as a "struggle for sexual power" (133). Perhaps it is. Nevertheless, surely Leonora's struggle is more emotional than sexual--though in rewriting Jane Eyre yet again Pym has a woman, Leonora Eyre, "imprison" James on the top floor (attic?) of her home. There are bars on the window of the sweet dove's cage, but the door is unlocked and Leonora is no "monster." Or is she? Has she become unnaturally "masculine"? The culture text would say so. Leonora not only has a room of her own but a house of her own, and part of her Bildung seems to be learning when to open the door and politely say goodbye to those who can bring only intermittent misery into the rest of her life. Leonora wrestles with a destructive obsession; moreover, she survives a very seductive form of romantic thralldom to which an older woman is emotionally susceptible in the human quest for something to love. The closure, of course, can be (and has been) read very differently, as a tragic hollow victory, and Pym's own ambivalence is discernible in the text in the contradictory voices which all sound in an unresolved Bakhtinian orchestration around the central conflicts. Nevertheless, The Sweet Dove Died, like all Pym's novels, is consistent in holding out "some hope for [her] characters and show[s] that their lives will go on somehow" (Bodley MS 98, "The Novelist's Use of Everyday Life," 7) (Fisichelli 47).

Notes

<sup>1</sup> In her final months of life, suffering from terminal cancer, Pym writes a letter to Philip Larkin (April 1, 1979) and can still affirm, in a characteristic complimentary closure:

A fine Easter sunshine and things burgeoning, I live still! (VPE 327).

<sup>2</sup> Pym's personal optimism recurs in her diaries and letters as well as in her "strategy" for making a life beyond the boundaries of conventional love and marriage:

(July 25, 1943) Walking along...it all began to seem quite funny as it usually does and I gradually came out of my depression.... I'm doing my best, trying to see the funny side, looking out for churches and buildings, writing it up, talking to various people and trying to take it all as a great chunk of experience--an extraordinary bit of life--but I want music and intellectual companionship and affection.... Well perhaps I'll get all that, one day. Don't forget the whimsical and perilous charm.... (VPE 151)

<sup>3</sup> Pym's choice of the comic novel as the genre within which she re-defines the character and emplotment of her protagonists ensures the possibility of the heroine's resurrection and re-integration with the community in closure, despite the importance of the assertion of individuality and the provisional distance from dominant culture that critique and interrogation demand. Pym's women are not, finally, isolated individuals, but continue to maintain a connection with the community. Their community usually expands as a result of the action of the novel. Pym's art reflects Joanne S. Frye's description of the novel as an apt medium for the woman writer:

Through its individualism the novel opens onto a capacity to offer new narrative interpretations of the female individual not as isolated and self-serving but as a strong and complex human being in social interaction with other human beings. (26)

Northrop Frye's observations on comic structure are equally significant:

If we are right in our suggestion that romance, tragedy, irony and comedy are all episodes in a total quest - myth, we can see how it is that comedy can contain a potential tragedy within itself.... The ritual pattern behind the catharsis of comedy is the resurrection that follows the death, the epiphany or manifestation of the risen hero. (215)

In fiction we discovered two main tendencies, a "comic" tendency to integrate the hero with his society and a "tragic" tendency to isolate him. (Anatomy of Criticism 54)

<sup>4</sup> I have considered in the context of dialogism the dissonance perceptible within Pym as a result of her internalising many of the images of women and culturally sanctioned reactions to experience represented in the texts of her traditional literary education. Joanne S. Frye discusses the importance of literature in shaping one's view of reality and, in this connection, quotes writers Margaret Drabble and Christa Wolf:

Speaking as a reader, Drabble suggests how novel reading participates in her own interpretations of experience: "I find out about living and about the values of living--and a lot of my beliefs in life and my feelings about people and what to do from reading novels." Christa Wolf's narrator in A Model Childhood claims a similar interpretive centrality for literary understanding: "I believe that the mechanism which deals with the absorption and processing of reality is formed by literature." (194-95)

Pym's wide reading in Romantic and Victorian literature provides a locus for many dialogic tensions within her more contemporary heroines.

<sup>3</sup> Myrian Diaz-Diocaretz describes such cultural pressures in terms of the "sociotext." See "Sieving the Matriheritage of the Sociotext" in The Difference Within: Feminism and Critical Theory, eds. Elizabeth Meese and Alice Parker, 115-147.

<sup>4</sup> Bakhtin's concept of "reduced laughter," which is formulated somewhat late in his career, is related to his discussion of the form-shaping nature of the novel as genre. Reduced carnivalesque laughter is present in novels which are not overtly comic--which may, in fact, seem sombre in subject matter. Nevertheless, much as Northrop Frye has observed in the Anatomy of Criticism, comic structure, regardless of surface incongruities, pushes towards integration and affirmation. Reduced laughter works in the same way, deep within the basic form of the novel. Bakhtin observes: "Reduced laughter is denied any direct expression, which is to say 'it does not ring out,' but traces of it remain in the structure of an image or a discourse and can be detected in it. Paraphrasing Gogol, we can speak of 'laughter invisible to the world'" (Problems of Dostoyevskv's Poetics 178, n. 40). Although Pym's early novels are clearly comic, and laughter, though oblique, may still "ring out," her later books, such as The Sweet Dove Died or Quartet in Autumn, are much more subtle and tragi-comic in subject matter. Nevertheless, they retain novelistic unfinalizability and push towards affirmation. The Sweet Dove Died is the most problematic in this respect and consequently will be considered in some detail.

<sup>7</sup> Frye notes that the basic structure of comedy involves "a movement from one kind of society to another" (Anatomy 163). Part of Belinda's quest as Pym heroine is growth in the ability to mature beyond such youthful and potentially destructive sentiments (should she give in to them) by seeing them as part of an irrevocably distant part of her life. Distancing herself from a youthful passion for the Archdeacon, and subsequently rejecting social pressure to marry by refusing a loveless match, she initiates a new heroine's plot. She thus rejects the culture text (and Tennysonian sentimentality) as guides to life. She can still enjoy them as art--by reading Victorian or Romantic poetry, for example. They belong to patriarchal images of a mythical Golden Age which must be left behind if the protagonist is to liberate herself into "a new society" as the novel ends.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Harvey speaks of the importance of the intellectual friendships formed at Oxford, but there can be no doubt that in order to make and keep these relationships with men and to break into the circle of male-dominated discussion of literature which she so enjoyed and needed as a stimulus to her writing, Pym had to play many roles as an undergraduate and adopt many costumes--some of them sexual: "'The fact was,' Henry Harvey explains, 'that friendship was stronger than romance for all of us in those early days--and whether or not we got married--and without denying that romance was strong too'" (A Lot 50). Intellectually, it is clear, Pym's life-long correspondence with the witty and brilliant Robert Liddell was of crucial importance to her literary apprenticeship. She writes of her relationship with Harvey:

For, in spite of unhappiness, it has brought me Jockie [Liddell] and other friends--and a little of Henry which I shall never forget.

How small a part of time they share  
That are so wondrous, sweet and fair!

as I am always quoting in my novel. [Some Tame Gazelle] (VPE 46)

Pym's ability to keep her former lovers and other Oxford contemporaries as "part of [my] background" is a rare phenomenon. The kinds of accommodations she was forced to negotiate on a personal level in order to keep men as friends testifies to the real difficulty of separating sexuality from agape. Pym's maintenance of a kind of supportive "community on paper" in her correspondence is one of her most amazing accomplishments in her private life. She had to adopt a number of oblique strategies and subordinate postures towards her male correspondents, however, in order to do so.

<sup>9</sup> Jacobs observes: "There are occasional references to happy marriages in Pym's writing, but the couples that she chooses to describe in detail are at best, in a state of 'dreary cosiness' and at worst, caught in a deep spiritual hibernation where romance and self-expression barely exist" (112).

<sup>10</sup> Of the tension in Pym evident in the "self-discipline" required to distance the constraints and comforts of Victorian life and literature, Robert Emmet Long comments:

Only in Pym, for example, does one find oneself tumbling oddly into a Victorian world.... Pym's Victorian frame is perfectly deliberate and creates a relationship to time for her characters that is both cozy and disturbing. It is disturbing because the Victorian reference belongs to an age of apparent security and order that is now irrecoverable and emphasizes the sense of loss and diminishment in the present. (213)

Here, again, in other terms, is a recognition of what happens when different Bakhtinian chronotopes are juxtaposed in the novel. A Pym heroine both longs for the heroine's plot of the Victorian novel and struggles to reject and distance it. Hence, one identifies another source of thematic and structural dissonance in her texts.

<sup>11</sup> An excellent woman contests the Church, but not without a divisive guilt. Pym records in her diaries, "20 May [1934] Church at 8 and 11:30. All my worst thoughts seem to be brought to the surface on such occasions--like a poultice drawing the poison out of a boil, perhaps--!" (VPE 40).

<sup>12</sup> An interesting link between this hymn, one of Pym's favourites, and Clark and Holquist's account of Bakhtin's favourite story, illustrates a common belief in the possibilities latent in human life:

As Bakhtin lay dying, he asked to be told again his favourite story, the tale in the Decameron where miracles are performed at the tomb of a man regarded as a saint, but who had in fact been a dreadful rogue. Among the morals to be drawn from so complex a story, the most significant one for an understanding of Bakhtin is that there is always a loop hole: "Life is full of surprises," or "God works in strange [sic] ways, his wonders to perform." Such apparently banal conclusions recognize a condition which at another level has always bedeviled metaphysics: nothing is ever completed, no word is final, there are no ultimate explanations that everyone, without exception, will accept as exhausting all possibilities. (347)

<sup>13</sup> The actual academic accomplishments of the much idolized Henry Harvey, for example, whose intellectual posturings and pretensions are "lovingly" distanced and deconstructed in the character of the Archdeacon, are recorded in the diaries laconically and--in the throes of passion--charitably: "28 July. [1933] Went in the town [her home, Oswestry] and bought a Times. My very dearest Lorenzo got a Second--not too bad--I hope he was satisfied with it" (VPE 24). The idealistic descriptive superlatives of romantic thralldom, "swathed in the drapery of Literature"--"my very dearest Lorenzo"--are tellingly juxtaposed with a stripped, deflationary reality--"got a Second--not too bad." The youthful undergraduate, Barbara Pym, who felt "intellectually inferior to them all" within the circle of Harvey's friends, records her own results of Schools casually: "18 July. [1934] I got a 2nd. With comparative ease too" (VPE 44).

<sup>14</sup> This strategy may perhaps be seen as another aspect of Bakhtin's discussion of the novel's ability to "create by potential." Morson and Emerson discuss this capacity in terms of, for example, serial publication: "It would be especially interesting to investigate the ways in which serial publication, in which the author may commit himself to a partial text before having a plan for the whole, may have been used to "create by potential" (N Ch. 6, no. 7, 486). Pym's strategy--to "carry over" characters from one text to another--is also a way, I suggest, to increase unfinalizability. See Gary Morson's study of Tolstoy, Hidden in Plain View: Narrative and Creative Potentials in "War and Peace" (California: Stanford UP, 1986) 295, n.16, for a further discussion of studies of creativity.

<sup>15</sup> Catherine R. Stimpson uses this term in her essay "Nancy Reagan Wears a Hat." She finds it in Donna Haraway's 1985 paper "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980's," Socialist Review 80: 101. I find it particularly appropriate to describe the "alien" voices and paradigmatic modifications in Pym's texts which contest the social, cultural and historical context of her works. It is one aspect of textual revision which opens up the novels to Bakhtinian unfinalizability. See Stimpson's essay in Meese and Parker, The Difference Within 13-35.

<sup>16</sup> Harvey's enlightenment of the 1985 PEN conference on Pym concerning the fact that Barbara "wasn't voluptuous" and that she "lacked sensuality" invites some scrutiny. Harvey didn't love Barbara Pym and he isn't responsible for that fact. However, no matter how much of Pym's desire for love may have been--in D.H. Lawrence's terms--"sex in the head," there can be no doubt that Harvey's (sexual) and emotional assault on her self-confidence did little to improve that mind/body dichotomy. Here was a girl who records in her diaries when she sees him, "My wretched heart was beating so fast I thought I should die or something" and [in the Bodleian] "I trembled all over when he came in and could hardly write" (VPE 36). Several days later she is "into his room" where, in the midst of a sexual encounter, he talks constantly of another woman while making his attitude to her so "cruelly obvious" that she bursts into tears. After this kind of emotional abuse under intimate circumstances, it is no wonder that Pym wanted to keep romance divorced from sexuality by distancing it in books and "reliques." Whatever happened in Harvey's room at 105 Banbury Road in March of 1934 was the beginning of Pym's own Bildung in "the relationships between men and women." She herself was repeatedly a victim of the Romance plot and the image of the romantic hero. She fell for handsome Henry (the first of many good-looking men) with his pretentious talk, his arrogance and affectation: "And what a mouth! He is able to curl it in the most fascinatingly repulsive sneering smile." His emotional "flatness" and potential for cruelty is reflected in his "twinkling (but not pleasantly twinkling) hazel-brown eyes" (VPE 19). After such lacerating treatment in the bedroom, it is clear that she decided to protect her fictional heroines from similar devastating emotional experiences. Many years later, she gave some of her books to Richard Roberts--who would also treat her badly in emotional terms. He found them "terribly sad, but witty." She writes:

why is it that men find my books so sad? Women don't particularly. Perhaps they (men) have a slight guilt feeling that this is what they do to us, and yet really it isn't as bad as all that. (VPE 223)

What men like Richard Roberts could still "do" emotionally to a woman like Barbara Pym, however, is played out in The Sweet Dove Died, her most disturbing and angry novel, albeit the biographical matrix is scrupulously distanced and transformed.

## CONCLUSION

The Pym canon, then, clearly reflects the kinds of antinomies which anticipate many of the projects and concerns of contemporary critics and writers. In particular, the investigations of feminist scholars into the problem of difference in all its diverse applications shed light on many of the grounds of dissonance and indirection characteristic of her prose. Bruce Jacobs speaks of the "blighted society" within which Pym's protagonists move, and concludes that Pym is a writer "who never ceases to view her world as absurd, unfair or appalling, and this keen critical edge in her comic vision should be recognized as a vital part of her unique narrative voice" (307). A significant component of this critical vision involves her keen perception of the inequities and limitations which a marginal positioning imposes upon her aging women in their day to day experiences--linguistically, socially and emotionally. In essence, it is the rich inner life, generous tolerance and stoic courage of her heroines that mitigate against the encroachment of a bleak despair that might seem more consistent with the actual circumstances of their lives.

Pym is, finally, an optimist in her fictional investigations into the relationships between men and women. Like Bakhtin, she believes in the possibility for change as long as the great dialogue continues and silenced and muted voices are allowed to sound. Bakhtin's vision of hell, as defined in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, might sound oddly familiar to some of Pym's women. It is the "absolute lack of being heard" (126). Pym's texts eschew the hells of mute isolation and liberate the voices of her women, initiating new queries within continuing cultural and literary debates.

Perhaps Letty Crowe's tentative observation in the closure of Quartet in Autumn best expresses Pym's generic commitment to the comic vision: "But at least it made one realize that life still held infinite possibilities for change" (QA 218). The assertion of "infinite possibilities for change" is

characteristically tinged with a wistful irony. Letty, like many of Pym's protagonists, is, as a single woman retired from the workplace, projected in time far beyond the conventional kinds of options for "making a life" proffered in traditional teleologies. Nevertheless, the Pym canon remains consistent in offering hope that marginal lives, especially those of women, may have value and meaning, and re-situates the days where we live to suggest a humorous acceptance and final celebration of the opportunities and limitations in every life.

From Some Tame Gazelle to The Sweet Dove Died and beyond, Pym revises and reshapes the place of her women within the constraining grids of language and literature as they "make a life" from the margins of a culture. The problematic endings of the novels provide a further example of stylistic reduction in their departures from a conventional structure that pushes toward romantic love and marriage as the necessary and ideal paradigm of comic closure. Such transformations are nevertheless consistent with Northrop Frye's description of the comic or tragi-comic resolution as one which integrates the protagonist with the community and overcomes tragic isolation. Life-affirming, Pym's satire critiques but does not condemn. The marginal protagonist, having contested lack of self-knowledge in the dominant community--and frequently in herself in her interim role as comic fool or Underground Woman--remains committed to a final resurrection or affirmation through an often unconventional modification of the "quest-myth," which Frye sees as the literary matrix of many genres. Moreover, Pym's comic fictions, never strong on plot, end tentatively with a characteristic, hopeful ambivalence. Like Bakhtin's understanding of the consolations of polyphonic laughter--"That which you thought was finished is not yet finished; that which you thought was dead is not necessarily dead" (Morson and Emerson 452)--Pym's heroines live on into new possibilities. Although the conventional narrative trope of Romance may be revised, the Pym protagonist retains hope that life may yet offer opportunities for genuine love and a significant measure of personal fulfilment.



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