

**A STUDY OF THE PRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF
BARBARA PYM**

by

CAIRN FIONA BLAIR

submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the subject

ENGLISH

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: DR D.C. BYRNE

NOVEMBER 1996

Acknowledgements: In memory of my brother Grant, to my parents Bill and Lynne, and with thanks to Dr Byrne.

Summary

In this dissertation I attempt an evaluation of Barbara Pym as a feminist writer. I study the central protagonists in Pym's twelve novels in the context of British society in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. I have drawn on feminist critical paradigms in my reading of Pym's novels in order to highlight my insights into her women characters.

Chapter One examines Pym's use of comedy and subversion in relation to her main protagonists.

Chapter Two explores the 'Excellent Woman' figure in Pym's fiction and the issue of spinsterhood.

Chapter Three scrutinises Pym's use of satire and tragedy in relation to her heroines.

Chapter Four investigates the emergence of the 'fallen' and 'formidable' women figures in Pym's novels, and analyses the ageing spinster figure.

My conclusion is that Barbara Pym is a humanist feminist of some importance, who succeeds in illuminating her heroines' struggles against patriarchy in the context of a changing British society.

Key terms: Presentation of Women; Pym's novel's; Women Characters; Pym's Heroines; Excellent Women; Pym's Spinsters; Formidable and Fallen Women; Upper Middle-Class British Women.

Student number: 876-192-2

I declare that

* A Study of The Presentation of Women In The
Novels of Barbara Pym..... is my own work and that all the sources that I
have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete
references.

C Blair
.....
SIGNATURE
(MISS C F BLAIR)

27/11/96
.....
DATE

Table of contents

	Page No.
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Subversion and Comedy in Pym's Early Works	22
Chapter Two: Spinsterhood and the 'Excellent Woman': <i>A Glass of Blessings and Excellent Women</i>	60
Chapter Three: Satire in the Presentation of Caroline Grimstone and Emma Howick	93
Chapter Four: Rejection of the 'Excellent Woman' figure: Letty, Marcia and Leonora	124
Conclusion	163
Select Bibliography	169

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is premised on the assumption that Barbara Pym is a writer of stature, whose insights into the condition of women in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s are profound and worth noting. I believe that her views are important because they contribute to a feminist understanding of the position of women and the ways in which women have been represented. I wish to argue that the onset of the Second World War created an ambivalent situation for women. On the one hand, the war catalyzed women's entry into the public sphere. Women recognized that it was no longer enough to possess 'a room of their own' to guarantee artistic, domestic or public success. This ideal had been put forward by Woolf in the years preceding the Second World War (1942:153). It was now seen as outdated by women such as Simone de Beauvoir, whose work, *The Second Sex*, was published in 1949, and Betty Friedan, whose work, *The Feminine Mystique*, was published in 1963 (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1988:733). Both works are milestones in modern feminism: de Beauvoir's work 'raised feminist consciousness by appealing to the idea that liberation for women was liberation for men too' (1988:733). Friedan 'attacked deadening domesticity – the conditioning of women to accept passive roles and depend on male dominance' (1988:733). On the other hand, once the War had ended, women were expected to return to the private sphere. Those who continued to work found themselves confined to the lower echelons of the workplace, with little room for advancement.

The majority of Pym's women revert to the domestic sphere, but with the sparks of freedom kindling in their breasts. They achieve their rebellion in a subterranean way. They create a community of women. This occurs in the domestic sphere.¹ I aver that women in the 1970s in Britain faced a more complex brand of patriarchy than their earlier counterparts. Pym demonstrates that women experience freedom in a superficial way. Their fight to attain gender equality is constrained by the convoluted forms which

patriarchy assumes. I shall explore this aspect of Pym's writing in more detail in subsequent chapters.

An assumption which pervades my dissertation is that Pym has been undervalued as a writer. She was sidelined by the literary establishment. Publishers rejected her novel *An Unsuitable Attachment* in 1963; *The Sweet Dove Died* was also deemed unsuitable for publication in 1970.² The literary establishment, represented by Macmillan, Cape and Faber, gave a united explanation for the rejections: there were fears that the novels would not be economic successes, given the permissive climate of the 1960s in Britain.

This inadequate explanation was a personal slight on Pym's writing ability. She was well aware that Cape were in the process of reprinting her earlier books, due to a demand for them. Ironically, *An Unsuitable Attachment* and *The Sweet Dove Died* were written for the same group of readers who continued to be avid admirers of her work. The patriarchal nature of the publishing establishment led it to decide that readers in the 1960s were not interested in ordinary women's lives, especially in the domestic sphere: nevertheless Pym continued to receive flattering reviews for her published works despite this rejection.³ She was 'rescued' by Philip Larkin and Lord David Cecil in 1977. Both Cecil and Larkin proposed that she was an underrated writer.⁴

Even the critics who attempted to reinstate Pym have made mistakes, for example by dismissing her writing as trivial and concerned only with a narrow compass of domestic or small-town issues.⁵ I contend that it is only from a masculinist perspective, which concerns itself with public matters, that domestic issues are trivial. A feminist reading, on the other hand, would take cognizance of homely concerns for women's lives, which are often restricted by patriarchy to a smaller domain.⁶ Pym renders the domestic domain larger than life and reduces the significance of the public sphere. She suggests that the

former is the place of empowerment for her heroines. I believe that she shows life from a woman-centred perspective, in which the domestic realm assumes greater importance than the public domain. In the course of my dissertation I provide a counter-argument to contradict critical disparagement of her novels.

I believe that Pym's novels are historically accurate. Her fiction is a significant record of the changing times in which she lived and wrote. Her early heroines are the products of relatively stable contexts. Many of the social codes and values of the Edwardian period survive in Pym's early novels: the 'superiority' of the male gender is affirmed, and women are cheerfully content to remain the guardians of the domestic sphere. For example, Belinda Bede in *Some Tame Gazelle* shares a home with her sister Harriet. She has no vocation in the public sphere but attends church and helps at community gatherings (Pym, 1978: 27–29, 85). Pym's women adopt a range of subtle strategies to achieve their subversive aims. For example, they form platonic relationships with other women. These provide them with both solace and friendship. In this way, Wilmet Forsyth in *A Glass of Blessings* is friends with Rowena Talbot and Mary Beamish (1991:19, 33, 163–167). Pym's later heroines are alienated from the patriarchal society of which they are members. The fact that they are old spinsters intensifies their alienation. In my discussion of these later novels, I concentrate on the isolation experienced by the heroines and its implicit criticism of patriarchal society. By contrast, the early heroines create a community of women.

Pym's depiction of women is a record of gender inequalities and social change in the years following the Second World War. This dissertation traces shifts in fictional emphasis as indices of social change. In the earlier novels, the emphasis is on the innovative but ordinary nature of women's lives. There is also a strong identification between the authorial voice and the earlier heroines. Pym portrays the creative nature of her heroines' lives. There is a fine balance in their natures between other people's needs and their own

concerns.

The heroines remain at the heart of Pym's later novels, but the author does distance herself from them. These later central protagonists are portrayed as lacking self-belief. They are complex heroines because their psyches are in turmoil. Their actions are contradictory: Marcia in *Quartet in Autumn* is independent in the sense that she refuses the help of Janice Brabner, the social worker (Pym, 1980b:28–29). By contrast, she worships the patriarchal qualities of Dr Strong (1980b:13). Leonora in *The Sweet Dove Died* desires attention, yet drives most people away, such as James Boyce, Miss Foxe, Meg and Humphrey Boyce (Pym, 1980c:34–36, 50–53, 57, 94). Their complex lives are a reflection of the convoluted nature of patriarchal ideology as practised in Britain in the 1970s. Pym suggests through her depiction of women's lives that this social change has not been for the better.

An important dimension of my research is the examination of Pym's representation of relationships between women and men, within and outside of marriage. This adds depth to her depiction of women. I contend that women in the social context of the 1950s tended to accept their position of subordination more easily than in later decades. Conflicts which do emerge are resolved by humour. A typical example is the marital tension between the Clevelands, which Pym portrays in *Crampton Hodnet*. In this early novel, Pym suggests that it is not yet timeous to challenge the power of men openly. The Clevelands' relationship portrays a conciliatory attitude to men when Jane Cleveland forgives Francis for being unfaithful and eloping with Barbara Bird. He is the prodigal son, and she welcomes him back without reproach: 'the fact of where he had been and where he had not been slid naturally into the background' (Pym, 1985:209). However, the rumblings of rebellion are also evident in another early novel. Catherine Oliphant constantly questions Tom's authority in *Less Than Angels*. Pym points out that their common-law relationship is also subject to patriarchal inequalities.

Marriage is treated ambivalently throughout the early novels. Its success depends largely on the heroine's ability to achieve self-worth, usually through communication with other women. This is a highly original view of marriage. For example, Wilmet Forsyth in *A Glass of Blessings* is supported by her friendships with Mary Beamish, Sybil Forsyth and Rowena Talbot. Through these friendships she is encouraged to become a better 'Excellent Woman' and to improve her self-image (Pym, 1991:14-15, 99-101, 165-166). Her marriage improves as a result. Although Dulcie Mainwaring in *No Fond Return of Love* and Mildred Lathbury in *Excellent Women* are unmarried, they begin to consider marriage in a more positive way as a result of the influence of other women. Dulcie befriends Viola Dace. She observes Viola's relationship with Bill Sedge. This leads her to consider a possible relationship with Aylwin Forbes (Pym, 1991:151-153, 253-254). Mildred considers Everard Bone as a possible husband after interacting with Allegra, Helena and Winifred (Pym, 1989:10-15, 120-121).

Conflicts in 'real-life' marriages are typically resolved between partners, not by the woman's communion with other women. Pym's unusual view of marriage is based on a lack of confidence in masculinist ideology: she holds the belief that women are better at resolving conflicts than men. This position is evident throughout *A Very Private Eye*. It surfaces in her relationship with Henry Stanley Harvey at Oxford, of which she writes: 'I don't think he cares a damn about me' (Pym, 1984:19-20). This feeling is reinforced in her relationship with Gordon Glover, a journalist in the war years. Pym found it intolerable to keep silent about her feelings for him, in view of the fact that he had not committed himself to the relationship and regarded it lightly (1984:110-119, 125). In these writings, Pym reveals her lack of confidence in love, marriage and the publishing establishment (1984:80, 84, 236). Pym appears to sideline marriage in the later novels. The heroines are usually spinsters. The disjointed nature of patriarchal society in the later novels means that women and men are isolated from one another. A sense of disillusionment about

women's futures prevails.

Pym represents the two social institutions of the Church and anthropology in relation to her central protagonists to add a further dimension to her depiction of women. I surmise that Pym uses anthropology and the Church in her novels because they featured prominently in her own life. From earliest childhood, she participated in the rituals of the Anglican Church (Pym, 1984:3). For many years she worked at an anthropological institute, the International African Institute. She was Assistant Editor of the Institute's journal *Africa* (1984:183). According to her sister Hilary Pym, 'although capable, she [Pym] had no real interest in Africa as such, but was fascinated by the anthropologists and linguists' (1984:183). The Church and anthropology provided Pym with examples of masculinist ideology and gender discrepancies. Perhaps, too, her interest in anthropology provided her with skills in social analysis. She uses her observations to great effect in her novels.

The Anglican Church provides a social and spiritual mainstay for women, especially those who are existentially at a loss (such as Wilmet in *A Glass of Blessings*). Rubenstein suggests that '[Pym's] critics have generally overlooked the element of religious hunger and consolation in her fiction' (1990:173). I agree with this argument.⁷ In later chapters I shall examine the Church's role in contributing to women's empowerment in Pym's early novels of the 1950s. Pym focuses on the Church's creation of a community of women, although the creation of such a community is obviously not the Church's main intention. The Church is portrayed as a vestigial organ of the Welfare State in the later novels. It no longer provides social and spiritual consolation. This is an index of the declining condition of British society.

Anthropology,⁸ a discipline in which Pym was involved during her writing career, is another outlet for women's energies, although ambivalently portrayed. Aside from its creative aspect, this discipline also smacks of overwhelmingly male influence. Pym counters patriarchy in the early novels by portraying female field workers in a metaphorical sense, who carry out investigations more successfully than their male colleagues. For example, Catherine in *Less Than Angels* conducts much field work for her novels. She observes life and records it in her short stories (Pym, 1993:26). She accurately records her observation of Tom's infidelity in a short story entitled *Sunday Evening*. 'It begins rather well with a young man and girl holding hands in a Greek restaurant, watched by the man's former mistress' (Pym, 1991:152), as Rowena in *A Glass of Blessings* tells Wilmet. Dulcie in *No Fond Return of Love* is also not an anthropologist in an official sense. Yet her investigative efforts are more successful than those undertaken by male anthropologists, such as Rupert Stonebird in *An Unsuitable Attachment* and Alaric Lydgate in *Less Than Angels* (Pym, 1992:52-53, 142-143; 1986a:34-43; 1993:216-217). Catherine and Dulcie manage to remain detached whilst telling their respective stories, unlike Rupert, whose subjective opinions cloud his observations (Pym, 1986a:70). I suggest that anthropology allows women a channel for their creativity. Observation, investigation and discovery provide a means to extend their intellectual abilities, and to find new interest in relationships based on their new-found interest in others. Anthropology dries up as a channel for women's energies in the later novels. This is because personal concerns are more central. Pym condones this shift because anthropology has failed to contribute sufficiently to women's empowerment. In effect, she abandons it as an unsuccessful experiment. The abandoned discipline of anthropology is part of a landscape of despair in the later novels. Pym has carefully closed all channels for women to empower themselves.

Pym's development as a novelist is related to her presentation of women. She describes various roles for women which shift in accordance with a changing social context. In

particular, she offers an oscillating portrayal of the 'Excellent Woman' figure. This figure reaches its zenith in the early novels. I believe that it is a means for women to express a covert form of rebellion against patriarchy. Although the 'Excellent Woman' figure is initially a patriarchal construct, Pym develops this role into a means for the self-expression of her heroines.

Pym's creation of the 'Excellent Woman' is suited to the social context of the 1950s.⁹ This context is marked by women's ambivalent response to patriarchy. On the one hand, the 'Excellent Woman' figure represents women's forging of a collective consciousness as a means to rebel against patriarchy. On the other hand, this construct also embodies women's desire to retain some of the privileges given to them as second-class citizens. These benefits would be lost if they overtly voiced their rebellion. Therefore, these women do not discard patriarchy, but rather embrace an attitude of qualified challenge towards it. The social context of the 1960s and 1970s prompted Pym to abolish the 'Excellent Woman' figure. The 1960s in Britain heralded an era of change for women. The question of female subordination arose in the midst of a sexual revolution. The trend was towards greater egalitarianism and greater female acceptance of permissiveness (Woody and Woody, 1973:14). In 1966 the National Organization for Women was founded (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1988:733). Women in the 1960s were more self-assertive and aware of gender discrimination than their predecessors. Amendments to discriminatory laws began in the 1960s (1988:733). The 'Excellent Woman' figure in Pym's fiction is staid, quietly spoken and not openly assertive. This figure does not convey the type of woman that Pym wished to depict in the later novels. The heroines in the later novels are anti-'Excellent Women'. They reject the home and the family as the mainstays of their lives. Also, they rage against their lack of status and the role of ageing spinsters.

I believe that Pym's insights into women's psyches are telling. The forces in their psyches are a microcosm of the broader conflicts in patriarchal society. Pym's early and later heroines experience conflicts between two figures in their psyches. These figures are the 'Angel in the House'¹⁰ and the demon-monster. The 'Angel in the House' represents that aspect of the female's psyche which is dictated to by patriarchy. This feature of women's psyches has a long tradition, as Woolf suggests (1942:152-153). Pym's version of this figure is the 'Excellent Woman'. This figure is dominant in the psyches of the early heroines. Sexual repression is also a feature of this role. The demon-monster epitomizes the rebellious aspect of the female consciousness, which is more evident in the later novels.

In her later novels Pym puts forward other possible roles for women in the social context of the 1970s. For example, there is the role of 'Formidable Woman'.¹¹ Pym suggests the complexity of life for women in the 1970s by representing them in many different roles. Self-expression is no longer possible through one role, since patriarchy manifests itself in many guises. Accordingly, Pym offers a number of roles for women in her earlier and later novels. Pym portrays her spinsters as relatively young women in her earlier novels. They are content with their assumption of this role, and prefer to remain single. Pym's spinsters in the later novels are middle-aged or old women who are uneasy in this position. Their insecurities stem from patriarchal ideology in the 1970s, which devalues women as they age. In addition, these women have little status without marriage. I believe that many of Pym's own fears of being an old spinster in the 1970s emerge in her presentation of the later heroines. Throughout *A Very Private Eye* Pym examined her chosen role of spinsterhood. Her early examination of this role, in 1938, was light-hearted, but there was a melancholy undertone. Pym did not ponder too deeply on the role of 'old spinster' at that stage (Pym, 1984:44-49, 67, 69). By contrast, she mentions feeling old and vulnerable in 1971, in comparison to young students in the library (1984:260). Her depression at being an old spinster was worsened by her remembrance of better times: good health, youth and

good reviews of her novels (1984:265). Her poor health (breast cancer, a stroke and heart attack) made her fear being a helpless old spinster: '[w]hen I thought my days were numbered I did feel it was perhaps better to die in one's sixties' (1984:277). These feelings of loss of control over her life, helplessness, poor health and loss of physical attraction emerge in her presentation of Letty and Marcia in *Quartet in Autumn*. Letty worries about her loss of physical beauty: '[Eulalia's] exuberant vitality was disturbing, especially to an elderly woman who felt herself in contrast to be greyer than ever, crushed and dried up by the weak British sun' (Pym, 1980b:11). Marcia suffers from breast cancer, like Pym, and she loses control over her life, which Pym feared might happen in her own life (1980b:13, 99; 1984:262, 277).

By contrast with many critics,¹² I contend that Pym is a feminist writer. I would refer to her brand of feminism as humanist: I see it as similar to Jane Austen's brand of feminism. The same charge of triviality which has been directed at Pym has been levelled against Jane Austen. The allegation is that neither writer has created magnificent and powerful works. There is patriarchal bias inherent in the idea of 'magnificent and powerful' or 'classic' or 'epic' works. This definition suggests that for a work to attain recognition it must contain a hero who carries out actions perceived to be of great significance. The hero is a paternal figure who looks after those who are smaller or weaker than himself. Pym herself deconstructs the patriarchal bias of critics who rejected her novels: '[w]hat is wrong with being obsessed with trivia? What are the minds of my critics filled with? What nobler and more worthwhile things?' (Pym, 1984:260). This leaves 'no desire in the reader for the scope to be bigger or even different' (Austen, 1947:9). Various critics have compared Pym with Austen. For example, Ezell proposes that Pym's debt to Austen is stylistic in nature (1984:450).¹³

In my view, it is significant that both Pym and Austen focus on issues which are irrelevant to the patriarchal establishment. Their concerns are significant for women who are products of contexts shaped by patriarchal society. Both writers focus on women. I feel that these writers produce forms of counter-ideology to counteract patriarchy's trivialization of women's achievements in the private sphere. Both authors articulate women's plight in a serious way. They reveal that women face patriarchal ideology in many guises. I believe that Pym also consciously creates an affinity with Austen. Many of her heroines resemble Austen's. The most marked resemblance is between Emma Howick in *A Few Green Leaves*, and Emma Woodhouse in Austen's *Emma*.¹⁴ Benet suggests that Pym is similar to Austen 'because of her satiric and detailed treatment of a distinctive social group' (1986:5-6). I would argue that Pym wishes to highlight the behavioural patterns of middle-class women in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in Britain. Like Austen, she delves into the consciousness of each heroine and reveals her complex and individualistic reaction towards patriarchy. I suggest that this indicates her awareness of the dangers of presenting a consistent reaction in different women and different contexts.

Pym's brand of feminism, in my opinion, includes an examination of her role as an artist in her society. Pym represents her earlier heroines as artist-figures. She suggests that the creative impetus within these heroines should be accompanied by accurate observation of their empirical environment, and participation in them. This is consonant with the social responsibility which her own work articulates. Pym depicts her early heroines as socially responsible individuals. Wilmet in *A Glass of Blessings* initially avoids this role, but finds that she lacks the fulfilment which other socially responsible women, such as Sybil Forsyth, possess. Wilmet takes responsibility for Mary Beamish and Wilfred Bason as the novel progresses (Pym, 1991:60, 109, 145). Mildred is socially responsible throughout *Excellent Women*. She helps other people to cope with societal pressures (Pym, 1989:17-19,

30–31,135). Catherine in *Less Than Angels* 'socializes' Alaric back into community life and is a mentor to Deirdre (Pym, 1993: 233, 248–249). Pym suggests that, to some extent, her heroines may ease the sufferings of other human beings. It is their responsibility to respond to cries of help from their fellow human beings.

The heroines employ language in an innovative and poetic manner. They are also aware of the literary tradition. They perceive that it can become part of their own literary mind-set through the use of literary allusions. They apply art, as represented by these literary allusions, to everyday events. This injects the literary allusions with a new significance. They become part of the characters' experience. Pym uses literature as an outlet for self-expression, and hence empowerment for women. It also functions as an intertext for her own novels. Pym implies that her novels are 'as good as' other great works in the sense that she scrutinizes her own position as an artist in relation to other artists throughout her novels. As is the case with other artists such as George Eliot, Henry James and E.M. Forster¹⁵, she attempts to capture the 'quicksilver', or essence of the artist's creativity, and to subject it to analysis.

Pym also examines the issues of creativity and art in the later novels. She demonstrates the loss of creativity by the heroines (artist-figures), as they fail to become fully involved in relationships. For example, Emma in *A Few Green Leaves* possesses many of the skills needed by an artist, such as intelligence, perception, flair and imagination. Yet she fails to become involved with the community of people that she is studying. This renders her art sterile (in a metaphorical sense) and divorced from experience. Similarly, Leonora in *The Sweet Dove Died* fails to apply her artistic abilities. She accrues art works and objects to gain social status, instead of pursuing her own creative impulses. Pym suggests that experience and creativity must meet in order for the artist-figure to reach his or her

potential. Art is a tool for inner empowerment and not a commodity, because it provides Pym's earlier heroines, such as Catherine, with an outlet for their creativity in the domestic sphere. They do not have to be 'heroic' figures in the public sphere to achieve self-empowerment (Pym, 1993: 26-29). They empower themselves through the use of literary allusions and intertextuality in the domestic sphere: they form a community of women. Women such as Belinda and Catherine belong to a group of literary people (Pym, 1978: 7-17; 1993:26).

Pym focuses on women's subversion in a subtle way. There are grounds for arguing that she does employ subversive tactics, although her fiction seems to represent rather than subvert patriarchy. Ezell proposes that thematically Pym's work is similar to the genre of social protest novels (1984:450).¹⁶ One example of a subversive tactic is the foregrounding of the previously discounted realm of the home and family where women are central. Another is the trivialization of the public sphere. In Pym's fiction, little of interest occurs in this domain. By contrast, the domestic sphere is swarming with events which are significant to the heroines. A further tactic is to deconstruct gender stereotyping as an off-shoot of patriarchal ideology: Pym probes the myth that women are unintelligent and passive victims of men. Pym depicts her heroines as creative women with high levels of intelligence. Patriarchy confines their abilities to the private arena. This realm is the setting for comic moments, the use of allusions and mishaps. Pym's male characters are usually egoistic and unintelligent. They contribute to the sterile representation of the public domain. A prime example is Henry Hoccleve, the Archdeacon in *Some Tame Gazelle*, who is jealous of all 'rivals' in the ministry. He is a petulant man who cares little for his parish (Pym, 1978:8-21). Similarly, Rocky Napier and Julian Malory in *Excellent Women*, Aylwin Forbes in *No Fond Return of Love* and Fabian Driver and Jane and Prudence are lazy men who use their good looks to coax women into doing their work for them. They also lack sensitivity (Pym, 1989:30-33,193-196; 1992:14-15; 1979:54-57).

Comedy and satire are two other strategies which Pym uses for highlighting and exposing the damage patriarchy inflicts on women. My dissertation traces Pym's use of comedy in her earlier novels¹⁷ and satire in her later novels. Jacobs proposes that two features lie at the heart of Pym's work. These are the ideas of growth and change in her novels (1988:11). Change in Pym's novels is related to her use of comedy because Pym abandons light-hearted comedy and farce for satire in the later novels. This change is brought about by her desire to critique patriarchy forcefully in the later novels. Pym's development as a novelist is related to her use of satire in the later novels. She establishes herself firmly as a feminist because satire provides her with a vehicle to confront patriarchy more directly. I contend that these are characteristics of a valuable and resilient writer. I feel that comedy is superseded by more biting satire in the later novels.¹⁸

In my interpretation Pym suggests that women are more imprisoned in the context of patriarchy as practised in Britain in the 1970s, than in the 1950s. This contradicts the view of society as 'progressive'. The later novels, in particular, encapsulate a vision of women as casualties of patriarchal stereotyping. I wish to suggest that Pym believes that women could achieve equality in the 1950s in Britain. This hopeful quality illuminates the lives of the earlier heroines. The war encouraged women to continue to make inroads into the public sphere. Pym's early heroines experience euphoria when they achieve public success. Her later heroines are disenchanted with the absence of gender equality. These characters give fictional expression to a sense of disappointment at the lack of progress in the patriarchal society of which her heroines are members. Here Pym is actually turning her satire on her heroines, as opposed to the social parody of the earlier novels.

She provides a critique of her later characters as victims of patriarchal society. She ridicules the weak points of her heroines, using a gentle brand of satire. This mode enables her to expose social problems and to invoke sympathy for her heroines, who are products of

their society. Pym suggests that there is little hope of resolving gender inequalities, and to that extent the heroines are presented in a tragic light.

As I have implied, this dissertation articulates a feminist approach. My form of criticism has been derived from the key figures of Anglo-American feminist criticism such as Kate Millett, Elaine Showalter and Gilbert and Gubar. During the course of my dissertation I provide an analysis of patriarchy as depicted and subverted in Barbara Pym's fiction. By the term 'patriarchy' I mean a widespread force which influences men's and women's lives at an individual and institutional level. I believe that patriarchy cannot be defined as a generalized social system because it adapts itself to different social contexts.

I believe that gender shapes all aspects of production, reception and interpretation of literary texts. I examine Pym's novels in terms of their reception and interpretation by the male-dominated arena of literary critics. Pym's early novels were favourably received because they suited the ideological needs of British society in the 1950s: they depict women in the domestic sphere who show little desire to enter the public sphere. Male critics found no place for Pym's novels in the 1960s, when topics such as rock 'n roll, drugs and racial issues received precedence (Pym, 1984:215-231). It required the influence of two male critics, Lord David Cecil and Philip Larkin, to rescue Pym from obscurity in *The Times Literary Supplement* (1977:66-68).

I believe that literature tends to be androcentric (Showalter, 1989:310). One needs to question a construct of patriarchal Western culture, namely the idea that a text's author is a father and procreator (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:6). Women in patriarchal societies have historically been reduced to mere properties and to characters and images imprisoned in male texts (1979:12). The literary allusions found in Pym's novels are from androcentric sources, but they are deconstructed by Pym to expose the underlying sexism. Pym's

heroines read Rochester, Young, Haynes Bayley, Vaughan, Hardy and Arnold (Pym, 1978:7,17; 1993:99, 101, 234–235). I show how these androcentric texts are assimilated by Pym's own woman-centred texts, as Pym relates them to her heroines' lives. Pym read Victorian poets, Scott, Johnson, Larkin and many other male authors (Pym, 1984:29,72, 105). She also read Compton-Burnett, Austen and Woolf (1984:26–105). These authors influenced her position in relation to gender and literature. The influence of the former group of authors may explain her conciliatory attitude towards men in the early novels. On the surface Pym's novels appear conciliatory. I believe that beneath the decorative surface of texts by women, such as Pym, lies a 'different kind of utterance' which breaks through when they write of suffering and anguish (Showalter, 1989:312). I examine how Pym uses irony, satire and tragedy to achieve this second voice in her novels. This is especially true of her later works.

A feminist reading of literature must question whether individual works and authors are representative and universal (Showalter, 1989:315). Pym speaks for a small group of middle-class women in the period after the Second World War in Britain. Women may write about male establishments within a situation of lack and absence, and with a sense of themselves as peripheral rather than central (1989:316). This is consonant with the fact that Pym's novels have been regarded as trivial by the literary establishment (Ackroyd, 1984:861; Fenton, 1985:11) because she writes from a position of presence and centrality, through her illumination of the domestic sphere. Androcentric critics may find themselves reading Pym's novels from a position of absence, since it is difficult for them to relate to women's experiences in the domestic sphere.

An important project in feminist criticism is deconstructing the myths of manhood or social constructions of masculinity (Showalter, 1989:324). Pym uses irony, the technique of

mock-heroism and comedy in her novels to undercut these myths. In the course of my dissertation I examine how Pym undercuts rigid definitions of sexual difference (1989:325).

Gilbert and Gubar claim that the woman writer needs to 'examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of "angel" and "monster" which male authors have generated for her' (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:17). I examine how Pym deconstructs these extreme images in her novels, and provides alternative roles for her women characters. The female writer's battle for self-creation involves her in the act of looking back, of entering an old text from a new critical direction (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:49). I feel that when one examines Pym's novels, one must approach them in a new way. Women's novels are marked by 'subterranean challenges' to truths that the writers of such works appear on the surface to accept (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:75). Feminist criticism now allows us to see meaning where previously there was empty space (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:75). I approach Pym's novels in this manner because her feminist stance is, as I shall show, 'subterranean'.

Millett's legacy to the feminist critic is to have drawn attention to sexual dominion, as perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture (1969:33). It is a status category with political implications (1969:32). In the course of my dissertation I examine how sexual dominion influences women's lives. I show that patriarchy is an all-pervasive force that limits women's lives: masculinist educational institutions assign women to the humanities and certain social sciences while men enter the realm of science and technology (Millett, 1969:59). I also show that one of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another; and that the greater quantity of guilt attached to sexuality in patriarchy is overwhelmingly placed on women, who are seen as the more culpable parties in most sexual liaisons (Millett, 1969:52, 76).

My theoretical framework in writing this dissertation comprises a number of elements. I am interested in what the novels reveal about social conditions for women, and in their deconstruction of gender inequalities. I believe that Pym's work offers a critique of patriarchal gender relations. She reveals the ways in which women's self-perceptions are based on patriarchal conditioning. Patriarchal ideology in the 1950s pervaded the lives of women in the home, and in the community. In her later novels, Pym demonstrates how it infiltrates women's places of work and their isolated dwellings. Pym indicates that the manner in which patriarchal gender relations continue to be entrenched in British society in the 1970s offers little hope for women's freedom. Pym traces the entrenchment of inequitable gender relations in the home, the public sphere and the education system, all through the eyes of her women characters.

My dissertation offers a feminist re-reading of Pym's critics as well as of Pym's fiction. I am interested in showing how Pym uses fiction to create a critique of patriarchy. In the early novels Pym uses a subtle barrage of feminist weaponry: her heroines wear the outer trappings of patriarchy. On the surface they are 'Excellent Women', who confirm the stereotype of the good wife, mother-figure or housekeeper. Pym critiques patriarchy through her use of intertextuality¹⁹ to suggest that women may draw on the ideas of other women to subvert patriarchy. She also employs an ironic tone and a light brand of comedy. In the later novels Pym critiques patriarchy more directly. She uses satire and tragedy in relation to the heroines. The heroines are ridiculed by Pym so that she can expose the weaknesses of their society. They also suffer, Pym implies, because they are 'imperfect women' in the eyes of patriarchal society. They are tragic heroines in the Aristotelian sense of being flawed and in the everyday sense because they suffer.

Pym's subtlety as a writer enables her to address the intricacies and pervasiveness of patriarchal power over women very effectively. I believe that there is a need for a subtle

and sensitive reading of Pym's complexities. The following chapters evaluate Pym's complex presentation of women in her novels. They also highlight the varied responses of women to patriarchal complexities.

Notes

1. Wilson (1980:15–16) provides an analysis of the role played by housewives in the period following the Second World War. This has contributed to my understanding of Pym's women.
2. Pym (1984:216–254).
3. Pym (1984:252–253).
4. Larkin also emphasizes Pym's unique qualities: '[s]he has a unique eye and ear for the small poignancies of everyday life' (Cecil and Larkin, 1977:66).
5. Benet argues that Pym's novels focus on her heroines' need to find something to love (1986:1). Whilst I do not wish to denigrate the importance of love, either in the novels or in women's lives, I do not believe that this is the central issue in her work. Fenton trivializes the serious nature of Pym's work by placing her in the role of the 'sexy St Hilda's girl' (1984:10). For Rossen, Pym 'writes on a small scale' (1986:5); and for Smith, Pym's novels are 'acute observations of a limited social scene' (Salwak, 1987:62).
6. Sochen suggests that women are the primary agents in the domestic realm, and have been undervalued because of their domestic domain (1991:11).
7. In this respect I concur with Stanley, who argues that Pym examines the question 'what creates a sense of community and purpose in the modern world?' (1990:7–8).
8. Burkhart provides an in-depth examination of anthropology in Pym's work: 'anthropology, ... along with the church, is one of the staples of the novels of Barbara Pym' (1983:47). My choice of the Church and anthropology as institutions where patriarchy is forcefully embodied and deconstructed is derived from Burkhart's emphasis.
9. Griffin argues that as Pym's heroines' 'Excellent Womanhood' changes, this is reflected in a changing relationship to space (1992:132). I follow Griffin's argument in my chapter on 'Excellent Women'.
10. Gilbert and Gubar (1979:24).
11. Wilkinson Whitney avers that in addition to the 'Excellent Woman' figure, there are two other types of women in Pym's novels: 'Terrifying Women', who seek husbands and 'Formidable Women', who cultivate masculine attitudes and interests (1989:71–75).
12. See Bradham (1987:31) and McDonald (1991:3). Both suggest that Pym is not a feminist. Van Aswegen occupies a middle ground on this issue. She avers that '[Pym's] heroines possibly lack the gutsy raunchiness associated with much feminist writing' (1987:34).

13. Keener suggests that Pym possesses both similarities to and differences from Austen, but 'did not aspire to be Jane Austen' (1985:109).
14. See Austen, especially with regard to Emma's love for Frank Churchill (1947:266).
15. See Eliot (1988:46–47); James (1987:250–251); Forster (1967:203–230).
16. See also Veach Sadler (1985:141–154) and Wilkinson Whitney (1989:71), for a subtle articulation of Pym's brand of feminism.
17. See Ackley's assertion that Pym is a comic writer who employs a gentle, loving and forgiving humour (1989:1–12). I feel, however, that Ackley fails to recognize the development and change which characterizes Pym's use of humour.
18. I agree with Jacobs's argument that Pym uses comedy and satire in the early novels, but replaces this comedy with 'a distinctly tragic tone' in the later novels (1988:11).
19. Moi argues that intertextuality is an important device for the feminist. It forges links with other female and feminist authors, as well as between the female characters in the various books (1985:156).

CHAPTER ONE

SUBVERSION AND COMEDY IN PYM'S EARLY WORKS

Dulcie (*No Fond Return of Love*), Ianthe (*An Unsuitable Attachment*), Catherine (*Less Than Angels*), Belinda (*Some Tame Gazelle*), Jessie (*Crampton Hodnet*), Prudence and Jane (*Jane and Prudence*) conform on the surface to the conventions of British patriarchal society in the 1940s and 1950s. These conventions place men in the forefront of the economic and public spheres. They also condition women to regard men as possessing more status and power than themselves. Other conventions dictate that Pym's heroines' tertiary educations are confined to the humanities and their lives are centred on the domestic sphere. Despite all this, Pym's central protagonists manage to subvert patriarchy.

In these earlier novels, Pym demonstrates this subversion through the use of mock-heroism. Mock-heroism is a literary technique which undermines traditional feats of heroism, as found in patriarchal texts such as *The Odyssey* (Homer, 1946:10–13). Various features of mock-heroism are employed against the patriarchal society of the 1940s and 1950s: irony, mockery of courtly love and the 'strong man' myth, and absurd and humorous descriptions of heroic figures (Coghill and Tolkien, 1959:18–49). Mock-heroism serves to deflate the men in these novels into incompetent, self-centred and often foolish creations. These men are pitted against Pym's central protagonists. The latter prove to be stronger in all respects.

In addition, Pym demonstrates her main protagonists' subversion by showing how they use the power of the female pen to counter the negative aspects of patriarchal literature. The central protagonists tell their own stories within the novels themselves, or use literary allusions in a way which subverts patriarchy. Pym also shows how writing can create an

alternative literary space for women, since the power of the female pen acts as an intertextual device: it links the main protagonists in the novels and so creates a community of women.

The central protagonists also have comic natures. It is my contention that Pym's use of comedy is indicative of her own brand of feminism. She uses two related types of comedy in relation to her main protagonists in the early novels: light-hearted, farcical comedy and humour in the domestic sphere.

I will argue in this chapter that the use of light-hearted, farcical comedy supports Pym's non-confrontational form of feminism at this early stage of her novelistic career (which began in the late 1930s and lasted until the 1950s). She uses this type of comedy as a vehicle for diluting social issues. Pym portrays the power struggles which women experience amongst themselves and in their interaction with other people, but in a light-hearted and farcical manner. The tone which Pym uses is, when read on a superficial level, tolerant of the shortcomings of patriarchy. At a deeper level, Pym's tone is subversive of patriarchy.

Furthermore, Pym creates a fairy-tale world by using this type of comic expression in order to avoid the harsh realities created by the Second World War. These realities were created by the crumbling of the 'old' values of pre-war Britain. I define the 'old' values concerning gender as follows: men and women have fixed positions. Men are associated with the workplace (or public sphere) and women with the domestic sphere (or private domain). Just as men were authority figures, so too were governments and Churches. There was a strong belief in God (Sinfield, 1983:13-54).

The old values of pre-war Britain continued to influence British patriarchal society after World War Two, until the early 1960s. It is these 'old' values, which remained in place from the 1940s until the early 1960s, and survive to some extent into the 1990s, which provided the conventions for Pym's heroines. Pym faithfully holds onto the 'old' values and depicts her central protagonists in a conventional manner, in terms of the light-hearted and farcical brand of comedy which she uses in the earlier novels. Pym is tolerant of the 'old' value system manifested by her central protagonists. She views it as an appropriate response by the main protagonists to their context. It follows that Pym is not critical of her earlier heroines. This lack of criticism is in keeping with her use of light-hearted comedy in relation to the heroines.

I will also demonstrate that the use of the epiphany, as a literary device, is another way for Pym to develop her non-confrontational brand of feminism. The epiphany is usually experienced in the domestic sphere in Pym's novels, where the patriarchal system prefers women to remain. This type of experience encourages women to remain in the domestic sphere, and to keep their feelings about patriarchal inequalities hidden from the public sphere. These women bear their burdens stoically and cheerfully.

The epiphany, being by definition a personal, non-confrontational experience, came to prominence partly as a response to the Second World War. Women were frustrated because men were actively involved in the war, whereas they felt useless. Humour in a domestic context allowed women channels for their energies: they saw themselves as a community, just as men were a fighting community because of the war.

I have grouped *Crampton Hodnet*, *Some Tame Gazelle*, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, *Less Than Angels*, *Jane and Prudence* and *No Fond Return of Love* together in this chapter because the heroines all use the epiphany and literary allusions in a subversive way, unlike

the later heroines, whose characteristics are discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation. Furthermore, these heroines are primarily comic, whereas the later heroines have tragic and satiric elements in their make-up.

In these earlier novels, Pym breaks down the patriarchal division between 'The Angel in the House'¹ and the demon-monster figure. Pym shows that her main protagonists are neither 'Angels in the House' nor demon-monsters. They possess aspects of both figures. Catherine Oliphant in *Less Than Angels* is an example of this combination of qualities. She is proficient in the domestic sphere. She cooks for Tom, cleans their flat and provides food for Digby and Mark (Pym, 1993:26-30). Despite all this, her attitude towards marriage is ambivalent (1993:30). Similarly, Dulcie in *No Fond Return of Love* is an 'Angel in the House' in the sense that she helps Laurel, Maurice and Viola to solve their problems (Pym, 1992:56-59, 242-243). Yet Dulcie is also a 'monster' in the eyes of society because she is critical of Aylwin's and Maurice's misogynistic behaviour (1992:95, 223). Belinda in *Some Tame Gazelle* administers to the needs of the Archdeacon in the domestic sphere. She is, simultaneously, critical of his patronizing behaviour (Pym, 1978:21). Prudence in *Jane and Prudence* admires Arthur Grampian, but finds other suitors to replace him in the course of the novel (Pym, 1979:29, 53, 97). Pym implies that women with extreme natures (angels and monsters) are not found in reality. They exist only as constructs of patriarchal society and literature.

Bowman contends that in Pym's novels

The subversiveness of the heroines and of the narrators allows them to challenge the complacency of the male and female characters around them who conform to the dominant culture.

(1988:92)

I agree with the basic substance of this argument. However, the heroines in Pym's earlier novels do not challenge the patriarchal ideas of the lesser characters around them. Instead, they are tolerant of other people. For example, superficially, Ianthe tolerates Miss Grimes and Mervyn Cantrell. She hides her dislike of most men and women (Pym, 1986a:26). Likewise, Belinda tolerates the faults of Henry, Harriet and Agatha (Pym, 1978:7-21). Jessie endures Miss Doggett's domineering manner and Stephen Latimer's conceited behaviour (Pym, 1985:3-5, 42-43). Dulcie is tolerant of Viola's and Laurel's patronizing attitude towards her (Pym, 1992:58-59). Catherine views people's faults as one aspect of their personality (Pym, 1993:28-31, 86-87). Kaufman makes the point that the heroines' subversion assumes the form of muted self-assertion and oblique rebellion (1986:69). In my opinion, this argument is valid. Catherine, Jessie, Prudence, Ianthe, Belinda and Dulcie conform to 'the conscious system of ideas and beliefs [of the period]' (Williams, 1977:109).

Williams contends that British patriarchal ideology is promulgated and perpetuated by the current education system, as, one might argue, are all ideologies (1977:108). His argument is applicable to Pym's main protagonists. Catherine and Deirdre in *Less Than Angels* are well-educated (Pym, 1993:26-27, 68) but lack the status of male anthropologists such as Professor Fairfax and Dr Vere (1993:8-17). Klein argues that after the 1914-18 war women were guided towards the arts and sociology in tertiary education instead of towards more scientific careers (1946:10). This argument is borne out in the portrayal of Pym's central protagonists: Dulcie Mainwaring, Prudence Bates, Belinda Bede, Ianthe Broome and Jane Cleveland receive an education in the humanities (the arts and social sciences). Belinda in *Some Tame Gazelle* has no job in the public sphere but 'still retain[s] some smattering of the culture acquired in her college days' (Pym, 1978:7). Dulcie's education in *No Fond Return of Love* prepares her to 'do odd jobs and make indexes' (Pym, 1992:13). Ianthe Broome in *An Unsuitable Attachment* justifies her choice of

vocation in patriarchal terms: '[w]orking among books [is], on the face of it, a ladylike occupation' (Pym, 1986a:25). Jane and Prudence in *Jane and Prudence* studied together at Oxford (Pym, 1979:7). Jane is now a clergyman's wife, and Prudence works at a 'vague cultural organisation' (1979:8, 35). This is in keeping with the demands of British patriarchal society after the Second World War. Women were given jobs to boost the economy, but only in positions which perpetuated gender inequalities.

The main protagonists appear to conform to what I call the 'patriarchal father' of British society after the Second World War (Pym, 1978:11; 1979:8; 1986a:19; 1992:34). The 'patriarchal father' is an umbrella term, which I use to describe patriarchal institutions and doctrines.² In Pym's novels these are the Anglican Church, anthropological societies, literary societies, community gatherings and companies. Gender relations in these institutions are based on the idea of men as leaders and creators, and women as their helpers. For example, academic departments in *No Fond Return of Love* are run by men. Aylwin Forbes edits a journal. He also gives lectures at learned conferences (Pym, 1992:16,27). By contrast, Dulcie and Viola correct proofs and make bibliographies and indexes (1992:13). Similarly, Professor Mainwaring dominates the anthropology department in *Less than Angels* (Pym, 1993:17). Women such as Esther Clovis work for Professor Mainwaring. She is 'a kind of caretaker in the new research centre' (1993:12). Wealthy women such as Minnie Foresight provide the necessary funding for further research, but they have no say in the running of the centre (1993:14–15). The term 'patriarchal father' also refers to the people in Pym's novels who initiate and maintain patriarchal inequalities.

Dulcie, Prudence and Ianthe are employed in vocations which are the result of their education in the humanities. Dulcie's role in *No Fond Return of Love* is that of a slave to 'people with more original minds' (Pym, 1992:50). Prudence, despite her tertiary

education, is a kind of secretary to Arthur Grampian, her boss. Ianthe is a librarian, in a vocation in which the upper echelons are dominated by men (Pym, 1986a:74; 1979:35).

Pym shows, through her presentation of the jobs available to her heroines, how the British government in the period after World War Two actively manipulated women into certain social roles. Wilkinson Whitney, in her social study of fear between the sexes, attests to the role which British patriarchal society assumes in the marginalization of women:

The Economic Survey for 1947 earnestly requested that women swell the labour force, especially in industry and in hospitals, or as domestic servants, typists, shorthand-takers, nurses and midwives ...it became customary for middle-class women, the group that concerns Pym, to take jobs after they finished school and before they marched to the altar.

(1989:75)

Pym's novels give fictional expression to Wilkinson Whitney's sociological findings, namely that the jobs available to women in Britain after the Second World War were usually poorly paid and simply a form of cheap labour for the British government. Dulcie, Prudence and Ianthe are highly educated women with university degrees, but they have little influence in the public sphere. Dulcie in *No Fond Return of Love* spends most of her time in the private domain. She even does her correction of proofs at home (Pym, 1992:32). Prudence and Ianthe are invisible in the public sphere in terms of their economic and social status (Pym, 1979:36-37; 1986a:30-31). Their wealth is inherited rather than earned (1986a:24-25). The development of critical thinking amongst women, as an end-product of an education in the humanities, is largely wasted on British patriarchal society. This is because women cannot reach their full potential and benefit the economy, because they are 'held in low grades and denied access to promotion, or to the kind of work which brings status and reward' (Miles, 1988:235). Pym's novels reveal how women

bolster the success of men in the public sphere by assisting them in inferior positions of work, but that their own status and power is limited to the domestic sphere. Pym's heroines are subversive in the domestic sphere, because their ideas and actions remain hidden from patriarchy, and they are free of the domination which men practise in the public sphere. For example, Catherine's presence in the busy streets of London goes unnoticed, but she is a vivid personality in the domestic sphere (Pym, 1993:7-8, 26-27). Similarly, Dulcie is important in the domestic sphere. She plans Laurel's room, picks plums for her neighbour, arranges dinners and investigates Neville Forbes (Pym, 1992:36-37, 35-39, 42, 52).

I would argue that Pym's characters, who are important in the domestic sphere but insignificant in the public arena, give an authentic portrayal of what many women's lives are like.³ Pym undermines the important place which the public sphere occupies in British patriarchal society, and replaces it with the domestic sphere in her novels (Pym, 1978:51, 111; 1986a:68-70). Pym's value as a writer is evident in her depiction of many women's lives in the domestic sphere. She gives insight into how many women in the 1940s and 1950s in Britain managed to gain some status and power in their patriarchal society. Pym focuses on the 'ordinariness' of her heroines' lives in the domestic sphere, and makes this the centre of her novels. In the process she depicts the special, extraordinary quality of these lives. Although Jessie Morrow in *Crampton Hodnet* is a companion to the formidable Miss Doggett, she experiences many pleasurable moments in the domestic sphere (Pym, 1985:6-9, 17-18, 24). Similarly, Jane Cleveland in *Jane and Prudence* is confined to the domestic sphere. She reaches a compromise by filling her days with quotations from her favourite poets (Pym, 1979:11, 130-131). She suggests that women are a valuable part of their society, whatever the roles they assume. In these earlier novels, Pym's heroines tend to have a simple psychology. Jane simplifies patriarchal inequalities: '[w]e women can't always do as much as we think we can' (Pym, 1979:115). This comment is made in the

context of her exclusion from the Parochial Council meeting. Belinda also explains her subordinate position in society in simplistic terms: it is due to her lack of originality (Pym, 1978:28–29). However, Pym suggests that these characters are as much a part of their society as the more complex heroines of the later novels.

The strategy of focusing on the 'ordinary' aspects of life is shared by other feminist writers – for example, Le Guin argues, in relation to her fourth book of Earthsea, that she discards the traditional hero–tale,⁴ and focuses on gender issues (1993:13). In this 'revised' hero–tale, Le Guin concentrates on the ordinariness of life:

There may be no public triumph of good over evil, for in this new world what's good or bad, important or unimportant, hasn't been decided yet, if ever. Judgment is not referred up to the wise men. History is no longer about great men. The important choices and decisions may be obscure ones, not recognized or applauded by society.

(Le Guin, 1993:13)

Like Le Guin, Pym's heroines live ordinary lives in the domestic sphere, and their important choices and decisions are not recognized or applauded by society. Thus Catherine's decision in *Less Than Angels* to befriend the reclusive Alaric Lydgate and to enter the traditionally male-dominated world of anthropology goes unobserved, aside from the curiosity of the neighbours (Pym, 1993:216–217, 248–249). Belinda's choice in *Some Tame Gazelle* of domestic bliss and spinsterhood over marriage to the Archdeacon is unnoticed by her society. Nor are her culinary triumphs praised, and her benevolent demeanour towards other men and women is not applauded (Pym, 1978:8, 23, 27–29, 226–227). Pym subverts the patriarchal notions that novels must focus on some great event, that the difficulties which her heroines experience should be referred to the wise men, and should inevitably end in marriage to some great man. Of the early heroines, only

Ianthe in *An Unsuitable Attachment* marries during the course of that novel (Pym, 1986a:252–253). There are no wise men to advise Pym's heroines, only fools. Pym portrays most of the less prominent characters in her novels as fools. Marjorie Forbes in *No Fond Return of Love*, Mervyn Cantrell and Sister Dew in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, Henry Hoccleve in *Some Tame Gazelle*, Francis Cleveland in *Crampton Hodnet* and Minnie Foresight in *Less Than Angels* are portrayed as fools (Pym, 1992:78–79; 1986a:17, 26–27; 1978:20–21; 1985:176–177; 1993:15). This strategy highlights the centrality and resilience of her women characters.

Pym chooses to undermine the centrality of men's lives within a patriarchal tradition by focusing on women. Dulcie, Catherine, Belinda, Prudence, Jessie and Ianthe are subject to a global tradition of patriarchal myth and custom which advocates the idealization of men by women. According to Miles, women have been regarded as the spoils of war throughout patriarchal history (1988:44–45). They are depicted in literature as passive and beautiful objects, who are waiting to be won by the bravest knights. The pleasures of the men lie in the conquests. Fantasies are the only pleasures available to the waiting women. They dream of being rescued by their suitors (Miles, 1988:45). Pym reverses this convention in her fiction.

Pym's subversion exposes the myth of the 'strong man' (Miles, 1988:81). Dulcie, Prudence and Belinda idealize men (Pym, 1992:16, 28; 1979:11, 36–37; 1978:8–9). This trend amongst Pym's central protagonists in part originates from the idealization which she practised in her own life, as manifested in her love for the unobtainable Henry Stanley Harvey, whom she met at Oxford. Fenton notes that 'from this time forth the problem of idealization enters all her relationships' (Fenton, 1984:10). Pym shows her women characters idealizing men, because it suits her mock-heroic ends. Through a parodic or mocking tone, Pym subverts her main characters' tendency to idealize men.

The first outstanding example of mock-heroism is the use of irony to suggest that Aylwin Forbes in *No Fond Return of Love*, Henry Hoccleve in *Some Tame Gazelle*, Stephen Latimer in *Crampton Hodnet*, Fabian Driver in *Jane and Prudence* and John Challow in *An Unsuitable Attachment* are not the epic heroes which the central protagonists often mistake them for (Pym, 1992:16; 1978:8; 1986a:45–50). Fabian Driver is shown to be a superficial person through Jane's eyes: '[s]he had a theory that this was why he tended to make love to women – because he couldn't really think of much to say to them ...' (Pym, 1979:96). There is irony in Dulcie's comment that Aylwin Forbes has god-like qualities: 'like a Greek marble' (Pym, 1992:28). The irony in Dulcie's comment about Aylwin originates with Pym, rather than Dulcie, who is not aware of being ironic. In the case of Henry Hoccleve, the irony may at times be less subtle: 'he had very few of the obvious virtues that one somehow expected of one's parish priest' (Pym, 1978:8). Belinda is quite aware of the irony in her comment. However, the tone which she usually assumes towards Henry is tolerant and benevolent.

Jessie's perception of her employer, Maude Doggett, and Stephen Latimer, is habitually ironic (Pym, 1985:4, 21, 112). Her perception reveals the falsity of the criteria such as wealth, beauty and education used by society to measure her worth. Pym depicts as more authentic Jessie's belief in marriage for love, and the importance of intelligence and morality rather than status. Jessie's deliberate use of irony creates a triangle of complicity consisting of Jessie, Pym and the reader. Jessie's tolerant brand of irony is used by Pym to make the reader aware of the shortcomings of men in a patriarchal society, which applauds their superiority over women, whilst also implicating Jessie in this criticism by showing her own complicity.

An important feature of mock-heroism is that it mocks various patriarchal conventions, such as courtly love and the heroic qualities of male figures in epics. In mock-heroic vein,

Pym mocks the ludicrousness of the unrequited love which Belinda has for Henry. Pym shows Belinda to be exemplary in terms of her unselfishness towards others, as well as in her unequivocal love for Henry (Pym, 1978:22, 26). There are deflating references to Henry's laziness, eccentricity and selfishness (1978:21, 37, 84). Belinda is ironically portrayed as a better person than Henry, even though this is not the way she, or society, sees their relative worth. In this relationship Pym subverts and mocks the expectations of a society that places men in the roles of heroes and women in subordinate positions.

Pym's tone is an important ingredient in the irony of her texts. It is not simply the portrayal of the characters that is ironic, but also the tone of this depiction. Often central protagonists, like Dulcie, may be unaware of the irony in their comments, but Pym's tone makes the readers aware that they should not take these comments at face value. Pym's tone creates two levels in her texts. First, there is a superficial level, which appears to support patriarchy and the old values of the period before the Second World War. Second, there is another level, which may be equated with the unconscious feelings of the central protagonists towards patriarchal strictures. This second level, which delves into the central protagonists' psyches, draws attention to important issues in womens' lives. Pym creates this level by placing emphasis on how women are treated as second-class citizens in this society. Pym's tone highlights the discourse which prescribes that men are 'haves' in this society, and women are 'have-nots'.

In *Jane and Prudence*, Jane draws attention to these two levels in the text: '[t]his insistence on a man's needs amused Jane. Men needed meat and eggs – well, yes, that might be allowed; but surely not more than women did?' (Pym, 1979:51). The first level in this passage is associated with Jane's amused and tolerant tone towards patriarchal ideas which foster gender discrimination. The second level is used by Pym to reveal the unconscious truth within Jane's psyche that focusing on a man's needs over and above

a woman's extends far beyond the issue of sustenance. Giving men more meat and eggs may initially seem harmless, but it leads to psychological damage to women's sense of self-worth, as they find that they receive less in all aspects of their lives.

Another of Pym's strategies is to mock the patriarchal convention of the strong and brave hero who rescues the weak woman (Millett, 1969:33). Pym shows that Aylwin Forbes's heroic status in *No Fond Return of Love* is a myth. Contrary to this myth, Dulcie assumes the role of rescuer and 'strong man' (Pym, 1992:28). Here Pym negates the notion of the stronger sex, which is a product of centuries of myth-making by patriarchal society (Miles, 1988:81).

Dulcie takes on Pym's mock-heroic perspective towards the end of *No fond Return of Love* in that she is aware of the shortcomings of other people and so undermines the strong man myth (Pym, 1992:222). This implies that as Dulcie grows psychologically, she no longer needs to idealize anyone because her self-esteem improves. This notion of growth accords well with Pearson and Pope's argument in their work *The Female Hero*, which draws on the theories of Carl Jung: 'Carl Jung sees the journey of the hero as dramatizing the human being's inner development toward maturity and psychological wholeness' (1981:3). Personal growth is seen here to lead to psychological independence.

Dulcie violates conventional norms by investigating other characters, such as Aylwin Forbes and his brother. Conventional norms do not allow women to investigate men. Pym presents Dulcie in the role of quester and investigator (Pym, 1992:107, 142, 219). In a sense, Dulcie adopts the role of an heroic figure who explores and conquers her world. Yet, her heroic journey is different from that of the classical male hero, such as those found in *The Odyssey*, who show their heroic power by conquering and killing others (Homer, 1946:25-60). The strategy of investigation which Dulcie employs is largely derived from

Pym's own brand of feminism, and her adoption of the role of female hero herself:

She had always had a passion for 'finding out' about people who interested or attracted her. Tracking people down and looking them up were part of her absorbing interest (that continued all her life) in 'research into the lives of ordinary people'.

(Pym, 1984:10).

In Dulcie's case, I believe that this strategy of investigation is a means of constructing a new identity by actively participating in events, and using her creativity as a means to self-empowerment in unusual situations.

Pym uses a different strategy in relation to Prudence in *Jane and Prudence*. Here, she deconstructs the patriarchal convention of marriage as the final and most respectable goal for women. She subverts the idea that love affairs prepare women to serve the needs of others in the institution of marriage (Millett, 1969:299). Prudence has a long series of love affairs without the commitment of marriage. Pym uses Prudence to demonstrate that love affairs can be a source of freedom and enjoyment for women, rather than of entrapment within the institution of marriage (Pym, 1979:215-216).

There are parallels between Prudence and the goddess Aphrodite (Venus) who fell in love easily with a long succession of men, while always staying in control of the affairs. Venus is depicted as the 'goddess of love and beauty who ruled the hearts of gods and men' (Avery, 1972:57). In a similar vein to Venus, Prudence has great beauty and is able to make men fall in love with her. She is not faithful to any one man, just as Venus is not faithful to her husband Hephaestus (1972:57).

Both figures gain power and status from numerous affairs. Prudence is revitalized rather than unhappy when each of her affairs ends. Venus, in a symbolic way, is revitalized by bathing herself in the sea (Avery, 1972:58). Clearly, Pym is using Prudence's name for ironic purposes. She shows that Prudence is not a prude, as her name suggests, but a temptress. Venus's and Prudence's affairs are mainly sexual, and are motivated by the power accrued by obtaining such beautiful partners. Venus is conscious of her power to give beauty and love to mortals (1972: 57), just as Prudence lives for the power she wields over men. Prudence becomes a type of goddess, who bestows her favours on men. In many ways she is like a goddess: she is exceptionally beautiful and intelligent, and is able to enslave men if she so chooses.

Only one of Pym's main protagonists does not idealize men. Catherine Oliphant in *Less than Angels* does not idealize Tom Mallow, even though she loves him. She loses his love, Pym implies, because she is not willing to be placed in the traditional patriarchal role of a good housewife who uncritically supports her common-law husband. Catherine refuses to ignore Tom's faults (Pym, 1993:108). The breakdown of their relationship is an indictment of patriarchal expectations of women in relationships.

Pym reveals the hypocritical nature of British patriarchal society in her presentation of Ianthe Broome in *An Unsuitable Attachment*. Although this society desires women to marry, the suitors they choose must be of the correct age and status. Ianthe falls in love with and marries the 'less than suitable' John Challow.

John Challow is 'less than suitable' in the eyes of his society (Pym, 1986a: 45, 250) and Ianthe is condemned for her marriage to John (1986a: 195, 223, 233). Pym shows that marriage exists mainly for the perpetuation of status and class, rather than for love. I do not share the view put forward by a number of critics,⁵ that Ianthe is a cold character.

This is the way society perceives her, because she refuses to participate in romance, by idealizing men and regarding them all as potential suitors.

Another important characteristic of mock-heroism which Pym uses in these early novels, is absurd and humorous descriptions of heroic figures. Pym employs this device in relation to Aylwin Forbes in *No Fond Return of Love* (Pym, 1992:14), Arthur Grampian in *Jane and Prudence* (Pym, 1979:37), Archdeacon Hoccleve in *Some Tame Gazelle* (Pym, 1978: 108–109), Stephen Latimer in *Crampton Hodnet* (Pym, 1985:93), John Challow in *An Unsuitable Attachment* (Pym, 1986a:116–117) and Tom Mallow in *Less Than Angels* (Pym, 1993:109–110). Pym's use of this aspect of mock-heroism is subversive of patriarchy because it undermines the romantic success of the 'heroic male' character in each novel. The courtly convention of the hero as successful lover is subverted in these works. All the 'heroic' characters referred to experience difficulties in their relationships with women. Rupert Stonebird's inability to deal sensitively with Penelope Grandison (who is in love with him), in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, is a typical characteristic of the heroic male figure. Rupert is behaving according to the conventions of 'male heroism', but Pym's woman-centred perspective allows her to reveal the flaws in his behaviour, from the point of view of her character (Pym, 1986a:179–183).

Pym's heroines display different, individual responses to idealization. The effect of this is to reveal that patriarchy is not a monolithic force. It adapts itself to each unique situation in order to achieve gender inequality. Thus it is invidious and all-pervasive. Patriarchy tries to force women to conform. Each central protagonist faces patriarchy in a different guise, and responds accordingly. I suggest that Pym also shows the resilience of her central protagonists. They adapt the original intentions of patriarchy in order to fulfil their own needs. Prudence in *Jane and Prudence* may marry, have affairs or continue to idealize Arthur Grampian. She uses these social expectations to her advantage by not making a

definite choice (Pym, 1979:10). Her response to patriarchal strictures is characterized by her ambivalent attitude (1979:174). Jessie in *Crampton Hodnet* appears to conform to patriarchal expectations (Pym, 1985:1–3), but in *Jane and Prudence* she overcomes these inequalities through her assertive behaviour as she tells Fabian: '[w]omen are very powerful—perhaps they are always triumphant in the end' (Pym, 1979:110). Belinda dotes on the Archdeacon in the early parts of *Some Tame Gazelle*, but is glad of her freedom in the later stages of the novel (Pym, 1978:28, 251). For Pym individuality does become a form of subversion. Women's individuality is necessary for them to deal with shifting forms of patriarchal oppression.

Although mock-heroism is an important aspect of Pym's subversive approach to patriarchy, she also uses the power of the female pen. The trope of the female pen involves the way that Pym employs her writing skills, as a female novelist, to reveal the literary skills that her main protagonists possess. This capacity is doubly subversive: it undercuts the notion that a text's author is a father and a male procreator, from the perspective of the heroines, and from Pym's own viewpoint as an author (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:6). It also draws on intertextual relations between texts in order to empower women and to create a community of women.

In the presentation of Dulcie, in *No Fond Return of Love*, Pym traces her own development as a female novelist, from the early days of investigation and observation of other people at Oxford (Pym, 1992:44; Pym, 1984:10). Dulcie uses the skills of the novelist, particularly those of investigation and observation, to undermine and subvert patriarchy. Dulcie sets out to write her own novel within the structure of the novel itself. According to Yaeger, this type of action 'allows the interruption and interrogation of the dominant culture' (1988:31). I agree with Yaeger's assertion. By investigating those who embody the ideas of patriarchy (Pym, 1992:44, 52), Dulcie subverts their positions as exemplary citizens in

this society. This is true of both Aylwin and Neville Forbes (Pym, 1992:38, 139). Pym exposes their shallow and selfish natures and large egos through their interaction with women (1992:107).

Pym shows that, while Aylwin and Neville may hold important positions in the public sphere, in the private sphere their lives are unimpressive. This serves to reinforce and validate the strong position which the central protagonists hold in the domestic sphere, by contrast with these men. This undermines the ideology that the public sphere is more important than the private sphere. Feminist theorists and critics have subverted and reversed the patriarchal idea that the public (male) realm is more important than the private (female) domain in a variety of ways, such as in Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*.⁶

A second way in which the power of the female pen subverts patriarchy is through Pym's use of literary allusions. Belinda in *Some Tame Gazelle*, Jane in *Jane and Prudence* and Catherine in *Less Than Angels* use literary allusions (Pym, 1978:7, 17; 1979:20; 1993:7, 101, 216). Ianthe in *An Unsuitable Attachment* is associated with Victorian literature, as is Prudence in *Jane and Prudence* (Pym, 1986a:26, 32; 1979:45). Pym's literary allusions allow the main protagonists access to an alternative literary space which is not controlled by patriarchy:

Language has, according to Arendt, this capacity to initiate a 'second birth' — to instigate something new—precisely because it is unpredictable, because words usher us into the space of dialogue, of debate, or of silliness — into a space where the unexpected can happen.

(Yaeger, 1988:96)

The use of allusions allows women to be the arbiters of literary meaning, and therefore undercut patriarchal meanings in the text. I argue that this is clear in Belinda's use of the

literary allusion from the poetry of Thomas Haynes Bayley: '[s]ome tame gazelle or some gentle dove or even a poodle dog – something to love, that was the point' (Pym, 1978:251). This line contains an element of paternalism. It seems to suggest that love can only be experienced in relation to some creature that is smaller and weaker than oneself. Yet, since Pym is the arbiter of meaning in relation to the literary allusions, she may take only those meanings from the line which are significant to her as a female author. The paternalistic aspects of the line are therefore diffused in the context of Pym's ironic strategies.

In the case of Belinda, I suggest that Pym is justifying her single status in society and her right to devote her love to whomever she chooses. By using literary allusions, Belinda grows in self-esteem and no longer needs the love of Henry. The growth of her literary creativity is a form of self-empowerment. Keener puts it this way: '[t]he bubble of secret desire in an inhibited woman's heart is the central impulse [of *Some Tame Gazelle*]....' (1985:93). I agree with this argument, and I believe that the bubble of secret desire is transformed into a creative spark, which manifests itself in the poetic language used by Belinda.

Catherine, in *Less Than Angels*, also uses literary allusions in a subversive way in order to undermine patriarchy. She refers to Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude the Obscure* (Pym, 1993:99). I suggest that this implies a comparison between Hardy's protagonist Sue Bridehead and Catherine in terms of the problems they experience in relationships with men and women in a patriarchal society which insists on convention (Hardy, 1985:207). Hardy's description of Sue reveals that Catherine is similar to her in many ways, and might indeed be a later version of her:

...[T]he woman of the feminist movement – the slight, pale 'bachelor' girl – the intellectualized emancipated bundle of nerves that modern conditions were producing, mainly in cities as yet; who does not recognize the necessity for most of her sex to follow marriage as a profession....

(Hardy, 1985:42)

Pym suggests, through the use of this allusion, that she will show her main protagonist, Catherine, subverting patriarchal conventions such as marriage. Catherine lives with Tom Mallow. She refuses to 'follow marriage as a profession'. Catherine also opposes obedience to a patriarchal figure. She dissociates herself from Tom when she discovers his relationship with Deirdre. She behaves differently from Sue, who elects to sacrifice herself in marriage to the patriarchal Phillotson. Catherine's behaviour constitutes a rejection of convention. She remains single but continues to have romantic associations after Tom has left her. She does not allow the hurt which he caused her to destroy her self-confidence. Furthermore, Catherine's writing for women's magazines involves presenting the world from a woman-centred perspective rather than the usual male-centred perspective. Catherine assimilates all her destructive experiences, such as Tom's affair with Deirdre, and transforms them into material for her woman-centred stories. Catherine also focuses on the poetry of Matthew Arnold. This draws attention to the alienation which she and other women often feel, as to life's purpose for them: '[a]nd We are here as on a darkling plain/Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight' (Pym, 1993:101; Kermode and Hollander, 1973:1380).

Catherine uses her writing and wealth of literary allusions as a form of sublimated engagement with life. Catherine's use of literary allusions subverts the original patriarchal purposes which the writers (Hardy and Arnold) intended for their literature. Pym draws attention, for instance, to Arnold's lament about the purposelessness of life in a godless nineteenth – century patriarchal society. This highlights the breakdown of the absolute

power of the father—figure as the head of the Church, the state and the home. Arnold laments the passing of patriarchal tyranny. Catherine's use of this literary allusion provides a woman—centred perspective. Pym focuses the sense of futility, which the allusion engenders, on the plight of women in her own society. Further, Hardy's description of Sue (Hardy, 1985:42) is a tragic portrayal of a woman forced into marriage because of social conventions. Pym subverts this idea, and portrays Catherine as an independent woman who is free from marriage (seen as a bondage), and enjoys life on her own terms.

The second way in which Pym uses literary allusions to subvert patriarchy is by showing how they promote intertextuality between the novels. Pym's novels support the idea that feminist writing should not have access to only one meaning. It should draw on intertextuality in order to strengthen its support base, as part of a super—structure of feminist literature (Moi, 1985:107).

Their common support of literature through allusions connects Catherine (*Less Than Angels*), Belinda (*Some Tame Gazelle*), Barbara Bird (*Jane and Prudence*) and Jane Cleveland (*Jane and Prudence*). Intertextuality, as it is used in all these novels, links Pym with other writers and positions her, Belinda, Jane, Catherine and Barbara in a community of literary people, all of whom use literature as a means of self—expression.

In *Some Tame Gazelle* Pym and Belinda are connected to writers from the medieval period, and to contemporary experts on the subject such as Agatha Hoccleve and her niece (Pym, 1978:41). They are also associated with the works of seventeenth—century love poets, such as Young and Donne (1978:85, 106, 121). Pym uses references to medieval literature to subvert the prevalent notion amongst scholars of the medieval period that women were incapable of being educated (Chaucer, 1986:200—201). Pym depicts two highly—educated

women (Agatha Hoccleve and Olivia Berridge), who are experts in medieval literature. Through her references to the love poets of the seventeenth century, Pym also subverts a convention of the literature of the period: to idealize women as unobtainable and 'perfect angels', about whom men could read. Pym shows a woman (Belinda) in the role of reader and critic of the love poetry. She interprets their poetry in her own way, thus reversing the traditional patriarchal roles, in which only men interpret texts and women are passive observers.

Jane Cleveland in *Jane and Prudence* also belongs to a community of literary women. There are references to her unfinished thesis on the work of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets (Pym, 1979:11). This links her to Belinda Bede and to Pym herself (Pym, 1978:85). Both manifest a common love of these poets. Pym subverts patriarchy's labelling of Jane as merely a curate's wife, by showing her to be capable of formulating her own ideas about literary texts when she writes a thesis on the love poets. Jane's knowledge of English literature allows her to become a member of a literary society (Pym, 1979:115). This connects Jane to her friend the writer, Barbara Bird (1979:116). Barbara Bird also appears in the earlier novel (*Crampton Hodnet*). Jane and Barbara in *Jane and Prudence* exchange literary ideas at the society meetings. The society is really a place for women to establish a literary community: '[w]hy was it, Jane wondered, that there were usually more women than men at these gatherings' (1979:117).

By alluding to the way women outnumber men at the literary gatherings, Pym directs the reader's attention to a pervasive feature of women's lives in Britain after the Second World War. Their education in the humanities prepares them to appreciate poetry and literature. This gives rise to women joining literary societies. Yet, it is still men who deliver the insights into literature and lecture at the societies to which the Pymian heroines belong (Pym, 1992:26–29; 1993:14–19). Men dominate discussion of literature in literary

departments as well as at the gatherings in Pym's novels, and this trend continues today. It is evident in the vast number of male literary critics who author books and articles. Pym subverts this patriarchal arrangement by showing that although men assume prominent positions at these literary gatherings, they are in fact uninterested. They only attend the meetings to lecture and then leave. It is the women who form a community and discuss ideas. They are the backbone of the society, rather than the men. By presenting her heroines in this way, Pym allows them to gain status in the private sphere. This is because the admired poet or lecturer at such a public literary gathering is always a man, whereas the women, with their training in the humanities, assume positions of interested listeners in the private sphere. Pym elevates the status of the private realm by suggesting that private discussion is the place where true evaluation and appreciation of literature takes place, and this is initiated by women (Pym, 1993:26, 52–53; 1978:7, 68,95; 1979:20–21, 130–131).

These early novels depict main protagonists who have writerly qualities (Pym, 1993:28; 1979:117–121; 1985:98–99, 176–177). By contrast, Pym's later novels reveal how the power of the female pen has waned, partly due to Pym's being rejected as a writer by publishers, and partly due to her changing artistic needs. Pym's later novels reveal how women's power as writers has waned. The later heroines struggle to articulate their plight. The heroines in the later novels hardly use literary allusions in relation to themselves. Women writers tend to be more alienated and less creative than their predecessors. These later novels also do not create communities of women: instead, there are isolated women who hardly interact with each other. These points are discussed in more detail in Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation.

The second aspect of my argument here focuses on the notion that Dulcie, Catherine, Ianthe, Belinda, Jane, Prudence and Jessie are comic protagonists. I define comedy in

Pym's novels as the use of light-hearted humour to resolve conflict. As I have mentioned, in these early novels, Pym employs light-hearted and farcical comedy. Jessie and Miss Doggett's relationship in *Crompton Hodnet* is portrayed in a farcical manner, as is Francis and Barbara's affair (Pym, 1985:54-55, 176-177). I define farce in Pym's novels as the extension of humorous situations into the realm of absurdity. Penelope and Rupert's relationship in *An Unsuitable Attachment* is also depicted in a farcical way (Pym, 1986a:122-123, 130-131), as is Belinda and Henry's relationship in *Some Tame Gazelle* (Pym, 1978:7-12). In my opinion, the extensive use of farce in these novels is part of Pym's early experimentation as a novelist, and she later abandoned farce as an unsuccessful experiment. The use of farce allows Pym to express a tolerant attitude towards the patriarchal society of this period. I define Pym's brand of satire as mild in that it acknowledges suffering, yet draws attention to social issues. In Chapter Three of the dissertation I discuss how Pym moves away from comedy and farce and embraces satire in the later novels to elucidate her critical attitude toward the patriarchal society of the 1960s and 1970s in Britain.

In her early novels, Pym surrounds her central protagonists with a fairy-tale world, which is filled with farcical situations (Pym, 1985:20-24, 177-192, 209; 1978:11, 35, 84, 169-223; 1979:7, 24). Pym's use of farce is a response to the awful horror created by the Second World War in 1939. Pym, in a sense, attempts to re-create the harmony and insularity of her childhood during the Edwardian years (Pym, 1984:1). The only way in which she could continue her writing was to forget about the changes taking place in society (1984:95). She wrote in April 1940:

I have done so little writing this year. But writing is not now quite the pleasure it used to be. I am no longer so certain of a glorious future as I used to be - though I still feel that I may ultimately succeed.

(Pym, 1984:103)

Pym was part of a society in which social and cultural breakdowns were engendered by the First and Second World Wars (Sinfield, 1983:13). Women of this period in Britain continued to act out the traditional roles which patriarchy had assigned to them: they were nurturing figures who served the needs of men within the invisible private sphere. They left the limelight of the public sphere to their male counterparts. Women's fear of experimentation with new roles, which might place them in the public sphere, was caused by the insecurities engendered by the Wars. They did not feel ready openly to assume new roles at this time. In the sphere of women's politics, the suffragette movement agreed to subsume their struggle for women's votes to the larger demands of the nation during the First World War and used their organization to help the war effort (*The World Book Encyclopaedia*, 1992:390). The War became an all-consuming occupation in Britain.

Pym reveals how the influence of the Second World War rendered her heroines largely invisible within the public sphere and confined them to the domestic sphere. Since they are comic heroines, they do not take seriously patriarchal inequalities which prevent them from achieving status in the public sphere. For example, Dulcie suggests that there is a humorous side to being an indexer (Pym, 1992:27), despite the frustration she often experiences. Miss Morrow suggests, tongue-in-cheek, that '[m]en seem to need a lot of food at all times' (Pym, 1979:90). Belinda, in a metaphorical sense, views her submissive love for Henry as a warm and comfortable garment. The heroines narrate these inequalities in a farcical manner. Their amusement, and toleration of men's superior status, is a defensive and self-protective device in the midst of crisis. It indicates a lack of security about the future, and a reluctance to challenge a society whose shaky values were beginning to disintegrate anyway (Sinfield, 1983:1-100). The feminist approach which Pym uses in these novels tends to be non-confrontational. The more liberal period of the 1960s would have to be reached before Pym's feminism became more confrontational, as her use of satire indicates. This shift in technique will be discussed in Chapter Three.

Pym uses a rebellious comic voice in relation to her central protagonists in order to parody and mimic the voice of patriarchy (Pym, 1978:89–95, 133, 179; 1979:28, 51; 1985:61, 94, 177). According to Sochen, '[i]n order to carnivalize the voice of authority and power, the rebel comic voice must use that authoritative voice, must parody or mimic it' (1991:20). I agree with Sochen's point that this process of parody is associated with 'carnival' and carnival laughter. The writings of Bakhtin, on Rabelais, amplify this aspect: '[t]he entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity' (Bakhtin, 1968:11). Pym creates a carnival world in which she can undercut patriarchy, yet still remain non-confrontational, because nothing and nobody escapes this carnival laughter (Pym, 1978:89–95, 133, 185; 1979:10–60). Pym's heroines assume a comic tone in relation to the patriarchal inequalities which they face. The underlying criticism is diffused by the humorous way in which they see and describe the situation. This is the case with Jane's perception of the way her husband receives preferential treatment from other women because he is a man (Pym, 1979:50–51). It is also evident in the comic tone which Belinda uses to describe the privileges which the Archdeacon receives because of his status as a man (Pym, 1978:10–11, 26–27, 36–38). At a deeper level of consciousness, within the heroines' psyches, the rebel comic voice asks more critical questions, such as why men are free to do as they wish, and are never condemned for their actions, while women are only second-rate citizens in their own society.

Pym also uses the epiphany in the novels *Some Tame Gazelle*, *Crampton Hodnet*, *No Fond Return of Love*, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, *Less Than Angels* and *Jane and Prudence*. The epiphany is a literary technique which was initiated and first defined in the early twentieth century in the writings of James Joyce. Stephen defines it in Joyce's work *Stephen Hero*:

By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phrase of the mind itself.

(1944:188)

Pym uses the epiphany to deconstruct the notion that the public sphere, or workplace, is more significant than the private sphere. She employs a subversive form of feminism in her comic presentation, by prioritizing the domestic sphere where women tend to be relegated in a patriarchal society (Pym, 1992:32–44, 71–75, 86–89; 1993:25–43, 52–53, 75–77, 84–88; 1985:1–25, 207, 209; 1979:15–23, 46–47, 58–63; 1986a:30–33, 67–70). Poovey, in her book *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, deconstructs the public/private dichotomy. She argues that the rise of Puritan principles in the eighteenth century in Britain, 'restricted women to narrowly defined domestic duties' (1984:7). Furthermore,

Women could emulate their 'capitalist' husbands... This led to the elevated and spiritually significant position of the home, and reinforced women's social importance when separation between the home and the workplace became the middle-class rule rather than the exception.

(Poovey, 1984:8)

Poovey's argument, that economic and social considerations prompted the public/private dichotomy in the eighteenth century, helps to throw light on the perpetuation of this dichotomy in the 1940s and 1950s in Britain. Economic and social reasons underlie women's remaining in the domestic sphere. In the early twentieth century, as in the eighteenth, although women ostensibly have precedence in the private sphere, they have no real status or power in this sphere. Pym subverts this trend, by allowing her heroines status and power in the private sphere. Pym makes women central in her books, and usually confines the epiphany to the domestic sphere (Pym, 1978:51–52; 1979:131; 1986a:196, 248).

As the domestic, 'ordinary' sphere gains in importance, so the public, 'heroic' sphere loses significance. The comic ecstasy which Pym's heroines experience allows them to find delight in the ordinariness of life. This enjoyment does not conform to heroic conventions, since 'heroes' would not experience joy at apparently trivial experiences. In heroic convention, joy is an emotion to be felt when there is a grand cause (preferably a national success), not a feeling catalysed by 'trivial' domestic causes. In contrast, Belinda Bede experiences joy when Miss Prior, the seamstress, forgives her for the caterpillar in her food. Belinda is also overjoyed at the appearance of the ravioli dish she has made (Pym, 1978:51–52, 229). Jane Cleveland experiences joy in the domestic sphere because she may continue her English studies in the private realm: '[c]reative work, that was the thing, if you could do that nothing else mattered' (Pym, 1979:131). Sophia Ainger in *An Unsuitable Attachment* also experiences an epiphany in the domestic sphere: '[t]he lemon leaves had been unwrapped and there were the fragrant raisins at the heart' (Pym, 1986a:196). Ianthe's love for John is represented by the fragrant raisins. The lemon leaves symbolize Sophia's initial doubt about their relationship. Sophia is glad that Ianthe is marrying for love rather than status. The non-heroic and domestic nature of these epiphanies prevents them from being experienced by other people, and excludes them from patriarchal influences.

Pym uses the epiphany as a means of self-empowerment through self-realization for her heroines. Catherine in *Less Than Angels* experiences an epiphany whilst quoting poetry to Tom in suburbia (Pym, 1993:83–84). She realizes that Tom does not understand her mercurial nature, or appreciate her intellectual abilities. The epiphany prepares Catherine for Tom's rejection of her later in the novel. Dulcie's moment of epiphany in *No Fond Return of Love* also empowers her as she confronts Aylwin about his behaviour: '[O]h, why do you always want such unsuitable wives!' (Pym, 1989:223). She perceives that Aylwin Forbes admires this assertive behaviour on her part. This is the beginning of her

relationship with Aylwin. Ianthe's moment of self-realization in *An Unsuitable Attachment* occurs when John Challow quotes Tennyson to her: '[N]ow lies the earth all Danæ to the stars\And all my heart lies open unto thee...' (Pym, 1986a:50). She decides to be free from the confines of patriarchal dictates. She will marry John Challow despite his lower-class status (1986a: 49, 196, 248).

Belinda and her sister Harriet share the domestic sphere where the epiphanies occur. Their comforting and homely relationship is, I think, a form of non-sexual marriage, or a substitute for it (Pym, 1978:7-10). Their relationship indicates Pym's tolerance towards non-sexual, same-sex relationships, which are important for women. Pym achieves two objectives in the presentation of such relationships. She preserves the domain of the domestic sphere exclusively for her women, but they can still experience the joys of marriage on their own terms, through this form of non-sexual marriage. This type of 'marriage' is more fulfilling than the conventional version, because although the aspects of mutual sharing, respect and friendship exist between Harriet and Belinda, the less positive aspects like servitude and drudgery are absent. There is equality and evidence of the kind of relationship which Virginia Woolf implies women should strive for:

You have won rooms of your own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men But this freedom is only a beginning; the room is your own, but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms?

(Woolf, 1942:153)

In a similar manner to her central protagonists' experience of the epiphany, Pym obtained much of her artistic inspiration in the domestic sphere (Pym, 1984:96).

The private sphere is a place of self-definition for women (Pym, 1993:99; Sochen, 1991:90–100). Sochen argues that the emergence of domestic, or housewifely humour can be viewed as a World War Two phenomenon. She further contends that domestic humour provides women with a temporary tool for coping with negative feelings about themselves and their lives (Sochen, 1991: 93–95). I agree with this argument. I suggest that in Pym's case, the origins of domestic comedy lie in her own life. She wrote during the war years (1940–45), and in the war-tinged years that followed, and at both stages of her writing she employed domestic humour. Domestic humour is found in Jane and Nicholas's uneasy marriage in *Jane and Prudence* (Pym, 1979:129), in Prudence's fastidious preservation of her 'pretty little flat' (1979:47), in Harriet's and Belinda's dominion over their domestic domain in *Some Tame Gazelle* (Pym, 1978:5–52) and in Jessie's behaviour in the private sphere in *Crampton Hodnet* (Pym, 1985:1–43). This, I believe, assuaged Pym's negative feelings about the war, and the role that she, as a woman, should or could assume: '[a]fter supper I did some writing which quells my restlessness – that is how I must succeed' (Pym, 1984:95).

Virginia Woolf also refers to epiphanic experiences as a means of self-empowerment for women. She writes of the role of women in war:

How far can she fight for freedom without
firearms? By making arms, or clothes or food.
But there is another way of fighting for freedom
without arms; we can fight with the mind.

(Woolf, 1942:154)

Woolf links the role of women in war to their formulation of ideas through writing. I feel that this leads to the significance of the epiphany in Woolf's work. According to Schulkind, in her introduction to Woolf's autobiographical writings, the epiphany leads to the transcendence of the self, and the individual consciousness becomes an undifferentiated

part of a great whole (Woolf, 1976:18). Schulkind emphasizes the profound understanding and communion which the epiphany brings. The point is that the epiphanies take both Pym's and Woolf's protagonists beyond the restricted selfhood prescribed by the patriarchal world, into a realm where patriarchy has no significance. Going beyond patriarchal definitions of selfhood entails becoming centred on one's own concept of self, rather than on that of others. This may lead to a degree of invisibility to others, but a heightened sense of presence to oneself. There is a sense of celebration in this feeling of being invisible to others because the heroines no longer need to justify their actions to a patriarchal society. There is a great sense of freedom. This is illustrated by Woolf's character, Mrs Ramsay, in *To The Lighthouse*:

All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others ... [A]nd this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures. When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless.

(Woolf, 1955:99)

This type of epiphanic moment which involves a loss of self is also experienced by Pym's heroines, such as Prudence in *Jane and Prudence*. It takes the form of an obliteration of consciousness and a release from patriarchy. Prudence feels that her selfhood has merged with a larger entity, namely nature:

She remembered herself standing by the window, looking out on to an early spring evening with the sky a rather clear blue just before the darkness came

(Pym, 1979:37)

For Belinda, the epiphany takes the form of freedom from worries, such as her anxiety about Henry's relationship with her, and other strictures of everyday life (Pym, 1978:52,229). For Catherine, it is a realization of the great force which is life itself and its sublimity, and the 'nothingness' of everything else by comparison (Pym, 1993:83). Lastly, for Jessie, it is a chance for freedom within the limited life she has among North Oxford 'patriarchal' society (Pym, 1985:117,156).

Pym uses the epiphany as part of her feminist approach, which is non-confrontational and directed more towards the self than towards others in these earlier novels which I am examining here. This is because the epiphany has associations with the 'mystic experience', as the influential French theorist Luce Irigaray describes it (Moi, 1985:136).

Irigaray argues that mystical experience is precisely an experience of the loss of subjecthood (Moi, 1985:136). According to Moi, '... the mystic experience allows femininity to discover itself precisely through the deepest acceptance of patriarchal subjection' (1985:137).

The mystical experience, or epiphany, allows the central protagonists to transcend the limitations of subjecthood, and therefore also all forms of patriarchy. The inward-directed energy of the heroines allows them, within their own psyches, to reach a place where no one else can go. From this vantage point, they perceive the larger universe which goes beyond gender differentiation and inequalities. The only way in which they can reach this state is by accepting their lot in a patriarchal society. It is when Prudence, Belinda, Jessie and Catherine accept the ordinary nature of their lives that they experience epiphanies. They do not have these experiences when they are facing patriarchal inequalities. These heroines do not assert themselves in the public sphere (Pym, 1979:47; 1985:54; 1978:28-29; 1993:7-9). The epiphany cannot be realized within politicized consciousness, where every

action is analyzed and there is no time for enjoying the ordinary things in life. This is borne out by the absence of epiphanies from the later novels, in relation to those heroines who are more politically aware and critical of society, namely Caroline Grimstone, Emma Howick and Leonora Eyre. (These characters are discussed in Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation.)

Pym's later heroines practise visible rebellion towards patriarchy, as I mention in Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation. The earlier heroines practise an inward-directed form of subversion. Dulcie in *No Fond Return of Love* researches Aylwin's and Neville Forbes's lives (Pym, 1992:52, 78–79). Catherine in *Less Than Angels* writes short stories (Pym, 1993:26). There are two possible levels of undermining patriarchy. One is outward-directed and would involve visible rebellion. This is the route that some thinkers in Anglo-American feminism, such as Kate Millett and Betty Friedan, would advocate. The other is inwardly-directed and involves freeing oneself mentally and psychologically from the bonds of patriarchy. This is what some writers in French feminism (such as Luce Irigaray and Hé^leⁿe Cixous) prefer. There are similarities between Pym's early novels and the work of the French feminists, in terms of Pym's heroines' rebellion.

I will now discuss how the close conformity of the heroines to the 'Angel in the House' stereotype is used by Pym in a subversive way to undercut patriarchy. Dulcie in *No Fond Return of Love* is defined by others in terms of 'her goodness and sweetness' (Pym, 1992:93). Belinda Bede in *Some Tame Gazelle* is regarded by the community as a good woman, who never says or does anything unkind (Pym, 1978:23, 28–29, 64, 107–112). Ianthe Broome, in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, because of her faultlessly 'correct' appearance and actions, is seen to be too good for any man in the community (Pym, 1986a:26, 222–226, 247–248). Catherine in *Less Than Angels* is also shown to be a good woman, who aids others less fortunate than herself (Alaric and Digby), and forgives those

who have hurt her (Deirdre and Tom) (Pym, 1993:26–31, 108–109, 122–124, 62–166, 220–223, 233). Even Jessie in *Crampton Hodnet* and Prudence in *Jane and Prudence* are good women, with fewer faults than those around them in patriarchal terms (Pym, 1985:2–3, 27, 29–31; 1979:9, 36–37, 39–40).

Pym draws attention to a division in patriarchal society between the 'Angel in the House' and the rebellious demon–monster, who is excluded from mainstream culture, because she challenges it (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:24). Pym shows the falsity of this division, which is constructed in the interests of patriarchy. Pym frees her heroines from such a division by presenting it, and then destroying it. Pym destroys the division between the 'Angel in the House' and the 'monster' figure by showing that the Angel has faults, and the monster is human.

As Woolf suggests, Pym's heroines must kill the 'Angel in the House' in order to be free from this patriarchal creation, and to be able to express themselves (Woolf, 1942:150). Pym, in *No Fond Return of Love*, allows Dulcie to move away from serving Maurice and being defined as a good but simple person: Maurice 'had loved Dulcie for her simple goodness, as he saw it – that goodness which he had decided he could not endure to live with all his life' (Pym, 1992:119). Dulcie later becomes independent and can help others with less sense like Laurel (her niece), Viola and Aylwin (Pym, 1992:23, 34–35, 42, 58–59, 122, 221–223). Although Dulcie may still be defined as 'good', she has separated herself from the image of the 'Angel in the House' (Pym, 1992:93–95) who lives entirely for others. This is also true of Ianthe, in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, after she decides to marry the 'less than perfect' John Challow who, in the eyes of his society, lacks economic and social status (Pym, 1986:194).

Belinda Bede in *Some Tame Gazelle* is able to modify her presentation as the 'Angel in the House', through interaction with her 'less good' sister Harriet Bede (Pym, 1978: 7–12, 40, 54–55). Belinda's goodness is tinged with satirical comments (1978: 19, 21, 24, 38–39, 60, 67, 69). Catherine in *Less Than Angels* also rejects the 'Angel in the House' image: she throws Tom out when he is unfaithful to her (Pym, 1993:109–110, 122–124). In the same way, Prudence in *Jane and Prudence* sheds no tears over the loss of Fabian Driver and Arthur Grampian as potential lovers; and Jessie in *Crampton Hodnet* rejects a marriage proposal from Stephen Latimer (Pym, 1979: 103, 151–152, 163, 174, 193–199; 1985:92–93). None of Pym's heroines wish to be seen as revered symbols of goodness. They prefer to define themselves as ordinary women. They perceive that being an 'Angel in the House' often involves putting others' interests before one's own and ending up somewhat disparaged. Pursuing one's own best interests may offend others, but generates a healthier outcome.

Pym's subversion is also evident in her treatment of the stereotype of the 'demon–monster' figure. The demon or monster figure is best represented by the character of Bertha Mason Rochester in *Jane Eyre*. She is marginalized within patriarchal society because of her difference from other women (Brontë, 1953:347). Pym provides examples of this stereotype, such as Harriet Bede in *Some Tame Gazelle* who is an older version of the siren or seductress figure, Viola Dace in *No Fond Return of Love* who has mild associations with Lady Macbeth – the temptress, murderess and villain – and Penelope Grandison in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, who is a flamboyant temptress (Pym, 1992:16, 21; 1986a:14, 39, 122; 1978:11–14). Having shown these women to be 'monsters', Pym then uses a mock–heroic technique to deflate the seriousness of this presentation. Both Viola and Penelope are flamboyant eccentrics and Harriet still believes that she is a young woman being courted by her lovers. Pym demonstrates that they are neither worse nor better than

any other characters. They are equalized by their ability to cause laughter, because laughter has a wide applicability (Bakhtin, 1968:30).

I infer from the dialectic which Pym creates that she breaks down the division between her heroines and the other women in the novels. This approach differs from the trend in Victorian fiction, which was to idealize and distinguish the heroine because of her goodness and purity (Hall, 1992:60–75). The humanist idea of an outstanding individual or hero is largely associated with men and is therefore a by-product of patriarchal ideology. Pym subverts patriarchal ideas, which would have this division stand.

Pym's values in these earlier novels include a belief in a code of decent conduct between men and women. The idea of 'decent conduct' in Pym's fiction implies consideration of other people's feelings as well as a sense of self-worth. Pym's heroines attempt to find a balance between both factors. They delve within their psyches to achieve a sense of self-worth, and the energy which wells up from within allows them to forge a link with the psyches of other people. The heroines are able to consider other people's problems as extensions of their own difficulties. Pym's heroines develop their psyches unconsciously through a loss of subjecthood in the experience of epiphany, and consciously, through consideration of other people's feelings.

It is my contention that Pym begins in the early novels to criticize some aspects of this patriarchal society, such as the unfairness and even cruelty in relationships between men and women. In this sense, her feminism is becoming more confrontational because it is dealing and grappling with important issues for women, namely marriage and their status in society.

In conclusion, I have assumed throughout this chapter that Pym is a feminist writer. Her feminist approach in these earlier novels is shaped by the influence of the Second World War. It accounts for the conventional presentation of her heroines: they are authentic portrayals of British women of the 1940s and 1950s. On the surface, the feminism they express is the feminism of the war period. Although this point is debatable, I feel that the heroines' feminism is on the surface an adherence to convention in terms of appearance and behaviour. The type of subversion which the heroines express is largely inward-directed.

In addition, I have shown that Pym's non-confrontational brand of feminism is not necessarily evidence of timidity. Pym's presentation of her central protagonists as subversive contradicts the label of timidity. They are presented as strong women who achieve assertiveness in the domestic sphere through the device of the epiphany. Pym employs the technique of mock-heroism to discredit patriarchal stereotyping of women: she shows that her central protagonists are ordinary individuals, and although they may possess aspects of the 'Angel in the House', or the 'demon-monster' in their characters, they have moved beyond these stereotypes and are uniquely themselves.

Notes

1. Gilbert and Gubar (1979:24).
2. My use of this term is influenced by Kristeva's 'Law of the Father' which operates in the symbolic realm. Kristeva's law enforces a certain code of behaviour. It acts particularly as a force on women's roles. Pym reflects this in her novels.
3. See Belinda Bede's portrayal in *Some Tame Gazelle: Pym* (1978:13, 19, 33). Her life consists of a succession of ordinary events: preparing food, entertaining curates at dinner, sewing and attending garden parties. There is little melodrama and excitement in her life.
4. Le Guin (1993:6-13).
5. See Benet (1986:107); Liddell(1989:96-97);Rubenstein(1990:181).
6. Millett (1969:32-59, 139-250, 293-342).
7. Woolf(1942:150).

CHAPTER TWO
SPINSTERHOOD AND THE 'EXCELLENT WOMAN' :
A GLASS OF BLESSINGS AND EXCELLENT WOMEN

In this chapter I examine the figure of the 'Excellent Woman' in Pym's fiction, particularly in *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings*. The 'Excellent Woman' is a derivative of the figure of the 'Angel in the House'.¹ The origins of the 'Angel in the House' may be traced back to a poem by the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore, entitled *The Angel in the House* (Macbeth, 1987:168–169). Metaphorically, the idealized relationship between the speaker and his 'Angel in the House' may be likened to the androcentric discourse which characterized relationships between the sexes in Victorian society. As a member of the middle class, Patmore promotes a separation between the public and private spheres. He idealizes the 'Angel' as a gilded bird contentedly captured in the cage of masculinist ideology in the domestic sphere. Virginia Woolf provides a feminist re-reading of the 'Angel' figure in the period before the Second World War:

And while I was writing this review, I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, *The Angel in the House*.

(Woolf, 1942:150)

Woolf suggests that women writers struggle to express themselves in literary establishments which are overwhelmingly male. The literary tradition which they write about is also mainly male: women are depicted by male writers in roles such as the 'Angel in the House'. The 'Angel in the House' embeds herself in women's psyches. She is a phantom who haunts successive generations of women. Her elusive nature makes her a difficult foe to conquer. Woolf counsels that this figure should be resisted because it

encourages women to see themselves as the humble slaves of patriarchal society, who are confined to the domestic sphere. This figure casts a spell on women: they become unsure of their ability to act as individuals, and critique patriarchal inequalities. The main quality of the 'Angel in the House' is that she lives for others. She is imprisoned in the domestic sphere, and is held up as an ideal woman, whom other women should emulate.

Woolf contends, by contrast, that the woman writer needs to define and live her own life. In her examination of the 'Angel in the House' Woolf creates a feminist counter-ideology in order to separate herself from the hegemony which patriarchy has established over the literary sphere. She deconstructs the mythical status of the 'Angel' figure in order to achieve distinction as a woman writer.

Pym has adapted the figure of the 'Angel in the House' and altered it for her own comic purposes. The 'Excellent Woman' figure resembles and is based on the figure of the 'Angel in the House', but has taken on a number of new qualities. The end result is that the differences outnumber the similarities. Pym uses this figure in an ironic way, so that her conventional actions cannot be taken at face value. The 'Excellent Woman' is often an unreliable narrator, and is not averse to using satire or irony to undercut patriarchy. Pym defines the 'Excellent Woman' figure as one 'who could correct proofs and make an index', 'a very capable person', and '[someone one can] respect and esteem'. She also says that '[t]hey are for being unmarried ... and by that I mean a positive rather than a negative state' (Pym, 1989:176). The 'Excellent Woman' differs from the 'Angel in the House' because she is a positive role-player in her society. Her 'social spirituality' consists of helping other people. She is also aware that she must concentrate on her own needs without neglecting other people. She possesses a critical awareness of the shortcomings of patriarchy, and does challenge it in a covert but subversive manner. Although she appears to be submissive on the surface, she is an active player in the gender-political arena.

By contrast, the portrayal of the 'Angel in the House' in Victorian literature shows no awareness of patriarchy as a system of oppression. The 'Angel in the House' is a figurehead which upholds patriarchy. This figure provides a frightening view of women at the mercy of patriarchy. The respect and esteem which characterize the 'Excellent Woman' figure arise from the fear which men often feel when confronted with intelligent and capable women. The 'Excellent Woman' is able to articulate her plight and forms of protest against patriarchy in a coherent and informed manner. The status which is associated with the 'Angel in the House' is deeply rooted in patriarchy. It consists of reverence for an icon, or idealized image of women. The 'Excellent Woman' is usually unmarried, unlike the 'Angel in the House'. This indicates her desire to avoid patriarchal oppression, which Pym occasionally associates with marriage. Finally, the 'Excellent Woman' is also portrayed in an ambivalent manner. This figure represents different values in different contexts. Pym uses the 'Excellent Woman' figure to create a heterogeneous discourse in response to the heterogeneity of patriarchal norms.

Victorian sexual repression led to a schism in art and literature: on the one hand, there is the pure 'Angel in the House' who possesses no sexual impulses. On the other hand, there is the 'Fallen Woman' who openly flaunts her sexuality by Victorian standards.² The 'Angel in the House' is all mind and spirit. She is unaware of baser instincts. Appetite and passion are strangers to her. Repression has also influenced the figure of the 'Excellent Woman' in Pym's fiction. The 'Excellent Woman' figure is a product of upper middle-class cultural expectations in Britain, both during and after the Second World War. An element of Victorian prudishness survives, and is inherited by the society of the period. The 'Excellent Woman' represses her sexuality because it does not complement her role in society. It is considered inappropriate in the eyes of society, but, as I shall show, sexuality has not been completely expunged from Pym's novels. It finds indirect expression in the minor characters.

The 'Excellent Woman' and the monster-woman or 'Fallen Woman' are two sides of all women's psyches, and not mutually exclusive positions. In *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings* Pym presents the 'Excellent Woman' as the conscious side of a woman's psyche and the 'Fallen Woman' as the unconscious aspect of her psyche. Jung's archetype of the shadow elucidates my viewpoint. He argues that the archetype of the shadow is an aspect of the collective unconscious, and to become conscious of the shadow 'involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real' (Jung, 1968:8). The archetype of the shadow corresponds to the monster-woman figure in Pym's novels. Like the shadow, the monster-woman desires sexual freedom and autonomy. These are the so-called dark aspects of the self, because they are taboo in the eyes of society: 'the inferiorities constituting the shadow ... have an *emotional* nature, a kind of autonomy' (Jung, 1968:8). Jung goes on to describe the shadow as being the bestial aspect of human nature, which is similar to the Victorians' depiction of the monster-woman: '[o]n this lower level with its uncontrolled or scarcely controlled emotions one behaves more or less like a primitive, who is not only the passive victim of his affects but also singularly incapable of moral judgment' (1968:9).

The 'Excellent Woman' figure, which is the conscious aspect of a woman's psyche in the novels under consideration, projects her so-called 'primitive' emotions onto other women. She views some other women as monsters because they openly express their sexuality. Pym's writing suggests that these women embody aspects of the 'Excellent Woman' which the central protagonists do not see as part of themselves. For Jung, this type of projection is associated with the shadow's resistance to moral control: '[t]hese resistances are usually bound up with *projections*, which are not recognized as such ... the cause of the emotion appears to lie ... in the *other person*' (1968:9). The heroines' inner conflicts between drives towards being 'Excellent Women' or 'Fallen Women' articulate wider conflicts in society. The heroines are ambivalent figures because at times they are amicable 'Excellent Women',

while at others they view themselves as marginalized women who defy patriarchy in their different ways.

The definitions of the 'Excellent Woman' in *Excellent Women* indicate the sterling qualities which this figure may possess (Pym, 1989:176). Formal register is used to describe the 'Excellent Woman's' capacity for accuracy and hard work, which inspires respect in other people. However, the tone of these definitions may also indicate an adherence to staid middle-class uprightness (which Pym depicts as typical of women of the 1950s in Britain in her novels) at the expense of individuality. The 'Excellent Woman' is open to criticism on the grounds of her conservativeness, but she can also be seen more generously as a product of Pym's cultural norms. Pym uses the conservative nature of her central protagonists as a mixed blessing. It is a source of strength to her 'Excellent Women', but is viewed as a weakness of the patriarchal society she presents.

Paradoxically, a conservative nature is also one of the features of the 'Angel in the House'. It can also be found in the portrayal of the heroines in Dickens's novels.³ Dickens's heroines, however, do not resist the inequalities of patriarchy. The 'Angel in the House' stereotype, as she appears in the work of Dickens, shows women to be powerful in the home, but dependent on male guidance in the public realm. The 'Excellent Woman', in her most evolved state, in the portrayal of Mildred Lathbury in *Excellent Women* (Pym, 1989:7-8,13,20), reveals the fallacy of this belief. All women and in particular 'Excellent Women' are capable of running their own lives and do not need men to help them. This quality is taken further in relation to Leonora Eyre in *The Sweet Dove Died*, as explored in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

The assertion that all women have the ability to run their own lives does not seem, however, to apply to Wilmet Forsyth in *A Glass of Blessings*. Pym criticizes the figure of

the 'Angel in the House' by showing that Wilmet, who superficially conforms to this role, is not happy without an occupation in society (Pym, 1991:11). Wilmet actually reaches the goal of becoming an 'Excellent Woman' during the course of *A Glass of Blessings*. She becomes useful and capable as the novel progresses, and is less critical of other people such as Piers, Keith and Mary than she was previously (Pym, 1991:145, 146, 164–166).

The 'Excellent Woman', as epitomized by Mildred Lathbury and Wilmet Forsyth, is both different from the 'Angel in the House', as seen above, and similar to this Victorian creation. This does not necessarily have negative implications. Dickens's heroines in *Dombey and Son* and *Little Dorrit*, who are both examples of the 'Angel in the House'⁴ possess qualities of an all-forgiving and nurturing mother-figure. Like Dickens's heroines, Wilmet and Mildred possess mothering characteristics. Mildred in *Excellent Women* is a mother-figure to Everard Bone, Julian Malory and Rocky Napier (Pym, 1989:133, 143, 185, 190–194). Wilmet in *A Glass of Blessings* mothers Piers Longridge, Harry Talbot and Mary Beamish (Pym, 1991:47, 79–84, 125). They do not always engage in mothering willingly; this reluctance undercuts any impulse to idealize them. Mildred is forced to provide tea and console Julian and Rocky when they seek her help. She refuses to cook a roast for Everard, but later agrees to correct his proofs. Wilmet mothers Harry because he seems to expect it of her. Harry and Wilmet's association dates back to the Second World War, when they were stationed in Italy, and Wilmet is too polite to destroy the fond memories, as well as being a little flattered (Pym, 1991:36–37).

The maternal aspect of the 'Angel in the House' and her successor, the 'Excellent Woman', may be viewed as a positive aspect of women, since, as Pearson and Pope suggest in their

work, *The Female Hero*: "[t]he role of mother-goddess offers a woman power, admiration and in many cases even worship' (1981:40). Their view is that the mother-goddess is one of the roles which women assume on their journey towards psychological wholeness. As feminists, Pearson and Pope seem to follow the French school of feminism in that they favour a covert form of rebellion towards patriarchy, in the form of a psychological onslaught against patriarchy.

Pym's heroines are rewarded for nurturing with power and status in their patriarchal societies. Wilmet and Mildred are much sought after by other people for advice and consolation. Their power attracts people to them. In Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, in a similar manner, a mother-figure such as Mrs Ramsay gleans a reward from nurturing behaviour, in the form of power (Woolf, 1955:90-99). Symbolically, Mrs Ramsay, Wilmet and Mildred function as lighthouses, who use their power and status to provide light and direction to others and manipulate other people's lives in certain directions. The other ship-wrecked characters in *A Glass of Blessings*, *Excellent Women* and *To the Lighthouse* follow these mother-figures because they lack power and status in their patriarchal societies.

While showing her heroines to be 'Excellent Women', Pym does not represent this role as an ideal and perfect state, which must be attained at all costs. Pym pointedly reveals the human and flawed nature of her heroines. Mildred in *Excellent Women* at times attempts to avoid the responsibility of the 'Excellent Woman' role (Pym, 1989:200-204). Wilmet initially has a self-interested approach to life. She ignores the plight of others, such as Mary Beamish, Piers's lover Keith and Father Bode. This attitude militates against the role of 'Excellent Woman', which involves aiding others (Pym, 1991:7, 21, 84, 192-199). Pym wishes to show that her heroines are not flawless 'Angels in the House': this is in keeping with her refusal in the earlier novels to idealize her heroines.

I would suggest that Pym reveals the complexity of her central protagonists, by showing that their creativity and uniqueness come from the ways in which they do not fit into the set roles created for women by society. They are not perfect 'Excellent Women' in terms of society's criteria. Individuality is an aspect of 'Excellent Womanhood', and it is revealed in the way the characters defy others' attempts to put them into roles. For example, Mildred refuses to comply with social expectations in that she is not always tolerant of other women. This is evident in the way she describes Esther Clovis to Everard Bone: '[a]nyway, Miss Clovis must be quite a lot older than you are, and then she looks so odd. She has hair like a dog' (Pym, 1989:176). Mildred does not conform to the role of 'rejected one' when Julian Malory informs her of his engagement to Allegra. She makes her point briefly: 'I was never in love with you, if that's what you mean' (1989:125). Similarly, Wilmet does not admire Mary Beamish, unlike all the other people in her community (Pym, 1991:19). Initially, she is not a faithful wife: she flirts with Piers and Harry, and wishes to have an affair with Piers (1991:39, 70). Wilmet also refuses to comply with society's expectation that she avoid the company of homosexuals. Instead, she overcomes her doubts and befriends Keith (1991:192–193).

The 'Excellent Woman' is also Pym's means of revealing her main protagonists' sexuality. McDonald argues that Pym's reluctance to acknowledge her own sexuality hampers her artistic development (1991:17). She suggests that Pym's inability to come to terms with her own sexuality translates itself in her novels in a negative way: her heroines fail to express their own sexuality, or come to terms with it. I disagree with this argument. Although the main protagonists are not sexually active, they interact with characters who are. In the process their attitudes towards sexuality are shaped and they experience sexuality vicariously. To an extent, the sexually active characters in the novels represent projections of the sexuality the main protagonists are too repressed to explore. The archetypal 'Excellent Women', such as Mildred Lathbury and Mary Beamish, concentrate

on other aspects of their lives. Their power and status originate from their mothering qualities, and not from their sexual prowess. Pym suggests that in most sexual relationships men, rather than women, gain status and dominate their partners: in *A Glass of Blessings* Rodney dominates Wilmet by suggesting that she remain at home, while he engages in extra-marital affairs. He takes Wilmet for granted, expecting her to comfort him when necessary (Pym, 1991:16). Harry also regards Rowena as a household fixture: when he grows bored with her, he attempts to start an affair with Wilmet (1991:37-39). At the end of *Excellent Women*, Everard regards Mildred as his property, and feels entitled to dominate her life (Pym, 1989:237).

Pym's main protagonists can be seen as staid. Their hidden sexuality can partly be explained by the attitudes and values still prevalent in a conservative British society after the Second World War, since, according to Millett, sex is a microcosm of the attitudes and values of culture (1969:32). An explanation for the conservatism of Pym's women protagonists is found in the author's private diaries. The Church was a major factor in Pym's upper middle-class upbringing. Pym's descriptions of her years at Oxford also reveal her conservative nature. As an inexperienced student she was overwhelmed by the abundance of social activities, and the attentions of 'men' (Pym, 1984:3-25). Pym never openly flaunted her sexuality, and she never became embroiled in politics. She remained a conservative person all her life (1984:95-97, 277). Her meeting with the poet Philip Larkin, in 1975, was characterized by the shyness which can develop between people from similar conservative backgrounds (1984:282). Pym's main protagonists, like Pym herself, are 'Excellent Women' who belong to the conservative British middle-class (1984:1-2). Mildred in *Excellent Women* comes from a middle-class background. Her father is a vicar. She spends most of her time helping with parish activities (Pym, 1989:7-8). Wilmet's situation in *A Glass of Blessings* is more complex. Although she is surrounded by middle-

class activities through her Church, and she does eventually become interested in these activities, initially she is pulled towards the values of the upper classes. She is wealthy. Her husband has a good job in the civil service, and Wilmet desires the 'good life' (Pym, 1991:5–18). She embodies the aspirations of many middle-class citizens towards a more affluent lifestyle. She retains, however, the conservative values of the middle classes. Her sexual conservativeness is revealed by her actions. She is shocked by Piers and Keith's homosexual relationship, by Harry's suggestion that she have an affair with him and by Rodney's affair with Prudence (1991:41, 47, 132–133, 136–137, 188–197, 249–250).

Another conservative feature which the 'Excellent Woman' embodies is the middle-class work ethic. Poovey notes that the spread of Evangelism occurred after 1740 in Britain. The puritanical values previously confined to the domestic sphere spread to society itself, and provided women with a practical opportunity for exercising their influence outside their homes – in helping the poor and in other charity work (1984: 8–9). This attribute is seen in the fact that both Mildred and Wilmet are involved in charity work. The 'Excellent Woman's' middle-class status also gives her greater access to the needs of other people than most women from the lower or upper classes. This is due to the fact that poor women tend not to have enough time or status to be free to consider the needs of people outside their immediate families. The impoverished gentlewoman, Miss Prideaux in *A Glass of Blessings*, is an example of an 'Excellent Woman' who is reduced by circumstances to relying on charity (Pym, 1991:77). Women such as Miss Prideaux are unable to help themselves or other people. They depend on the kindness of 'Excellent Women' (Pym, 1989:13). Rich women often find it hard to imagine the sufferings of other people, since they have so much economic status themselves: old Mrs Beamish in *A Glass of Blessings* is an example of this form of self-centredness (Pym, 1991:76–77). Initially Wilmet is also guilty of this type of behaviour. She fails to imagine the circumstances in which other people who are not 'colleagues' live, such as Piers's friend Keith (1991: 74–75).

The 'Excellent Woman' figure need not necessarily be middle-class. I have argued that Wilmet lies between the middle and the upper classes. Nevertheless, Pym shows that it is harder to become an 'Excellent Woman' if one does not belong to the middle classes. Mildred assumes the role of 'Excellent Woman' without difficulty, partly because she has a middle-class background. Wilmet does struggle to become an 'Excellent Woman', because she initially adheres to pretentious upper-class values. Pym suggests that the 'Excellent Woman' should be content with her middle-class existence. Pym seems to support 'wholesome' middle-class values for Wilmet at the end of *A Glass of Blessings*. These values are participation in the church community, charity work and friendship with other women. Pym also highlights the importance of marriage for Wilmet: she demonstrates that Wilmet's sexuality should be channelled in the 'right' direction in a mutually giving relationship, which is sanctioned by society, namely marriage.

In accordance with these middle-class values, the patriarchal culture, to which Pym belonged, seemed to consider it tasteful to hide women's sexuality from the eyes of the world.⁵ Pym had a number of sexual relationships, most notably with Rupert Gleadow and Henry Harvey (Pym, 1984:17,36,38). She refers to these relationships in her diary in an oblique and 'coy' fashion. Pym's reference to her first sexual encounter is partly torn out of her diary (1984:17). Similarly, Pym's main protagonists find it difficult to discuss their sexuality openly.

Wilmet and Mildred remain 'sexless' if one perceives their positions only as 'Excellent Women'. However, I argue that the 'Excellent Woman' cannot be invoked without reference to the opposite of the 'Angel in the House' – the monster or siren as she is defined by Victorian patriarchal society (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:24). Gilbert and Gubar, writing

within the Anglo-American school of feminism, critique the stereotypes of the 'Angel in the House' and the 'demon-monster'. They suggest that women need to empower themselves by deconstructing these negative images of themselves which are put forward by patriarchy. Women's attitude towards patriarchy in the period after the Second World War should be openly rebellious and critical of its shortcomings (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979:10-124). These critics' 'rebellious' brand of feminism is influenced by their context, which is American society after the Second World War. In the same way, Pym's brand of feminism arises from her context.

I maintain that Pym deconstructs the monster figure in the period after the Second World War in accordance with her conservative middle-class values and British upbringing. The monster figure takes many forms in Pym's fiction. For Wilkinson Whitney, she is a 'formidable, terrifying' type of woman, exemplified by Allegra Gray and Esther Clovis in *Excellent Women*, who seek husbands or assert their eccentricity (1989:71-84). Piers Longridge in *A Glass of Blessings* defines the monster as the intellectual type of woman: '[t]he combination of beauty with brains is to me unnatural and therefore rather repellent' (Pym, 1991:134). In my view, Pym presents Piers as an ambivalent figure, not as someone she wholeheartedly agrees with. I do not think that we can rely on his opinion of intellectual women. Pym seems to suggest that patriarchy is threatened by intellectual women and seeks to undermine their status by defining them as monsters: Prudence Bates, for example, possesses both beauty and brains. Rodney describes her to Wilmet as 'rather cool and distant' because he is threatened by her attributes (1991:250). She is a more 'formidable' version of Wilmet. Rossen mentions another variation of the monster figure, namely 'the hard woman', such as Helena Napier in *Excellent Women* (1986:19). These twentieth-century versions of the monster figure reveal their sexuality through their positive, yet aggressive, self-assertion. Their sexuality is channelled into most aspects of their lives: for example, Allegra Gray uses her self-assertion to manipulate Julian,

Winifred, and to some extent Mildred. Allegra is constantly aware of her sexuality and how it may aid her progress in life (Pym, 1989:78–79). Helena is also an assertive woman, whose sexuality is evident in her interaction with Mildred, Rocky and Everard (1989: 8–9, 90–92, 219–221).

The monster figure, as represented by a number of characters in *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings*, often enacts the hidden, passionate part of the main protagonists' psyche, which she may wish to express but cannot because of the influence of the patriarchal culture. For instance, Wilmet nearly becomes a 'Fallen Woman' in *A Glass of Blessings*, although she later develops into the 'Excellent Woman' of the novel. She initially expresses her sexuality through her flirtation with Harry Talbot, her attempted affair with Piers Longridge and her obvious frustration at the passionless life she shares with her husband Rodney (Pym, 1991:9, 13, 39, 47, 163). Wilmet, however, does not actually 'fall'. She is rescued by Piers's lack of romantic interest in her, her friendship with Mary Beamish and her growing faith in God.

Pym demonstrates the passionate side of Wilmet's womanhood by showing that she has an ability to express her inner feelings. Sexuality does not exclude her from 'Excellent Womanhood'. Wilmet's sexuality is part of her status as an 'Excellent Woman', when channelled in a wholesome and 'decent' direction (in her relationship with her husband). Although Pym is not explicit about her heroines' sexuality, she does have a tolerant view of their sexual impulses. Pym's apparent tolerance of her heroines' indirect sexuality may be a reflection of her own feelings about and expression of sexuality. To some extent Pym does deny her sexuality, but not entirely (Pym, 1984:17, 36, 62, 101, 140). There is a complex relationship between expression and repression in the portrayal of her heroines' sexuality, as in her own life. I should like to postulate the possibility that Pym achieves a sometimes uneasy balance between the two.

Pym depicts Wilmet's experimentation with the role of 'fallen woman' as parallel to her quest to become an 'Excellent Woman'. There is a struggle within Wilmet's psyche between the 'Excellent Woman' and the 'Fallen Woman', or monster. In the end the 'Excellent Woman' is victorious because Wilmet realizes that she can find happiness and sexual fulfilment in her marriage. Wilmet needs to overcome negative impulses in her own psyche, such as sexual desire for men other than her husband. This is an interesting feature, both because it supports the middle-class institution of marriage, and because it allows for psychological and moral growth on her part.

Mildred Lathbury in *Excellent Women* provides a contrast to Wilmet Forsyth. Ackley argues that Mildred is the archetypal 'Excellent Woman' – the spinster with low self-esteem and competency in handling crises (1989:39). I agree that certainly at the beginning of *Excellent Women*, Mildred is the supreme 'Excellent Woman': 'I know myself to be capable of dealing with most of the stock situations or even the great moments of life' (Pym, 1989:8). In these attributes she is similar to Cassandra Marsh-Gibbon in Pym's compilation of short stories, *Civil to Strangers* (Pym, 1990:15).

Mildred does not experiment with the role of 'Fallen Woman', unlike Wilmet. Mildred's psyche, that is, her hidden emotions and passions, emerge in the interchange between herself as 'Excellent Woman' and the 'Fallen Women' in *Excellent Women* (Helena Napier and Allegra Gray). Helena and Allegra express passions which Mildred would like to express openly, but cannot. Helena Napier's passion for Everard Bone is a way for Mildred to express her own feelings for Rocky Napier and Everard Bone. Mildred observes Helena as she expresses her feelings for these two men. Mildred wishes to be, like Helena, an attractive extrovert. I do not believe that Pym wishes that Mildred were more open and expressive. It is part of Mildred's low self-esteem that makes her wish she were different. Pym's tone is never critical of Mildred's behaviour (Mildred chastizes herself often

enough); in fact it is tolerant. Mildred is an ironic and often comic narrator who undermines the pretentious natures of Helena, Rocky and Allegra (Pym, 1989:10–11, 36–37, 47, 55, 219–222). Pym is a benevolent and invisible figure at these points in the novel. She overlooks, or perhaps even condones, Mildred's criticisms of Helena, Rocky and Allegra. Pym assumes a more active stance in the later stages of *Excellent Women*. She begins to criticize the behaviour of more open and expressive women such as Allegra Gray and Helena Napier. Mildred receives the carrot at the end of the novel (possible marriage to Everard Bone), whereas Allegra and Helena each receive a stick: Julian Malory breaks off his engagement to Allegra, and Everard spurns Helena's advances.

Allegra Gray seems to be an extension of Mildred's passionate but hidden nature. She is a temptress who lures Julian Malory towards a loveless marriage. Mildred buys 'Hawaiian Fire' lipstick after her confrontation with Allegra (Pym, 1989:121–123). This reveals the rebellious aspect of her nature: Mildred is a pale shadow of the 'Fallen Woman' figure at this point. Her behaviour seems to suggest the inward direction of her sexuality away from the object of desire (Julian), towards the 'Excellent Woman' role which she adopts in relation to Everard Bone. The energy of Mildred's sexuality has been comically diverted into preparing food for Everard, and making indexes.

Pym breaks down the ideal image which surrounds Mildred to reveal that the ideal nature of the 'Excellent Woman' is a patriarchal myth. I agree with Benet when she suggests that Mildred's real story is about her ruination as a pure model of 'Excellent Womanhood' (1986:43). Pym's 'Excellent Women' are not perfect. I aver that a few 'flaws' (from the point of view of conservative middle-class society) make them more likeable. Mildred is, at times, an unreliable narrator, who hides her feelings for Everard Bone (Pym 1989:77, 91–94). Pym's use of an unreliable narrator advances her comic impulse: Everard is unsure of Mildred's feelings towards him, and must express himself in an open way (which he is

not used to, being an anthropologist). Mildred is also made more human by the dislike which she feels towards Allegra, Helena and Dora (1989:17, 78–80, 107–108). Pym wishes the reader to identify with Mildred, and to some extent she achieves this because the other women do not possess likeable qualities. The degree of identification would depend on whether the reader comes from a conservative, middle-class background, or identifies with the values of that class as Mildred does.

Another norm in conservative Britain which Pym challenges is the taboo on homosexuality. In this time frame (between the 1930s and the 1950s) homosexuality was often associated with moral unreliability (Wilson, 1980:101). Pym's perception of homosexuality is positive. In this sense she sides with most of the writers of the 1930s who were homosexual, although she does not seem to have been acquainted with these writers. During the 1930s Auden, Isherwood and Spender became known as the 'Auden group'. Spender declared that '[a] new generation had arisen which proclaimed that bourgeois civilization was at an end, and which assumed the certainty of revolution ...' (Johnstone, 1982:106). They viewed their homosexuality in a positive light, and this attitude informs much of their written work (1982:98–115).

Pym challenges the taboo on homosexuality in *A Glass of Blessings* by portraying a warm and loving relationship between two homosexuals, Piers and Keith. Their happiness provides an ironic contrast to the initially problematic heterosexual relationship between Wilmet and Rodney Forsyth. Pym humbles Wilmet, by allowing her to realize that Piers and Keith have a long-standing homosexual relationship, which she has overlooked because of concentrating on her own feelings. Wilmet learns to be more tolerant after Piers draws attention to her intolerance (Pym, 1991:199–226):

I didn't really mean to imply that you're to blame for what you are. Some people are less capable of loving their fellow human beings than others.

(1991:199).

Contrary to Piers's assessment of Wilmet, Pym suggests that Wilmet has some faults, but she is not a monster of inhumanity, as Piers avers. It is Wilmet's cultural background which has left her unprepared for the reality of homosexual relationships and must take the blame for her homophobia.

As I have mentioned, Pym examines the complex interrelationship between expression and repression of sexuality in her heroines' psyches. John Halperin makes a perceptive comment in *The Life and Work of Barbara Pym*, that: '[t]here is a battle going on all right in Pym's novels, but the most interesting thing about it is that no one is winning' (Salwak, 1987:89). The idea of a conflict between the 'Excellent Woman' and the 'Fallen Woman' seems particularly interesting if these figures are considered as forces within a single person's psyche. This would explain why none of the central protagonists is a perfect model of 'Excellent Womanhood'. It is a necessary part of Wilmet's and Mildred's growth that they learn to control the 'Fallen Woman' aspect of their psyches. For Emma (*A Few Green Leaves*), Caroline (*An Academic Question*) and Leonora (*The Sweet Dove Died*), the 'Fallen Woman' aspect is dominant.

Pym uses the interplay between these two forces in one collective feminine psyche to show that the nature of a woman is not a definable essence. It changes through the phases of her life and in accordance with her social context. At times both Wilmet (*A Glass of Blessings*) and Mildred (*Excellent Women*) are near to being 'Fallen Women', but at other times they are closer to being 'Excellent Women'. This conflict between the two figures within the individual psyche reinforces the human and flawed nature of Pym's heroines.

Their lives mirror the constant battle between these forces in their psyches. Each heroine must find a balance which suits her individuality. In this way the 'Excellent Woman' figure contrasts with the static ideal of the 'Angel in the House'.

The conflict between the 'Excellent Woman' and the 'Fallen Woman' within the feminine psyche, is also extended to the interaction between separate feminine psyches. Early on in *A Glass of Blessings*, while Wilmet is associated with the 'Fallen Woman' figure, she experiences an unreasonable dislike of Mary Beamish, who is closer to the 'Excellent Woman' figure. Towards the end of the novel, Mary and Wilmet approach one another as they grow beyond their roles as 'Excellent Woman' and 'Fallen Woman' (Pym, 1991:19). In *Excellent Women*, Mildred and Helena approach one another in a similar way (Pym, 1989:219–222). These rapprochements testify both to the integration of psychological forces and to the relativity of the figures of 'Excellent Woman' and 'Fallen Woman'.

The idea of a conflict between these two figures within a single psyche, and between separate psyches, is explained in a different way by Millett. Millett tries to create a theory of patriarchy in an attempt to prove that sex is a status category with political implications (1969:32). She avers that patriarchy is an efficient political system and that one of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another (1969:51–52, 250). Although Millett at times oversimplifies patriarchy's role as a monolithic force, on the whole her arguments are pertinent to Pym's novels. Her analysis of class as a weapon which patriarchy uses to separate women applies to the relationship between Belinda Bede and Agatha Hoccleve in *Some Tame Gazelle*, and to the relationship between Jessie Morrow and Prudence Bates in *Jane and Prudence*. In both cases, the central protagonists, Belinda and Jessie, are on a slightly lower level in terms of their class. Although all four characters belong to the middle class, Prudence and Agatha are wealthier and have more status. This creates conflict, because Agatha thinks that she is better than

Belinda and treats her with contempt. Jessie resents Prudence and plots against her. In a similar manner, Wilmet initially regards Mary Beamish as an 'inferior' who is of a slightly lower class (Pym, 1991:76–81). Mildred criticizes Esther Clovis because she does not possess a 'solid' upper middle-class appearance, and seems to fit more easily into the ranks of the lower classes (Pym, 1989:176). Mildred also regards Allegra Gray as an impostor who has inveigled herself into the ranks of the upper middle-class (1989:77). There is conflict between Pym's middle-class women characters, which supports Millett's argument that class is used by patriarchy to separate women. Although Millett's argument does have merit, the idea of a conflict between the 'Excellent Woman' and the 'Fallen Woman' within the collective feminine psyche is a more valid way of explaining the progression of Wilmet and Mildred in *A Glass of Blessings* and *Excellent Women*, since these two novels deal more explicitly with the issue of 'Excellent Womanhood' and the 'Fallen Woman', than *Some Tame Gazelle* and *Jane and Prudence* do.

I also believe that the 'Excellent Woman' figure in *A Glass of Blessings* and *Excellent Women* is partly a modern cultural phenomenon which developed in response to the Second World War. The presentation of Pym's heroines is always associated with their context. It is no accident that Mildred defines herself as an 'Excellent Woman' in the context of a discussion with Helena Napier about the Second World War. Helena informs Mildred that her husband Rocky serves as an officer in Italy (Pym, 1989:20–21). In a metaphorical sense, Rocky embodies the context of the Second World War. When he arrives in London he brings this context with him, and this has an impact on Mildred's and Helena's lives. Rocky still sees himself as a dashing and heroic officer in Italy (1989: 128–129). He expects Helena, who is a thoroughly 'modern woman', to wait on him in the same way other women did in Italy. Helena has overthrown certain outdated patriarchal expectations about women's roles and is modern in the sense of being independent and refusing to

conform to these roles. As a result, Helena plans to leave him (1989:142–143). Rocky's flirtatious manner has a more positive impact on Mildred: she grows in confidence and begins to see herself as being more than an 'Excellent Woman' (1989:30–31). The war also affects Wilmet's life. Her flirtations with Piers and Harry, and her reconciliation with Rodney all occur in the context of her stay in Italy during the Second World War (Pym, 1991: 36–37, 175, 201).

Wilson argues that: '[t]he housewife was the heroic figure of the Second World War' (1980:16). The term 'housewife' may be extended to include the unmarried 'Excellent Woman' who worked in the domestic sphere. Much of Mildred's time is spent preparing tea and washing dishes, often for other people (Pym, 1989:141–147). Wilmet is a more splendid example of a housewife, who fusses over her exquisite clothes (Pym, 1991:33, 41). Mildred does not see herself as a heroic figure: instead she is critical of her shortcomings (Pym, 1989:34). Wilmet likes to think that she is rather heroic: 'I thought we [Wilmet and Rowena] must have made quite a pleasing picture – two tall tweedy young Englishwomen embracing on a Surrey roadside' (Pym, 1991:33). Later in the novel, though, Piers informs her correctly that her motives are far from heroic (1991: 198–199). In some respects Pym modelled her main protagonists on her own activities during the war years:

Like all women in civilian life she was busy with housework – making over her old clothes now that there was clothes rationing, and constantly pre-occupied with food.

(Pym, 1984:96).

Pym may have regarded the housewife as playing an heroic role in the war years (Pym, 1984:96), but she modifies this stance in her fiction. Pym subverts Wilmet's belief in herself as 'heroic' in *A Glass of Blessings*, and therefore undermines the whole premise that housework can be heroic.

There is a strong connection between 'Excellent Womanhood' and community involvement in Pym's novels. Mildred in *Excellent Women* finds it relatively easy to make the transition from life in a country rectory, with its unchanged values, to life in London. She adapts because of her 'Excellent Womanhood'. This role allows her access to parish activities, and helps her fulfil a useful role in the community (1989:13). Wilmet, in *A Glass of Blessings*, also attains 'Excellent Womanhood' as she becomes more involved in the community. She forges strong links with the Anglican Church and also with the community of so-called 'tea drinkers', who are affiliated to the Church. Wilmet's comment: 'I myself seemed to belong to two very clearly defined circles – the Martini drinkers and the tea drinkers' (Pym, 1991:52), whilst it may be true of the earlier part of the novel, is untrue of the novel as a whole. Wilmet is without doubt a 'tea drinker' at the end of *A Glass of Blessings*. Like Mary Beamish, who is also an 'Excellent Woman', Wilmet becomes very involved in the church community at the end of the novel (1991:205). Pym suggests that the martini drinkers' values are not as high as those of the tea drinkers.

Closely associated with the issue of 'Excellent Womanhood' in Pym's novels is that of spinsterhood. Pym reveals the positive aspects of spinsterhood in *A Glass of Blessings* and *Excellent Women*. For example, she emphasizes Mildred's freedom to do as she wishes in the domestic sphere, and with regard to the desires of other men and women: 'I thought, nor for the first time, how pleasant it was to be living alone' (Pym, 1989:20). By contrast, Wilmet's entrapment in her marriage and the domestic sphere is described in the early parts of *A Glass of Blessings*. The tone Wilmet uses to describe her abode is disinterested: '[l]ater, when I had finished my wandering round the shops and was approaching home, it occurred to me how very bleak and respectable the house looked' (Pym, 1991:10). The adjectives 'bleak' and 'respectable', which are meant to describe Wilmet's home, also apply to the state of her marriage.

The positive impulse which characterizes Pym's presentation of spinsters partly stems from her own life, in the early and middle years. Pym consciously assumes the role of spinster in a letter to her friends Robert Liddell and Henry and Elsie Harvey in Helsingfors in early 1938. Here she suggests that this role has partly replaced her feelings for Henry, and that she is quite happy in her life of writing and helping others:

And Miss Pym is looking out of the window — and you will be asking now who is this Miss Pym, and I will tell you that she is a spinster lady who was thought to have been disappointed in love And you will be coming back to England, and you will be meeting this so dull spinster which is like the old brown horse walking with a slow majestic dignity,... But this spinster, this Barbara Mary Crampton Pym, she will be smiling to herself — ha — ha she will be saying inside. But I have that within which passeth show

(Pym, 1984:67–69).

The tone in which Pym writes this self-definition is light-hearted, and she seems to rejoice in the role of spinster which she assumes. This self-description implies that the spinster, as found in her novels, is not dull or one-dimensional. She has overcome the negative emotions of lack of self-esteem and anger which may have resulted from the role of spinster. In the same way, Mildred makes many witty and self-reflexive comments in *Excellent Women*. She describes Everard Bone's astonishment at Helena's declaration of love in an unconventional way: 'it must have been like having something like a large white rabbit thrust into your arms and not knowing what to do with it' (Pym, 1989:135). This type of comment reveals that Mildred is not a 'dull spinster'. She is often more perceptive and intelligent than the people around her. Mildred's presentation undercuts the patriarchal perception that spinsters are any different from other people. Spinsters, such as Mildred, are often forced to be more resourceful because of their lack of status in the eyes of society. Mildred describes her 'faults' in a comic manner which suggests that in her eyes

they are not really faults: 'if she [Mildred] is also a clergyman's daughter then one might really say that there is no hope for her' (1989:7).

The role of spinster often has negative associations in a patriarchal society. Women who fail to marry are considered to be lacking in some respect. Pym turns these negative connotations into a tongue-in-cheek self-examination (Pym, 1984:67-69), and it spills over onto the presentation of the spinster figure in *A Glass of Blessings* and *Excellent Women*. Mary Beamish, who is the main spinster figure in *A Glass of Blessings*, is presented in a positive way by Pym (Pym, 1991:19-21, 205-208). Pym suggests that she is wasting her abilities by marrying the feeble and vain Marius Ransome. There is irony in Wilmet's thought, 'that such a good-looking man as Marius Ransome should want to marry anyone so dim and mousy as Mary Beamish' (1991:228). Pym alludes to Marius's unworthiness as a husband for Mary (1991:242-243). In such comments, Pym uses and deconstructs the stereotype of the spinster in the service of her feminist views. In her presentation of the spinster sisters Belinda and Harriet Bede in *Some Tame Gazelle*, Pym creates a new image for the spinster. She is attractive, independent and continually refuses offers of marriage. Pym is resisting rigid definitions or stereotypes here.

Mildred Lathbury begins *Excellent Women* as a spinster who has control over her domestic space. Nevertheless she finds it difficult to maintain control, as Griffin argues:

[T]hough Mildred wants to live alone and as she chooses, establishing boundaries within which she may have privacy, neither she nor those around her think of her as entitled to these things.

(Griffin, 1992:132).

I agree with Griffin, who further argues that, if Mildred does not claim her own space, she will remain a tabula rasa for others to impose their ideas on (Griffin, 1992:132). Helena

Napier, Everard Bone, Rocky Napier and Julian Malory all attempt to impose their ideason Mildred (Pym, 1989: 10, 133, 140, 149). She establishes her own space as a spinster by ignoring Everard's advances (on his terms) and refusing to provide a home for Winifred (1989:173–174, 192) because: 'I was exhausted with bearing other people's burdens' (1989:192). Mildred elects to accept Everard's advances on her own terms, by establishing control over her own space and aiding Everard in his own domain (1989:222, 224).

Spinsterhood is viewed more positively than marriage by Pym in *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings*. Wilmet, who is married, tends initially to be controlled by space, rather than to have any control over space (Pym, 1991:37). It is harder for her to control her domestic space because she is married. Whereas the Victorians saw the home as a place of peace for the wife, John Stuart Mill first drew attention to its limitations for women's freedom, as Millett notes (1969:139). Mill's 'On the Subjection of Women' shows how he saw the state of marriage as a yoke for women (Kermode and Hollander, 1973: 882–885). In a similar vein, Pym deconstructs the notion that married women have better control over their domestic and economic space.

Wilmet is imprisoned by domestic space, in a similar manner to that described by Foucault, in relation to the metaphor of the all-seeing tower of the prison or panopticon. This tower was structured so as to allow wardens in Victorian prisons a perfect view of their prisoners at all times. The prisoners' freedom was completely eliminated. Foucault describes this all-seeing tower as follows:

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised All this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism.

(1977:197)

In patriarchy, power over spatial areas is tangibly defined in certain ways, whereas the power which marriage gives men over women, in terms of confining them to certain areas, is never put into words. It is an invisible form of power, but it is similar to the other types of spatial control which the disciplinary surveillance imaged by the panopticon exercised over Victorian institutions:

[T]his is what was operated regularly by disciplinary power from the beginning of the nineteenth century in the psychiatric asylum, the penitentiary, the reformatory, the approved school and, to some extent, the hospital.

(Foucault, 1977:199)

Wilmet's marriage in *A Glass of Blessings* is an invisible imprisonment. The house she lives in does not belong to her (Pym, 1991:6–13). She cannot escape from the domestic sphere, for 'Rodney had the old-fashioned idea that wives should not work unless it was financially necessary' (1991:17–18). Wilmet is imprisoned by her husband's desire that she remain at home. She feels useless. Pym uses the shortcomings of this marriage to question the idea that marriage can ever be satisfying. Both Wilmet and Rodney Forsyth are products of their patriarchal society, and as a result have false expectations about marriage. Both experience confinement and limitations, because of their unrealistic expectations. Wilmet is frustrated because money, a beautiful house and attractive clothes, whilst welcome, do not give her a sense of self-worth (Pym, 1991:10–17). She needs to have a useful role in society, which she finds when she becomes an 'Excellent Woman'. Wilmet is also frustrated because Rodney treats her as a 'housewife', rather than an intelligent woman who is a useful member of society (1991:12–17, 31). Pym reveals that he has been conditioned by patriarchy to believe that women can only fulfil one role at a time. In Rodney's eyes Wilmet can only be a housewife, a formidable working woman, or a beautiful woman, but never all of these things simultaneously. Initially Wilmet agrees

with Rodney: 'I suppose some of them [those splendid and formidable women] try to combine marriage with a career' (1991:11). She changes her perceptions when she discovers that Rodney almost had an affair with a woman who combines a number of roles (1991: 249–250). Rodney expects Wilmet to assume only one role, since she is his wife, but falls in love with Prudence Bates, a woman with many qualities. Rodney attests to this: 'Miss Hitchens has a friend who's most attractive and intelligent too' (1991:135). Prudence is Miss Hitchens's friend.

The contradictory nature of patriarchy is exposed by Rodney's frustration at Wilmet's adoption of the role of dour housewife. Paradoxically, it is because of his expectations that Wilmet behaves in this way. Rodney is irritated and bored with Wilmet's passionless and predictable behaviour, and even considers acquiring a mistress. The danger inherent in these speculations testifies to the weakness of conventional marriage.

Wilmet's experience supports Pym's generally negative view of marriage in her novels. Wilmet's rethinking of her priorities in her marriage ultimately saves it. Wilmet exchanges her patriarchal values, which include being a beautiful and helpless 'Angel in the House', for the more useful role of 'Excellent Woman'. She elects to make her husband's and her own happiness of paramount importance (Pym, 1991:256). The circle of martini drinkers must take second place. Rodney also chooses to focus on improving his relationship with Wilmet (Pym, 1991:248–249). His patriarchal priorities, which include his vocation as civil servant, receive less attention as he takes Wilmet on a long vacation. In this instance, Pym's morality influences her acute observation of the fact that marriage does not improve simply because a woman wants it to. Both partners have to make an effort.

I agree with Ackley, who avers that Wilmet's growth is 'the most pronounced discovery of self' (1989:13). I also find merit in Benet's assertion that the novel is about Wilmet's

development as a mature woman (1986:77). Wilmet gains independence through helping others. She visits Mary at the retreat house (Pym, 1991: 222–226), and she creates her own domestic space by purchasing a new place to live together with Rodney: '[o]ur search for somewhere to live seemed to have brought us closer together than we had been for years' (1991: 247).

Pym associates maturity and discovery of self, in the cases of Wilmet and Mildred, with the values of 'Excellent Womanhood' and spinsterhood. In *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings* marriage hampers the development of the self. Growth can still be achieved, but with difficulty. Many feminist theorists, notably Betty Friedan (in *The Feminine Mystique*)⁶ and Shulamith Firestone (in *The Dialectic of Sex*)⁷ have commented that marriage hampers women's psychological growth.

As I have shown, Pym has a positive attitude towards spinsterhood, but her attitude towards marriage is ambivalent. In *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings*, she describes the advantages and the limitations of marriage, as well as extra-marital affairs. *A Glass of Blessings*, portrays two different kinds of marriages, namely those that function well and are healthy, as opposed to those that do not and are not. The well-balanced marriage of Sibyl Forsyth and Professor Root is juxtaposed with the Forsyths' and Talbots' less than ideal unions, and the uneasy marriage of Mary Beamish and Marius Ransome.

What should also be noted is that Pym is not only condemning marriage here, since in the regeneration of Wilmet's and Rodney's marriage she shows that there is still hope. Wilmet must work at being a better wife, and Rodney must improve in the same way:

I [Wilmet] had always regarded Rodney as the kind of man who would never look at another woman. The fact that he could – and had indeed done so – ought to teach me something about myself, even if I was not yet quite sure what it was.

(Pym, 1991:250)

Pym makes a strong case for the advantages of spinsterhood over marriage, even though she does not openly discredit the latter. For example, marriage for Mildred in *Excellent Women* would seem to lead to a life of drudgery (Pym, 1989:202–237). Marriage negates the role of the 'Excellent Woman' in this novel. Conversely, being unmarried is precisely the strength of the 'Excellent Woman's' self-sufficiency, as Mildred suggests (1989:176). Self-sufficiency is directly related to the portrayal of both the 'Excellent Woman' and the spinster in Pym's novels. Mildred, who is both an 'Excellent Woman' and a spinster, is totally self-sufficient. It is this quality which attracts inefficient people to her – such as the scatter-brained and helpless Winifred, the untidy Helena and the disorganized Allegra (1989:11, 19, 77–80). Other inefficient people, such as Rocky Napier and Julian Malory, also expect Mildred to sort out the problems in their lives, and to provide them with tea and other alimentary items when necessary (1989:144–150). Even Everard Bone expects Mildred to make indexes for him and cook roasts (1989:235–237).

In addition to the strong link between spinsterhood and self-sufficiency in Pym's novels, there is also an association between spinsterhood and spiritual fulfilment. Pym, a spinster herself, achieved comfort, consolation and a positive sense of direction in her life from the Anglican Church: '[f]ull participation in church fêtes, jumble sales and church outings was a natural and enjoyable part of [her life] from earliest childhood' (Holt, 1990:13). Holt argues that Pym had a strong personal faith in God (1990:150) which gave her spiritual as well as social fulfilment.

Holt goes on to mention that Robert Smith sees Pym's use of religion in her novels as arbitrary: '[r]eligion, for Miss Pym's characters, involves no anguish of conscience ... no dark night of the soul' (1990:152). Rubenstein supports this view. She argues that spiritual hunger is not one of the motives of Pym's 'Excellent Women' (1990:175). I contend, though, that it is possible to distinguish different kinds of spirituality: mystical, social and inwardly-directed spirituality. Smith and Rubenstein measure Pym's characters according to a mystical type of spirituality. They contend that spiritual hunger is not part of the 'Excellent Woman's' make-up, because the 'Excellent Woman' does not experience a mystical dark night of the soul. In my view, Pym's central protagonists tend to achieve a more or less 'social' kind of spirituality – a degree of consideration for others through participation in the church community. Pym's heroines attain emotional and social growth through spirituality. Smith and Rubenstein's limited definition of spirituality means that they fail to grasp the social spirituality of Pym's heroines.

Social spirituality is strongly present in the presentation of the spinster Mildred and her married counterpart, Wilmet. Mildred in *Excellent Women*, because of her 'Excellent Woman' and spinster status in the community, is perceived to be a useful member of society and has close associations with the Anglican Church. She thus has a well-developed spiritual space, in a metaphorical sense, which is a source of strength to her. Mildred is, from the outset, a willing and active participant in the Church, while Wilmet develops into her enjoyment of church life as part of her psychological growth.

It seems that marriage negates the Church's spiritual function in a woman's life, and replaces it with total adherence to the demands of patriarchy. Mildred, a spinster in *Excellent Women*, is constantly aware of the significance of the Church in her life. Even in the domestic space of her flat, she feels the pull of the Church and seeks to place it visually in relation to her home: 'it [the church spire] looked beautiful ... prickly, Victorian –

gothic, hideous inside, I suppose, but very dear to me' (Pym, 1989:12). Mildred's faith is very strong and she attends Church regularly (1989: 7-8, 12). Her spirituality enables her to find communion with other church-going women, and to overcome the physical and emotional destruction brought about by the war (1989: 48,112). The heroines' membership in a Church, usually the Anglican Church, provides them with a network of support as well as spiritual input.

Pym presents the Church as alienating to Wilmet, with her upper-class aspirations and materialism. Wilmet, as a married woman, initially struggles to claim a spiritual space of her own. She finds her community Church alien, and criticizes those associated with it (Pym, 1991:7-8, 19). Although she may never have access to as much spiritual 'space' as Mildred, since she must divide her world between marriage and the Church, she does claim a less traditional spiritual 'space', which has pantheistic overtones:

Here, in a kind of greenish twilight, stood a pile of grass cuttings and garden rubbish, ...I imagined all this richness decaying in the earth and new life springing out of it.

(Pym, 1991:226)

Wilmet achieves spiritual rejuvenation through her observation of how the vegetable kingdom rejuvenates itself. Her spirituality is defined by the realization that all her actions are connected to the lives of other people. She no longer feels alienated, because she perceives that she is part of a community of people. Wilmet's spiritual growth is narrated in natural terms, and extended by the image of the old priest guiding the bees to follow their queen to a new hive (Pym, 1991:232-233). Like each individual bee, Wilmet's life is defined by the overall purpose of the hive.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that the 'Excellent Woman' and spinster roles are defended by Pym against the often negative prejudices of patriarchal society. Pym presents her spinsters and 'Excellent Women' in a positive way in *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings*. Pym shows how women may subversively use stereotypical labelling, such as 'spinster' and 'Excellent Woman', to their advantage.

Pym also draws on similarities between the Victorian 'Angel in the House' and the 'Excellent Woman'. She shows ultimately that the 'Excellent Woman' is more different from than similar to her predecessor. This reveals Pym's innovation as an artist: she draws on the Victorian way of presenting women in literature, and transforms this mode of presentation into something different yet recognizable – in other words, Pym's 'Excellent Woman' figure still remains part of the intertextual space of literature. Her fiction thus has affinities with other literary representations of women's strategies for dealing with patriarchal oppression.

The 'Excellent Woman' role gives women a chance to assert themselves as individuals within the bounds of the dominant patriarchal culture. Simultaneously, they can belong to a distinct sub-culture of 'Excellent Womanhood'. The dual role of Pym's women throughout her novels epitomizes her own distinctive brand of feminism as expressed in these novels: this combines a certain degree of conformity to patriarchy, together with some hidden subversion.

The presentation of 'Excellent Women' in her work is Pym's way of revealing that she is concerned with the sexuality and spirituality of the women characters in her novels. As I have shown, the 'Excellent Woman' figure is herself too repressed to explore her sexuality openly. Pym creates a dialectic between the 'Excellent Women' of the novels and the sexually active characters. The sexually active characters represent projections of the

repressed sexuality of the 'Excellent Women' and vehicles for a vicarious experience of sexuality. Pym's 'Excellent Women' also exhibit a 'social' spirituality. They learn to tolerate the shortcomings of other people, and to show some consideration for them. Their membership in a Church provides them with a network of support. They are no longer alone, but part of a community of women. While Pym presents spinsterhood positively, marriage is portrayed more ambivalently. Pym shows that the need to marry is often based on economic and cultural considerations rather than on a woman's happiness.

Finally, I contend that the positive presentation of women in *Excellent Women* and *A Glass of Blessings* is part of Pym's highly creative middle period of writing in the 1950s. Pym believed in herself as a woman, and this is reflected in her novels.

Notes

1. Gilbert and Gubar (1979:124).
2. See Holman Hunt's painting *The Awakened Conscience* and Augustus Egg's *Past and Present*, which deals with the fall of a bourgeois woman who turns to prostitution (Kermode and Hollander, 1973: 1120–1121).
3. See Dora's presentation in *David Copperfield*; Florence Dombey in *Dombey and Son*; Pet Meagle in *Little Dorrit* and Bella Rokesmith in *Our Mutual Friend*. (Dickens, 1966:669; 1985a:590, 756–7, 969; 1985b:64; 1986:825).
4. Dickens (1985a:739; 1985b:787).
5. Woody and Woody (1973:16).
6. Friedan (1963:300–367).
7. Firestone (1970:200–274).

CHAPTER THREE
SATIRE IN THE PRESENTATION OF CAROLINE GRIMSTONE
AND EMMA HOWICK

After the rejection of her novel, *An Unsuitable Attachment*, in 1963,¹ I believe that Pym began to reconceptualize her comic characterization. This was partly due to her disillusionment with the publishing establishment in Britain, and partly to a loss of self-confidence in her powers as a writer (Pym, 1984:217, 257–258). In this chapter, I look at Pym's reconception of her art in relation to two of her novels written after 1963: *An Academic Question*, completed in 1971 (Pym, 1984:263) and *A Few Green Leaves*, completed in 1980 (1984:291). My purpose in this chapter is to show that Pym does not present her main protagonists in these works in a comic way, by contrast with her earlier novels. She portrays them as the targets of her satire. The brand of satire Pym employs in these novels does not involve comedy because this would be incompatible with the mode of tragedy which Pym also employs in relation to her heroines. I wish to show that these novels display more tragic than comic features. The result of Pym's use of satire and tragedy is a subversive approach towards patriarchy. She also introduces an element of suffering in relation to her heroines, and both the novels have very negative outcomes. They are, in consequence, tragedies. Caroline in *An Academic Question* loses faith in Alan and in the male sex as a whole (Pym, 1986b:181). Similarly, Emma in *A Few Green Leaves* embarks on a loveless affair with Tom to quell the feeling of unfulfilment within herself (1980a:249–250).

I define comedy in Pym's novels as the use of humour to dictate a happy ending for the central protagonists. Vices and failings are underlined in a humorous manner. My definition of tragedy is not classical in nature. The heroines are flawed but do not die as a

result. They experience suffering at the hands of the male protagonists. My idea of satire is of a milder brand which highlights the vices of patriarchal society and the central protagonists, whilst perceiving their propensity for suffering.

The term 'satiric target', which I use in this chapter, refers to the fact that Pym's main protagonists are the targets of her satire, together with other men and women in the novels. Nevertheless, the central target of her satire is the patriarchal society of the 1970s, since the main protagonists are products of their society. It is Pym, not the central protagonists, who is wielding the satiric pen.

I describe Pym's use of satire in *An Academic Question* and *A Few Green Leaves* as follows: she relies on irony in relation to her heroines, but in Jacobs's words, 'now comedy has been displaced by a distinctly tragic tone' (1988:11). Jacobs defines Pym's later novels as belonging to a tragic-satiric category because they 'confront the problems of ageing and social disintegration' (1988:11). Pym portrays her central protagonists as victims of patriarchal society. They are not to blame for their mistakes, follies and vices. In fact, she evokes sympathy for her heroines. This allows them to contribute meaningfully to tragedy. By using this tragic brand of satire, Pym reveals that she takes the uncertain position of the modern woman in Britain in the 1970s seriously. As Jacob says:

In the late novels, the world is too sick to be cured with light mockery; by confronting the reader with stark narratives where romance is a rarity and death weighs heavily on life, Pym has taken a significant step away from the gaiety of comedy towards the uneasiness of traditional satire.

(Jacobs, 1988:296)

I intend to concentrate on the methods Pym uses to portray the central protagonists in a satirical way. I also focus on Pym's portrayal of the heroines as tragic figures. The model

of tragedy which I am drawing on here is one which suggests that the central protagonists' lives are adversely influenced by the patriarchal context which they grow up in, and dwell in. They unknowingly submit to and suffer from the gender inequalities perpetrated by their society.

The modes of tragedy and satire are usually incompatible as satire is used, to a greater or lesser extent, for ridicule, while tragedy is used for grave reflections on imponderables such as human nature (Abrams, 1957:153–155, 173–175). I want to juxtapose these terms, since I believe that this is appropriate for the texts I am examining here. Tragedy and satire co-exist in *An Academic Question* and *A Few Green Leaves*, because Pym's use of tragedy and satire differs from 'classical' models. In her work, using one mode does not preclude use of the other. Thus the use of tragedy, which extends to Pym's portrayal of the heroines' suffering and despair, does not preclude the heroines from being ridiculed insofar as they exemplify the inequities of their society. Similarly, Pym's use of satire in relation to the patriarchal society of the 1970s does involve ridicule, but it does not preclude the reader from feeling a sense of tragedy at the decay manifested in the society. Pym's ridicule is mild rather than caustic. It is often premised on a sense of despair at the impossibility of eliminating patriarchal inequalities.

Pym's use of tragedy differs from the 'classical' model in that classical tragedy gives attention to the tragic hero's standing in society. He or she is, according to Aristotle,² a good person and a leader, someone who (unlike Pym's central protagonists) inspires respect in others. Although one feels a degree of sympathy for Pym's heroines, they elicit ridicule rather than respect. Furthermore, Pym's heroines do not possess fatal flaws in their natures,³ which is usually the fate of the classical tragic hero.⁴ Pym's heroines possess a number of minor psychological flaws which make them suffer, and cause them to be victims

of other people. These flaws result in loneliness and estrangement between marital partners, but are not severe enough to cause death.

Pym's heroines, Caroline Grimstone and Emma Howick, share several tragic characteristics. They both feel despair at patriarchy's creation of inequalities between the genders: they possess little sense of self-worth, since other people regard them as insignificant. They lack status and power, since they are not mother-figures or achievers in either the private or public spheres. They are 'invisible' women in the eyes of patriarchy.

Also, Caroline and Emma both suffer because other people are unfaithful to them. Furthermore, although the heroines do not experience illness and death towards the end of *An Academic Question* and *A Few Green Leaves*, both are left with feelings of loneliness and unhappiness with little to love.

Pym's use of satire differs from the 'classical' model because she does not launch a vituperative attack on the patriarchal society of which the heroines are members. She employs a lighter invective, which is defined by Jacobs as being 'a gentler satire not used to scourge vices in specific individuals or the general reader' (1988:5). According to Jacobs, Pym's satire is closer to that of Horace than to the classical satirists (1988:6). I agree with this argument, and with the assertion that 'Pym's use of satire does not conform to that of the great classical satirists who used images of filth and corruption' (1988:5). Pym's use of satire co-exists with her heroines' experiences of suffering and her sympathy for them, which are part of the tragic dimension of the novels. Jacobs gives an apt description of Pym's strategy: 'the generous caricature, where an author is both mocking and sympathetic at the same time' (1988:21).

By changing from comedy in the early novels to satire and tragedy in *A Few Green Leaves* and *An Academic Question*, Pym directly connects social issues with the presentation of her central protagonists. Pym's satire becomes a vehicle for revealing gender inequalities and enables her to subvert the patriarchal system more directly. To some extent Pym expresses despair that women will ever achieve equality in a patriarchal society. The only hope would be to destroy the patriarchal system, and to replace it with a society free of gender bias. Pym falls short of describing how this alternative is to be achieved, and so leaves these later novels in the realm of tragedy based on despair.

Jacobs contends that there are two satiric techniques in Pym's prose: 'the use of absurdly low language' and 'the elevation of trivialities through high diction' (1988:36). In addition to these two satiric techniques, I believe that Pym uses irony in relation to her central protagonists. Pym employs an ironic tone to tell her own 'hero-tale'. The hero-tale is a Western genre which perpetuates inequality between the sexes. Le Guin defines it as follows: '[s]ince it's about men the hero-tale has concerned the establishment or validation of manhood' (1993:5). Pym does not change the patriarchal format of the hero-tale in *A Few Green Leaves* and *An Academic Question*, but uses irony to satirize the validation of manhood, which this genre excels in.⁵

Pym does not separate Caroline Grimstone, or Emma Howick, the two central protagonists of *An Academic Question* and *A Few Green Leaves*, from the principal target of her satire: the British patriarchal society of the 1970s, with its changing social structure and greater permissiveness. The main protagonists are products of their society. Emma Howick in *A Few Green Leaves*, for example, is a mediocre anthropologist who feels that she has failed her mother by not marrying (Pym, 1980a:8-9). She attempts to overcome her problems through an affair with Graham Pettifer (1980a:32-34). This brings her further unhappiness. Emma's complex and contradictory behaviour is symptomatic of wider

trends within her society. She wishes to be independent yet expects men to be chivalrous towards her:

This irritated Emma ... the idea that a woman must be accompanied on a country walk in the dark. Yet she realised that had he [Graham] *not* made the gesture she would have been even more annoyed. Women were not yet as equal as all that.

(1980a:175)

In Emma's society the old ideas of chivalry, love and marriage co-exist with the new ideas of affairs and casual sex (Pym, 1980a:8-9, 32-34). Emma is unable to reconcile the old with the new ideas. She wants to be independent but she also desires stability in her life. Her affair with Graham leaves her without hope for the future (1980a:32). Emma's ambivalent behaviour is a symptom of a society which preaches one set of values but practises another: her society preaches sexual freedom, women's independence and people's implicit value as human beings. By contrast, her society practises sexual repression, the necessity of marriage for women and the treatment of men and women as commodities (1980a:8-9, 11, 88). Emma's coldness is a by-product of the way her society treats people. People's worth is measured in terms of their purchasing power or status in society (1980a:9-13). Adam Prince and Martin Shrubsole are prime examples of their society's clinical attitude towards men and women. Martin Shrubsole even views his mother as a patient and Adam Prince analyzes food in a ruthless fashion (1980a:14-17, 25-27, 52-53). Emma cannot be blamed for analyzing marriage and her relationship with Graham in a similar way (1980a:34, 37). Patriarchal society has failed to consider the needs of the men and women living under its influence (Holt, 1990:267; Rossen, 1986:157; Woody, 1973:15).

By making both Caroline and Emma targets of her satire, Pym reveals that women are part of the patriarchal process at work in their society. Caroline Grimstone in *An*

Academic Question remains trapped in an unhappy marriage, because she is unable to consider divorce or single motherhood due to ideological constraints. In her society motherhood and marriage are seen to be sufficient fulfilment for women (Pym, 1986b:5). Caroline's society advocates the expression of one's sexuality (1986b:6, 71, 121) but in reality this applies only to men. Alan feels no guilt at his affair with Cressida (1986b:106–107). It is Caroline who worries about the negative consequences of his actions. She thinks of the rhyme: '[m]arried when leaves in October thin/Toil and hardships for you begin ...' (1986b:114). Caroline represses her sexuality as a result of Alan's behaviour. She is unable to further her daughter's sex education because of her embarrassment over Alan's behaviour (1986b:121). She is also slightly shocked by the manner in which Iris Horniblow shows off her new lover (1986b:140). Caroline is unable to follow Iris's example because she is trapped in a conventional way of thinking. She feels that she owes it to Alan to remain faithful (1986b:1–7). Freud explains such behaviour in terms of the mechanism of repression:

From [the] ego proceed the repressions, too, by means of which an attempt is made to cut off certain trends in the mind not merely from consciousness but also from their other forms of manifestation and activity.

(Freud, 1947:16).

At the end of *An Academic Question* Caroline represses her anger at Alan's infidelity (Pym, 1986b:180–182). She places the blame on herself and attempts to be 'more loving and feminine' (1986b:181). Pym alludes to a negative outcome because she suggests that Caroline's negative feelings are in hibernation, like the hedgehogs, but they will re-surface (1986b:182). The words '[l]ater I might change my mind' (1986b:182) are ominous in this context. It is impossible for these women to escape from patriarchy, since they are themselves not aware of its influence upon them: they have 'internalized' the values and

standards, or ideology of patriarchal society. This 'internalized' ideology operates as follows: a subject who has been conditioned by socialization naturalizes the ideology, so to speak, and is not aware that he or she has been conditioned to behave in accordance with ideological norms.

I agree with Jacobs's assertion that in the early novels Pym's narrator's 'imagination and generosity are in sharp contrast with the vanity and obtuseness of the people around her' (1988:23). This sharp contrast is lacking in the portrayal of Caroline Grimstone in the later novel *An Academic Question*. Rather than establishing her as a reliable narrator, Pym makes her a target for authorial satire. 'Internalized' ideology is responsible for the understatement which Caroline uses to describe herself. She emphasizes her lack of self-worth in descriptions such as the following:

I had been christened Caroline, which in my teens
I had changed to Caro because of poor Lady
Caroline Lamb, who said she was like the wreck of
a little boat for she never came up to the sublime
and beautiful.

(Pym, 1986b:4)

Pym sets up a contrast between the lyrical language used in the descriptions 'Lady Caroline Lamb' and 'sublime and beautiful', versus the understatement inherent in the shortened nickname 'Caro' and its associations with 'the wreck of a little boat'. By using understatement, Pym diminishes Caroline's stature and importance. Caroline is insignificant and child-like from a patriarchal perspective, and from her own position of 'internalized' ideology.

It is ironic that Lady Caroline Lamb is described using lyrical language in the quoted passage, as if she is someone of importance, when in fact she also suffered at the hands of patriarchal inequalities. There are clear similarities between the two women, as indicated

by Caroline's lack of 'beauty and charisma'. Both women are exploited by patriarchal society, and then cast out as rejects. Pym draws attention to a further similarity in their situations. Lady Caroline's affair with Lord Byron, and her subsequent rejection by him, make her into a tragic figure. Similarly, Caroline's discovery of her husband's infidelity destroys her world. Both find their lives wrecked by love-affairs and men's sexual politics. They are more the victims of men than the architects of their own misery. I believe that Pym blames men for the destruction of both Caroline's and Lady Caroline Lamb's lives. They are victims of the cruelty inherent in the patriarchal system. Part of Pym's criticism of Caroline focuses on her passive acceptance of the role of the victim.

Although Caroline sees other women such as Iris Horniblow and her own sister Susan acting in an active way (Pym, 1986b:71,140), she remains a passive victim. She allows Alan to dominate her life. He subjects her to mental anguish by suggesting that he might find her more attractive if she tried harder to conform to his expectations (1986b:3-19). The more Caroline carries out his wishes, the more sadistic he becomes. He does not acknowledge Caroline's part in obtaining the papers necessary for his research (1986b:133). Some hint of sexual perversion is evident in his acknowledgement of his affair with Cressida whilst attempting to make love to Caroline (1986b:100). Dolly also alludes to this aspect of their relationship: '[i]t shouldn't affect your marriage After all, the main relationship is still there. It may even add something to it' (1986b:105).

The implicit ironic comment, which Pym makes about Caroline's marriage (Pym, 1986b:4), is followed up later in *An Academic Question* with a full exposure of Alan Grimstone's infidelity (1986b:100). Pym's implicit ironic judgement is one way in which she uses marriage as a satiric target:

Pym's couples may be physically comfortable, but they are not nourished spiritually by their marital relationships. On the contrary, most wives feel trapped in a purgatory of emotional sterility and minimal communication with spouses who do not understand their needs.

(Jacobs, 1988:110–111)

Pym makes it clear from the beginning of *An Academic Question* that Caroline is unhappy in her marriage. She has a negative self-image because her husband continually criticizes her (Pym, 1986b:4), and she feels frustrated because she has a tertiary education but is unable to find a suitable job (1986b:4–5). Furthermore, although she has borne a child, this does not improve her self-image or provide enough justification for remaining in the domestic sphere. By making Caroline a target for her satire, as well as Alan,⁶ Pym shows that both men and women are responsible for creating marital disenchantment, because their beliefs are shaped by patriarchy. At the same time, Pym indicates that Caroline deserves sympathy, as she is clearly the wronged partner in the marriage.

Alan tries to isolate Caroline from her friends. He mistrusts Dolly and despises Coco and Kitty (Pym, 1986b:13–15). He controls her life effectively by making her feel guilty about these friendships. She relies on his opinion as a supposedly superior person in society, but is let down by his lack of scruples (1986b:133). Caroline will never be happy in this relationship because Alan is a megalomaniac who battens off the adulation she gives him. The more pain he causes her, the more likely she is to remain a passive victim. She sees herself as a martyr (1986b:4) and is unable to escape from the spiral of her despair.

In comparing herself to Lady Caroline Lamb, Caroline intends the term 'wreck of a little boat' to have positive connotations. It associates her with the romantic life of Lady

Caroline Lamb, and allows her to view herself as a small, waif-like and orphaned creature. However, the term has strong patriarchal overtones because Caroline describes herself as smaller and weaker than the surrounding 'sea', which may be equated with patriarchy. The tone used by Caroline is tragic, since she is defenceless against the whims of patriarchy. Pym suggests that these whims are often cruel and unpredictable. By contrast, the tone used by Belinda in *Some Tame Gazelle*, in relation to the literary allusion 'something to love' (Pym, 1978:251), is paternal rather than tragic, as I have shown in Chapter One of this dissertation. Belinda diffuses the paternal elements of the allusion, whereas Caroline's tone contains an element of suffering and disillusionment throughout *An Academic Question*.

As I have mentioned, Alan has an affair with a girl called Cressida. I believe Pym's use of the name Cressida is an intentional echo of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*.⁷ There are similarities between the two works. The Trojans Troilus and Cressida are lovers in *Troilus and Cressida*. When the Greeks invade Troy, the Trojans are forced to give the Lady Cressida as a gift to Diomedes. This is done with Troilus' consent. Cressida is left without any social or economic status in the Greek Camp, and eventually becomes Diomedes' mistress. Troilus declares her 'faithless', despite his use of her as a bargaining chip to save the Trojan empire. He is unable to see the similarities between his use of her as a pawn with which to retain the economic and political power of Troy, and her pawning of her own person so as to retain economic and social status. He will never forgive Cressida because in his patriarchal society women are bargaining tools, rather than the people with power who make the bargains (Shakespeare, 1989, v.ii. 139–160).

Similarly, in *An Academic Question*, Cressida is blamed for enticing Alan into an adulterous relationship. This is despite the fact that he is the one with economic, political

and social status. Alan grants Cressida no status in the relationship. He calls her 'a hopeless sort of person' (Pym, 1986b:99). He, rather than Caroline, is faithless. He fails to accept responsibility for his actions. Both Caroline and Cressida (as in *Troilus and Cressida*) suffer because they are women with little status and power in their own contexts, which are shaped by patriarchy. They must suffer the consequences of other people's actions. Pym suggests that the reader should sympathize with Cressida and Caroline, rather than Alan.

Alan creates much of Caroline's pain. He separates her from his work, and then criticizes her for not being more interested in his job (Pym, 1986b:7). He only desires Caroline's love when he feels that he has hurt her (1986b:98–100). Caroline feels inadequate because she realizes that she is second best in his eyes (1986b:99). Alan dotes foolishly on Cressida, despite his criticism of her (1986b:99). Caroline is sickened by his behaviour (1986b:99) and represses her sexuality to a certain extent. This is echoed by Alan's scrutiny of 'the lower half of a torso with the thighs spread out' (1986b:34). It makes him uneasy. Alan fails to face the challenge of a sexual relationship with Caroline. He chooses the 'hopeless' Cressida (1986b:99), who can fulfil his sexual needs without making further demands on him. Both Emma and Caroline repress their sexuality (Pym, 1980a: 209; 1986b:122). During the course of their respective novels they are forced to acknowledge their sexuality. Each heroine is confronted by the archetype of the shadow, which is an aspect of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1968:8). Like Pym, Forster uses the archetype of the shadow to highlight the sexual repression of Adela Quested in *A Passage to India*. Adela and the caves function as a self and shadow double in the same manner as Caroline and Cressida. Adela experiences the shadow as a violent sexual assault: 'there was this shadow, or sort of shadow, down the entrance tunnel, bottling me up' (Forster, 1967:189). The experience has a tragic outcome for Adela in that she is rejected by the Indian community, which she

has sought to befriend (Forster, 1967:245–247). Adela's experience in the Marabar caves can be interpreted as an encounter with the Jungian archetype of the shadow.

Cressida in *An Academic Question* is an aspect of Caroline's unconscious. Alan mentions the similarities between the two women (Pym, 1986b:99). Caroline is faced with her hidden sexuality when the two women meet. She feels at ease with Cressida and is not repulsed by her obvious sexuality:

[I]t was beginning to dawn on me [Caroline] that Cressida and I weren't going to have any sort of show-down of the kind I had imagined. I could see her now as a jolly friendly girl who would go to bed with anyone and think nothing of it, perhaps Alan had taken her too seriously and I had, too.

(Pym, 1986b:129).

Cressida, as a representation of the archetype of the shadow, is confronted by Caroline when she visits her on an impulse (Pym, 1986b:128–129). Instead of being threatened by Cressida, Caroline feels psychologically complete (1986b:129). She accepts that Cressida is inexplicably connected to her innermost feelings about her sexuality. She acts in a more responsible manner than Adela, who is terrified of her shadow (Forster, 1967:189). Caroline returns home in a hopeful mood. She believes that the crisis with Alan is partly resolved (Pym, 1986b:131). I believe that no positive outcome is possible for Caroline because Alan's behaviour has unleashed a form of evil in Caroline's world. The act of infidelity, like the echo in the Marabar cave, has serious consequences: '[e]vil was loose ... She [Adela] could even hear it entering the lives of others ...' (Forster, 1967:190). The seeds of doubt about Alan's future behaviour are planted in Caroline's mind (Pym, 1986b:182). *An Academic Question* is a tragedy because 'our pity is excited by misfortunes

undeservedly suffered [by Caroline], and our terror by some resemblance between the sufferer and ourselves' (Aristotle, 1953:25). Infidelity is a common feature of life in the twentieth century (Woody and Woody, 1973:13-15), as is sexual repression, and these aspects result in suffering.

The archetype of the shadow in *A Passage to India* is accompanied by Mrs Moore's feeling that too much fuss has been made over marriage; 'centuries of carnal embracement, yet man is no nearer to understanding man' (Forster, 1967:134). I contend that Pym echoes a similar sentiment in relation to Emma in *A Few Green Leaves*. Emma confronts the shadow in the form of Miss Vereker, who lies sleeping in a clearing in the woods (Pym, 1980a:221). Just prior to this confrontation, Avicé has articulated Emma's sexual repression: '[E]mma's trouble was nothing more interesting than frustrated sex or even unrequited love' (1980a:219). Miss Vereker represents the passionate aspect of Emma's psyche. She is closely associated with symbols of female sexuality and fertility, such as flowers and the woods which she has walked through all her life (1980a:106, 215-221). Jung defines the self as a mixture of opposing elements such as old and young, powerful and helpless and male and female (1968:225). Forster describes this ancient aspect of the self in terms of the Marabar caves:

What dwelt in the first of the caves? Something very old and very small. Before time, it was before space also. Something snub-nosed, incapable of generosity – the undying worm itself.

(Forster, 1967:203).

Emma discovers Miss Vereker in the woods, just as Adela discovers the 'eternally watchful' worm in a Marabar cave (Forster, 1967:145; Pym, 1980a:221). The caves and the woods are ancient. They are symbols of the collective unconscious. The woods date back to medieval times, and at their core lies the deserted medieval village, which Miss Vereker

discovers (Pym, 1980a: 233). This is the essence of their being. The Marabar caves are timeless, and their essence is 'a bubble-shaped cave that has neither ceiling nor floor, and mirrors its own darkness in every direction infinitely' (Forster, 1967:125). Although the caves and the woods offer Emma and Adela an understanding of the collective unconscious, they do not offer a solution to their problems. As Forster suggests, the unconscious is primitive and 'incapable of generosity' (1967:203).

I contend that *A Few Green Leaves* and *An Academic Question* have negative outcomes in part because the male protagonists fail to confront the repressed aspects of their psyches. Alan Grimstone rejects the female aspect of his psyche, or so-called animus⁸ (Jung, 1968:221–225). This is depicted by Coco Jeffreys, an androgynous figure who defies gender boundaries (Pym, 1986b:107–113). Alan refuses to associate with Coco (1986b:12–15). He gives the impression of being afraid of him. Pym implies that if Alan acknowledged the feminine side of his nature, he might be a better husband to Caroline.

In a similar vein, Graham Pettifer in *A Few Green Leaves* may depict Tom Dagnall's repressed sexuality. He exudes an animalistic sexuality, unlike Tom (Pym, 1980a:32–34, 111–112, 148). Tom does not come to terms with Graham's presence in the village. He is jealous of Graham, but outwardly he ignores him (1980a: 124–125). Tom fails to come to terms with his repressed sexuality. This may be a stumbling block in his relationship with Emma, who is used to the attentions of the robust Graham Pettifer (1980a:112, 148, 190).

In a patriarchal system, men have economic and social status, which allows them to accuse their lovers or wives of infidelity, but to escape questioning themselves. This state of affairs recalls the Trojan world which Shakespeare depicts in *Troilus and Cressida*. Similarly, Caroline does not confront Alan because she does not think she can. This may

be because her indoctrination by patriarchal values has made her feel it is not a woman's place to confront her husband. She may feel that she does not have any rights in the marriage, as in most respects she does not.

Caroline's similarity to the 'wreck of a little boat' extends to her relationships with Kitty and Coco Jeffreys and Dolly Arborfield. These relationships become the target for Pym's satire and tragedy. Pym uses a heterogeneous discourse in her description of Kitty and Coco Jeffreys, as Caroline observes them:

'Not your *black* pearls, then?' Coco sounded disappointed, excessively so for a man of forty-two. His mother at sixty-two was even better preserved and they made a handsome and interesting pair. 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.

(Pym, 1986b:1-2)

Pym employs a formal register in her portrayal of Coco and Kitty Jeffreys through the use of words which suggest passion and involvement in life: the use of words like 'excessively so', 'better preserved', 'handsome and interesting' and 'passionate interest' suggest that Kitty and Coco enjoy facing the problems of life with energy. Caroline's tone displays both admiration and interest in the Jeffreyses. However, Pym is 'behind the scenes', so to speak, exercising a hidden irony in Caroline's perception of the situation. Kitty and Coco are actually the epitome of slothfulness. Rather than facing the problems of life themselves, they expect other less wealthy individuals to keep the wheels of society turning.

Pym also uses an informal tone to highlight Caroline's role as a victim who is in the

clutches of Coco and Kitty Jeffreys. Their relationship echoes the sado-masochistic undertones of Caroline's marriage. Coco's friendship towards Caroline is stimulated by his criticisms of her behaviour and his cruelty towards her. (Pym, 1986b:1-3, 26-27). He tells Caroline to take a lover rather than sort out her marital problems (1986b:27). This informal tone is promoted by the following words: 'sounded disappointed', 'felt old beside them' and '[n]ot your black pearls, then?' (Pym, 1986b:1). By contrast, Caroline's attitude towards the Jeffreyses is naive and trusting. Pym exercises sympathy and even pity for Caroline, from 'behind the scenes'. She uses an informal tone to emphasize that Caroline is not a bombastic or superficial person. Her portrayal is in contrast to the exaggerated language which epitomizes Pym's portrayal of the Jeffreyses. Pym satirizes Coco's and Kitty's lack of feeling towards their fellow human beings by contrasting it with Caroline's sensitivity and empathy.

In portraying Caroline's interaction with the Jeffreyses, Pym mixes registers and creates a heterogeneous discourse. This discourse has both satiric and tragic effects. Caroline's use of a formal register has satiric effects. Her use of the word 'trivialities', in the early part of the novel (Pym, 1986b:1-2), assumes an ironic significance in relation to Coco's total absorption in trivial gossip later in the novel. Pym uses Coco's salacious interest in the details of Alan's affair to satirize the stereotype of the society gossip and the cruelty inherent in such curiosity. The use of a formal register also highlights the superficial nature of the Jeffreyses and their concern with appearances.

Caroline's informal tone has tragic effects. It draws attention to the flaws in her friendship with Kitty and Coco. Pym makes the reader aware of the discordant elements in the relationship, so creating a feeling of sympathy for Caroline, and pity for the dystopia in the Jeffreyses' lives, which they misrepresent as Utopia. Caroline realizes the worthlessness of her friendship with the Jeffreyses when she is faced with the crisis of her failing marriage.

She seeks to confide in Coco but finds that he is only interested in the sordid details of Alan's affair, and not in Caroline's shattered self-confidence (Pym, 1986b:110-111). His superficial nature precludes any human empathy.

In addition, Pym makes it clear that the Jeffreys' 'beauty' is only superficial and not a substantial quality. They appear to represent something deeper than television and convenience food, but ironically, they form part of the trivialities of modern life. There is a contrast between surface appearances and inner, 'deeper' reality here. Pym is satirizing the values of the wider society that Caroline lives in and that has shaped her aspirations.

In her portrayal of the relationship between Caroline and Dolly Arborfield, Pym uses both lyrical and colloquial language. This switching of registers draws attention to Pym's use of tragedy and satire. Pym satirizes Dolly's society, but presents Dolly herself in a tragic way. Dolly is described using colloquial language, which creates pity and sympathy for her: 'Dolly's hair was grey and frizzy and she wore clothes that melted into her background of old books, junk and animals' (Pym, 1986b:14). In the eyes of her society, Dolly is ordinary and unimportant, because she does not possess the necessary embellishments which would make her superficially desirable.

Pym uses lyrical language to describe Dolly's convictions about people and animals. Dolly also defines her beliefs in lyrical terms. For example, she comments to her dinner guests that '[w]e are fearfully and wonderfully made' (Pym, 1986b:36). Pym suggests that although Dolly has no looks when compared to the Jeffreyses, she has an inner wealth of spirit and nobility which lead her to nurture sick animals (1986b:15). By contrast, Pym is able to target the false material values of a society which measures a person's wealth by his or her appearance and material wealth. This trend is not limited to the period I am

examining (Britain in the 1970s); if anything, it has grown stronger since then with the rampant growth of capitalism and a commodity society.

Emma Howick in *A Few Green Leaves* is also a target for Pym's satire. Pym satirizes her in order to reveal the destruction of many of the values which people possessed before the Second World War. These values included caring for other people in the community, and belief in a higher deity which inspired people to attempt to live out a brand of social spirituality. Pym's tone in her later novels suggests that she mourns the disappearance of these values. She was raised in the midst of this value system. She grew up in the Edwardian period, in a 'red-brick Edwardian house' (Pym, 1984:2). She internalized the values associated with church-going, 'having curates to supper', 'children's parties', 'a happy, unclouded childhood' and '[m]usic and acting' (1984:2-3). Her values were those of the upper middle-class in Britain. This value system, which is portrayed in Pym's early novels, is replaced by a valueless society in the later novels. Pym depicts society in the 1970s as self-centred and materialistically inclined (Pym, 1980a:2; Woody, 1973:14).

I have been arguing that Pym is aware that society is saturated with patriarchal values, and possesses serious shortcomings. I also contend that there is an idealistic aspect in her writing which yearns towards the past: things seem much easier to bear when one is a successful young novelist with many lovers and admirers (Pym, 1984:44-62, 101, 113, 171, 179, 187-211). Pym recalls her youth with misty-eyed euphoria. She is aware, as an ageing woman in the 1970s, of the less than idyllic nature of her existence: she was shunned by publishers, and had few admirers to illuminate her later years (1984:215-289).

Pym's frustration in the years 1963 to 1977⁹ emerges in her use of satire in the later novels. In keeping with her satirical aims, Pym uses a mixture of a pompous tone and understatement in her description of Emma's feelings about marriage:

[A] sociological survey of modern marriage, under whatever title you gave it, would find the whole affair very commonplace and predictable — the kind of thing that was happening all the time.

(Pym, 1980a:37)

Emma uses a formal register to describe the onset of modern techniques which categorize phenomena in a highly efficient and scientific way, such as the words 'sociological survey' and 'title' (Pym, 1980a:37). This seems to suggest that technologically advanced ideas are much more significant and accurate in evaluating phenomena such as marriage. Pym's irony works in such a way as to diminish the importance of these new ideas gradually. The description of Emma's feelings about marriage descends into understatement: 'the kind of thing that was happening all the time' (1980a:37). Pym demonstrates that in the patriarchal society, of which Emma is a member, marriage is trivialized until it no longer has any significance. Pym is also suggesting that an 'objective' or authoritative study would find contemporary marriage lacking.

Pym satirizes Emma's propensity to criticize and dissect marriage as an institution. This is also a hallmark of women of the 1970s. Pym suggests that while the anthropologist studies and observes behaviour in human cultures, Emma herself practises anthropology coldly. She extends this practice to a scientific analysis of marriage. Emma uses a pompous tone to justify her scientific and detached role: 'remembering her role as an anthropologist and observer — the necessity of being on the outside looking in — she crept away, meditating on what she had observed' (Pym, 1980a:20). Emma tends to give the impression that anthropologists are all cold-blooded and have ulterior motives. Pym wishes to suggest that it is Emma alone who is not a 'moral' anthropologist. This is one of the flaws in her make-up which makes her a tragic figure, in the sense that she has

misunderstood the limitations of the role and misapplies them, making herself unhappy as a result. Pym creates sympathy for Emma, who is often her own worst enemy. The patriarchal system makes women such as Emma act in a contradictory way. In order to survive in patriarchal society they have to be ruthless. Emma's mother has taught her to be cold-blooded, especially in her search for a husband (1980a:8-9). Emma's contradictory behaviour causes her much suffering. I believe that her society, which creates this type of behaviour amongst women, must ultimately be held responsible.

Pym also ridicules Emma's limited approach to life. An anthropologist should not become involved with the people she is observing, lest she affect the results of the investigation. Emma breaks the moral code of the anthropologist by becoming embroiled with the people she is observing. Pym satirizes Emma for this behaviour, and for misapplying the anthropologist's clinically detached stance to her ideas about sex, love and marriage. Emma views these issues in a detached way, as if they do not affect her directly. Woody and Woody contend that this is an approach taken by women in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. It continues into the present time (Woody, 1973:14).

Some critics interpret Emma's anthropological leanings as central. Two of these are Burkhart (1983:48) and Rossen (1986:11). Burkhart contends that '[a]nthropology is everywhere in the novels: specifically African anthropology, which was the kind she [Pym] knew most about' (1983:47). As I have implied, Pym uses Emma's anthropological involvement in a satirical way. She reveals the weaknesses of Emma in her own context, which is shaped by the patriarchal system. There is a dearth of appropriate connections between people in her society. Emma makes connections with other people, but misapplies the study techniques of the anthropologist to these relationships, since she tries to categorize them in the same way. The implication is that Emma is not able to form relationships.

Other people in Emma's society also fail to form relationships. Tom Dagnall, Graham Pettifer and Beatrix Howick are anti-social individuals who prefer their own company to that of other people (Pym, 1980a:8-9, 11, 38). Anti-social behaviour permeates late twentieth-century society as a whole. Laclau and Mouffe blame the capitalist system for this trend. They argue that capitalist consumer society wishes people to remain isolated because this prevents them from initiating a revolutionary process through unity, and freeing themselves from this repressive type of regime (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:10-11).

Pym also sets up a contrast between the formal register, which Emma uses to describe her anthropological pursuits, and the colloquial language, which is associated with Emma's description of the villagers and of Graham Pettifer (Pym, 1980a:38-39; 81-83). Emma employs colloquial language in her description of the new doctor's wife, Avice, as 'rather pushing and do-gooding' (1980a:39), and in her blunt description of Graham Pettifer: '[t]here was a kind of bent look about the shoulders which might explain why she had not recognized him immediately' (1980a:81). The use of colloquial language suggests that Emma is emotionally involved, at least to some extent, with the villagers, because she imbues them with down-to-earth qualities through the use of pithy and brash language. Anthropology is grounded on the anthropologist recording her observations without judging or evaluating the people and behaviour she observes, but Emma's choice of adjectives implies a measure of judgement. Her lack of detachment reflects poorly on her morality as a supposedly objective observer, as I have mentioned. One of her faults is her use of Tom and Graham as part of her anthropological study and her simultaneous judgement of them. In this situation Pym suggests that Emma is destined to be unhappy because of her contradictory nature. She sympathizes with Emma's unhappy assumption of the role of 'tragic heroine'.

Pym satirizes Emma and the society of which she is a product. She indicts modern society, in particular the way in which people analyze and categorize issues such as love and marriage. Pym also targets an earlier patriarchal belief system which has shaped the way Emma acts. This is the belief system from the period before the Second World War, which influenced Emma as a child. This belief system is most accurately defined by its similarity to the hero-tales of the Western world. These hero-tales have the following qualities: '[w]omen may be good and brave, but with rare exceptions (Spenser, Aristo, Bunyan?) women are not heroes', and, '[w]omen are seen in relation to heroes: as mother, wife, seducer, beloved, victim, or rescuable maiden' (Le Guin, 1993:5). This belief system suggests a conventional outlook. Women define their lives in relation to men, and the love which men bear them. This belief system has influenced Emma in that she feels the need to form a relationship with a man (Pym, 1980a:11-37).

Emma's conventional outlook comes from her mother's influence. Beatrix Howick feels that women's lives must be defined in relation to men's, although she tries to hide this belief from other people since she wishes to be seen as a 'thoroughly modern' woman. She desires Emma to marry, even if the person is not entirely suitable (Pym, 1980a:8, 97). Beatrix's study of the eighteenth and nineteenth century novel is ironic because she fails to perceive that 'women won independence and equality in the novel, but not in the hero-tale' (Le Guin, 1993:5). She achieves independence and equality through her study of the novel once her husband is dead. She mistakenly thinks that she achieved independence and equality by marrying and having children, and that she was rewarded for her efforts when her husband passed on. She encourages Emma to believe in the values put forward by the hero-tale.

Ironically, Beatrix does not realize that Emma, as a single woman, is more of a heroine

(and might even give up anthropology for the writing of a novel) than if she marries simply for convenience and appearance, in keeping with the masculinist ideology underlying the hero-tale. Another irony lies in the relief which Beatrix expresses at the death of her husband. She is now free, while she reveals her simultaneous desire for Emma to be married to anyone suitable, even if it does not bring her happiness: 'Beatrix had always felt that a woman should marry or at least have some kind of relationship with a man' (Pym, 1980a:99-100). The contradictions in Beatrix's attitude to marriage are symptomatic of the impossible situation of women under the patriarchal system. Emma's own suffering comes from her pursuit of relationships with Graham and Tom, despite the fact that she loves neither (1980a:32-34, 56-76). Her society exploits the difficult position of women under the patriarchal system. It frustrates any attempts at power struggles by women by making them act in contradictory ways (1980a:8-9, 56-60). Women such as Emma and Beatrix view each other as enemies instead of joining forces against the greater enemy: the society which manipulates them (1980a:8-10).

Pym uses colloquial language to describe Emma's oppression by patriarchal norms and conventions. This mimics the irrational and rushed way in which Emma pursues Graham Pettifer. Pym demonstrates that patriarchal norms and conventions are irrational, whereas women's own ideas are logical and coherent. At this point Emma is unable to think logically because she is oppressed by the patriarchal system:

There may be an unlimited number of things that can happen to the ordinary person, but there are only a few twists to the man-woman story. For instance, it would be more satisfactory if Graham could expand on the bare information contained in his letter ... That might help her to clarify her own, for she was not sure whether she wanted him or not.

(Pym, 1980a:120).

The use of understatement in the description of Emma's and Graham's love affair allows Pym to deromanticize what the patriarchal system would have us believe is the most romantic experience of all in life: the sexual love between men and women. Pym reveals the irony in Emma's reconciliation of two incompatible roles, that of detached anthropologist and emotionally entangled lover, through her use of a pompous tone in relation to Emma's anthropological efforts, and colloquial language in relation to Emma and Graham. There is very little 'romantic love' involved in Emma's and Graham's affair. This is clear from the derisive way in which Graham treats Emma: '[h]e started to kiss and fondle her in a rather abstracted way as if being with her could be no more than that' (Pym, 1980a:148). Their affair is a matter of convenience and availability. Pym appears to be subverting the patriarchal myth that sexual love will, or can, fulfil a woman's needs.

Graham Pettifer causes Emma much pain. His initial behaviour towards her encourages her to believe that he likes her for herself, rather than what she can do for him (Pym, 1980a:2-30). She realizes, as the novel progresses, that he wants food, accommodation and sex (1980a:32-34,111). Emma is little more than a commodity in this consumer society. Graham refuses to let Emma make any physical or emotional demands on him. His strategy is to disappear for a few days and then reappear (1980a:81). To Graham, Emma's sexuality is not part of her personality, but a separate aspect which is there to satisfy his needs (1980a: 111-112,170-171). Graham is unable to accept the challenge of a sexual relationship with Emma. He can only be affectionate when he leaves her: 'he took Emma in his arms with a warmth and affection he had not shown during his time at the cottage' (1980a:190). Emma's feeling of failure is reinforced by Graham's treatment of her: she believes that she is inadequate because she is not a brilliant anthropologist, she has not married and she is unsuccessful in love (1980a: 126-164). Graham does not face up to the problems in his relationship with his wife, or with Emma (1980a: 86-87). A similar

pattern of behaviour is found in Claudia Pettifer's refusal to discuss her marital problems with Emma (1980a: 126–129).

There are similarities between Tom Dagnall, the rector, and Mr Casaubon in *Middlemarch*. Both men are involved in life-long studies of things past. Tom studies the 'Deserted Medieval Village' (Pym, 1980a:21), while Casaubon is writing the Key to all Mythologies (Eliot, 1988: 39–41). Casaubon's marriage to Dorothea fails partly because Casaubon loves his work above all else:

I feed too much on the inward sources; I live too much with the dead. My mind is something like the ghost of an ancient, wandering about the world and trying mentally to construct it as it used to be ...

(Eliot, 1988:40)

Tom has a similar problem in *A Few Green Leaves*. He pays little attention to Emma (Pym, 1980:38). He hides in the past (1980a: 56–57) and is 'taken aback by [Emma's] frank way of speaking' (1980a:59). Tom quotes poetry to Emma in a bumbling manner (1980a:76). This embarrasses her and makes her feel inadequate. Moreover, Casaubon wishes to marry Dorothea because she will aid him in his pursuit of the Key to all Mythologies as a kind of assistant (Eliot, 1988: 87–88). Similarly, Tom wonders if Emma 'might be a good typist' (1980:7). Casaubon and Tom lack sexual energy (Eliot, 1988:66–67; Pym, 1980a:61–85). Tom's association with buried objects is in contrast to the vibrant images of fertility which abound in the village (Pym, 1980a:77, 84–85, 167–168). Tom is not even aware that Emma may have sexual needs. He represses his own rather inadequate sexuality by hiding his jealousy of Graham (1980a:124–125).

Indeed, neither Graham nor Tom understands Emma's sexual needs. Her sexual

frustration is symbolized by the 'slight rash on one of her hands' (1980a: 209). Although Tom likes Emma, he fails to enter into the relationship with enthusiasm (1980a: 176–178). Her need for love is not assuaged by Tom. By contrast, in the more romantic novel (*Middlemarch*) Dorothea initially loves Casaubon and only gradually becomes aware of his faults (Eliot, 1988:88, 228–319). Emma is aware of a lack in Tom from the beginning of their acquaintance. He is a passive and rather colourless figure in her eyes (Pym, 1980a:56–77). It is only when she is rejected by Graham that she considers Tom as a possible suitor (1980a:126–178). Much of her feeling for him is made up of pity (1980a:145). Like Graham, Tom proves inadequate to the challenge of a sexual relationship with Emma. I believe that the hope for the future which he expresses towards the end of the novel should be viewed cynically in the light of his behaviour in the novel as a whole (1980a:248–250).

I do not agree with Rossen's view that *An Academic Question* and *A Few Green Leaves* may describe melancholy situations, but that this is done with an essentially warm, comic approach (1986:158). Nor do I agree with Van Aswegen's assessment of *An Academic Question*, which suggests that it is an interstitial novel, not belonging to the good fun of the early novels, or to the darker later novels (1987:306). I think that both novels are tragedies rather than comedies, according to my earlier definition of 'tragedy'. I believe that tragedy excites our pity because of the misfortunes suffered by the heroines, and our terror because of some resemblance between the sufferer and ourselves (Aristotle, 1953:25). Pym's satiric tone, which characterizes her later works, adds to their tragedy, because Pym provides no definite solution to the problems which she attacks satirically. This sense of tragedy is partly due to Pym's awareness of approaching old age and death, especially when writing *A Few Green Leaves*. She wrote on 1 October 1979:

As I am not feeling well at the moment (more fluid) I find myself reflecting on the mystery of life and death and the way we all pass through this world in a kind of procession.

(Pym, 1984:331)

This focus on death and decay is evident in both *A Few Green Leaves* and *An Academic Question*. In *A Few Green Leaves* it is revealed in the mythical qualities of the once-governess to the De Tankerville family, Miss Vereker (Pym, 1980a:3). She returns to the village at the end of the novel, as if to remind the villagers that the old values have vanished. In *An Academic Question* the themes of decay and death are evident in Pym's descriptions of the dying missionary, Mr Stillingfleet (Pym, 1986b: 40–41).

I contend that what finally defines the novels as tragic is that the central protagonists in these novels are tragic figures. Pym employs an ironic tone as a further aid to her satiric aims, even though irony is usually incompatible with tragedy. Emma in *A Few Green Leaves* loses Graham Pettifer as suddenly as she has found him. He hardly says farewell. The last few lines (in the novel) exemplify Pym's ironic tone throughout this work: '[s]he could write a novel and even, as she was beginning to realise, embark on a love affair which need not necessarily be an unhappy one' (Pym, 1980a:249–250). These lines articulate a pessimistic outlook for the future. The chances of Emma completing a novel are slim, since she battles throughout *A Few Green Leaves* to apply herself to her anthropological survey, which she is familiar with, while the writing of a novel is something new. I also believe Pym makes it clear, during the course of the novel, that Emma lacks the imagination to write a successful novel. Patriarchy suppresses her imaginative leanings, making her creatively sterile, in contrast to the imaginative heroine in *Less than Angels*, Catherine Oliphant (Pym, 1993: 7–9). It is also unlikely that Emma could be happily married to

Tom, since they are not really compatible. Tom represents many of the qualities of days gone by, through his preoccupation with the deserted medieval village, whereas Emma is for the most part a modern woman. I do not envision a happy ending for Emma. Emma is deluding herself, hoping against hope that her life will become more stimulating and fulfilling. Emma has been driven into this impasse by patriarchal ideology and its restrictions.

Caroline Grimstone in *An Academic Question* is a tragic figure because she has lost faith in the integrity of her husband. Her disillusionment with him is revealed through the gradual death of the missionary, Mr Stillingfleet (Pym, 1986b:41). Alan manipulates Caroline into stealing the missionary's field-papers, and she must bear the burden of his guilt. As she watches the missionary slowly dying, she realizes that her feelings for Alan are also dying. At the end of the novel Caroline's acceptance of Alan is metaphorically associated with her acknowledgement of the passing of time, which numbs all pain: 'I thought how "ongoing" life was and was at that moment glad of it' (1986b: 182). This reinforces the themes of death and decay, which I have already mentioned.

In conclusion, I would argue that Pym portrays her central protagonists as both tragic figures and satiric targets in order to further her own subversion of the patriarchal system. She reveals that men and women are products of the patriarchal society which they live in. As a result of this, their lives cannot be anything but tragic in view of the limitations imposed on them by the patriarchal system. Pym lays the blame for the unsatisfactory situation, which Emma and Caroline find themselves in, partly at the individual's door, but mostly at society's feet.

Pym shows that men and women continue to perpetuate their unequal sexual roles, because

the patriarchal system has convinced each sex that this is the behaviour which the other sex expects from them, and that any other behaviour is unacceptable. Pym also suggests that in order to survive in patriarchal society, women need to uphold certain norms. They need to be receptive towards other people, and to look beneath the surface for others' inner qualities. Especially in view of the corrupt society of the 1970s, Pym's women need to have a set of values by which to live. Pym also reveals that although women in the 1970s no longer viewed love and marriage in a romantic way, as they did before the Second World War in Britain, they were still living under the influence of the patriarchal system. It had merely assumed a new guise.

Pym's use of satire and tragedy makes her a more vocal feminist than in her earlier novels, where Pym's light-hearted tone dilutes her statements against patriarchy. Pym presents a type of Utopia in the earlier novels, where tolerance is advocated. In the later novels, she presents a brand of dystopia, or despair, through the use of tragedy and satire. She suggests that despair has set in, and it will be difficult to escape from it.

Notes

1. Pym (1984:213).
2. Aristotle (1953:25).
3. See Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* for examples of classical tragedies: Clark and Wright (1989:882–920; 1007–1053). In my opinion, the central protagonists in these plays have fatal flaws: Hamlet has a melancholy constitution which is worsened by the corrupt state of Denmark, and Romeo and Juliet are doomed by the animosity between their families. It is possible to argue that these fatal flaws lead to the death of Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet.
4. Aristotle (1953:25).
5. Within the context of the two novels *An Academic Question* and *A Few Green Leaves*, Pym retells the hero-tale in relation to the central protagonists Caroline and Emma, but in an ironic way (Pym, 1980a:32–34, 76, 129–130; 1986b:1–7, 98–100). She uses the juxtaposition of colloquial language and formal register to undercut the romantic notions of the central protagonists and to satirize their perpetuation of inequality between the sexes.
6. See Pym, (1986b:100): '[w]e neither of us spoke until Alan put his arms round me and told me that this kind of thing couldn't possibly make a difference to us – it might even be a kind of enrichment of our marriage'. Alan's use of formal register is ironic because it supposedly indicates his nobility of intention and moral integrity. In the context of his faithlessness it loses its positive connotation.
7. See Clark and Wright (1989: 769;808).
8. Jung has been criticized by feminists for his sexist bias in writing about the anima and animus. See Wehr (1987:5, 64–65, 117–126).
9. See Pym (1984:215–289) for an understanding of her frustration at the rejection of *An Unsuitable Attachment* in 1963, and her experience of the literary wilderness for fourteen years.

CHAPTER FOUR
REJECTION OF THE 'EXCELLENT WOMAN' FIGURE :
LETTY, MARCIA AND LEONORA

In this chapter I show that in Pym's later novels, *The Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn*, she turns away from the 'Excellent Woman' as a suitable role for her heroines. The central protagonists which I discussed in Chapter Three deviate from the ideal of the 'Excellent Woman' because Pym believes that this 'perfect' type is no longer an appropriate role for women in the 1960s and 1970s in Britain. They assume the role of Modern Woman instead. This allows them to overthrow some patriarchal ideas, such as the notion that women should remain in the domestic sphere and not provide a challenge to men in the public sphere. Yet Pym portrays them as 'tragic-satiric' figures who are controlled by patriarchal society of the 1960s and 1970s, with its new methods of perpetuating gender inequalities.

Letty, Marcia and Leonora also reject the role of 'Excellent Woman', but in ways which differentiate them from the central protagonists discussed in the previous chapter. They assume the role of 'Ageing Women' in an unforgiving patriarchal society. The negative attitude of patriarchal society towards these old women means that they can no longer believe in the ideal of the 'Excellent Woman' as an appropriate way to express themselves, because their society does not encourage old women to help other people, and to be involved in the community. It considers them to be too old. Here Pym is targeting the tendency of contemporary society to worship youth and neglect age. Letty, Marcia and Leonora also adopt the roles of 'Fallen Women' and 'Formidable Women', because these roles allow them some status in a male-oriented society in which they are doubly disempowered: they are not only women, they are also old women. By adopting these roles, they take on masculine qualities. They assume the following socially defined

masculine qualities and roles: they are the decision-makers in the public and private spheres, and the initiators of relationships. Although both men's and women's lives are controlled by the patriarchal system, Letty, Marcia and Leonora establish themselves as astute players in the gender-political arena. This allows them some status in their society.

The central protagonists in *The Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn* possess some aspects of the 'Fallen Woman' figure. These heroines also share similarities with the 'Formidable Woman'. Pym's response to the quality of 'fallenness' is a complex one. She adopts a position from which she simultaneously understands, criticizes and condones the 'Fallen Woman'.

My use of the term 'Fallen Woman' is not intended to define a woman who has lost her reputation for sexual chastity. I mean this figure to represent the central protagonists' fall from grace in a moral and spiritual sense. As far as I can see, British society of the 1960s and 1970s must take as much responsibility for the moral failings of the main protagonists in these novels as the individual women themselves.

I define the figure of the 'Formidable Woman' as follows. This figure rejects the traditional gender roles which define women as weak in a physical and emotional sense, and men as strong. She assumes qualities usually associated with the stronger sex, such as emotional and financial independence, and the pursuit and domination of the opposite sex. For example, Leonora Eyre is a wealthy woman, who is free of the shackles of economic dependence. She relentlessly pursues and dominates the opposite sex. In her portrayal Pym satirizes the overwhelming drive within certain people's psyches to dominate others. Letty and Marcia both have vocations, which allow them some economic freedom. They may appear to be pale shadows of their male colleagues, but in fact they are resourceful women: rather than waste time by becoming embroiled in arguments, they act

independently of these colleagues. '[Letty and Marcia] did not speak of or break into gossip about the two men [Norman and Edwin], who were accepted as part of the office furniture and not considered worthy of comment' (Pym, 1980b:11). The 'Formidable Woman' operates within patriarchal rules, but from the unorthodox position of a male gender role.

Pym associates these 'terrifying' women (men are afraid of them because of their aggressive pursuit of their goals) with the inauguration of a media-oriented society in the late 1950s. By the 1960s and 1970s, many women had adopted the role of 'Formidable Woman' due to the influence exerted on them by visual media such as television. Ironically, Leonora appears to have associations with the Victorian age: she loves antiques and spacious old houses. By contrast, Leonora's behaviour has more in common with the 1970s world of advertising and television. She markets herself in the best manner possible (Pym, 1980c:13). The 'Formidable Woman' is also defined by her dislike of the 'Excellent Woman'. The 'Excellent Woman' is a threat to her attempts to discard traditional gender roles for women. This is because the 'Excellent Woman' is the embodiment of media-oriented values which constitute a traditional gender role for women. Examples of this animosity between the 'Excellent Woman' and the 'Formidable Woman' occur in *Quartet in Autumn*, in the relationship of Janice Brabner (an 'Excellent Woman') and Marcia Ivory (a 'Formidable Woman'); and in *The Sweet Dove Died*, in the rivalry between Leonora Eyre (a 'Formidable Woman') and her neighbour Meg (an 'Excellent Woman'). The 'Formidable Woman' cannot share the faith of the 'Excellent Woman' in wholesome family values, in friendships, and in a certain type of humanist morality which dictates that people should help each other as fellow human beings. British society in the 1960s and 1970s has destroyed her belief in these values.

The categories of 'Fallen Woman' and 'Formidable Woman' represent developments in Pym's investigation of roles for women. The 'Excellent Woman' figure is no longer

appropriate because Pym wishes to satirize the lack of any standards or values in the version of the patriarchal system that prevailed in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, through the presentation of central protagonists who also lack values. The 'Excellent Woman' figure is inappropriate for this purpose because of her high standards of moral conduct and community-centred values. Furthermore, the 'Excellent Woman' figure is also unsuitable because Pym wishes to show how patriarchy in the 1960s and 1970s has changed its guise to allow women to experiment with new gender roles. Patriarchy still maintains control over women despite these changes. The 'Excellent Woman' figure is premised on a belief that there is only one role for women: the traditional female role of home – maker and community helper. The 'Excellent Woman' figure is appropriate for Pym's earlier revelations about British society in the 1940s and 1950s, when Britain was in the shadow of the Second World War, and women had no time to question their position in the patriarchal society of the period (which I discussed in Chapters One and Two).

Whereas in earlier novels Pym shows the role of 'spinsterhood' in a positive way, in the later novels Pym reveals that without the psychological buffer of 'Excellent Womanhood', women tend to view spinsterhood negatively. In these later novels, Pym's heroines are ageing or old women, and Pym depicts the effect that this has on their self-images, and how it influences their perceptions of the roles of 'Excellent Woman' and spinster.

Letty and Marcia in *Quartet in Autumn* and Leonora in *The Sweet Dove Died* are not 'Excellent Women'. They do not possess certain fundamental qualities of 'Excellent Womanhood'. These heroines do not efficiently control their domestic space; rather, they are imprisoned by it. In the second place, they do not have any ties with the Church. Connected to this is their lack of social spirituality, since they do not consider the needs of others, and are not involved with helping others in the community. Pym's main protagonists also lack mothering qualities, which, as I have argued, is a central aspect of

the 'Excellent Woman' figure. In contrast, as I discuss in Chapter Two, Wilmet (*A Glass of Blessings*) and Mildred (*Excellent Women*) are archetypal 'Excellent Women'. Their domestic space is their own private world in which they excel, and where they have absolute control. They also attend Church regularly, and are involved in Church activities. Furthermore, they possess social spirituality, because they care about the needs of others in the community. The characters' helping others in their communities is a manifestation (or even a sublimation, since most of them are childless) of their maternal qualities. The heroines in *The Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn* assume two new roles: they are 'Fallen' and 'Formidable Women'.

'Fallen Women' appear in all of Pym's novels, but it is only in *Quartet in Autumn* and *The Sweet Dove Died* that Pym has 'Fallen Women' as main protagonists. Some minor characters adopt the roles of 'Formidable' and 'Fallen Women' in the earlier novels. In *Excellent Women*, Esther Clovis is a 'Formidable Woman' (Pym, 1989:176). She is much more competent than the men around her, and she has a very important position within the discipline of anthropology. Allegra Gray in *Excellent Women* is a 'Fallen Woman', because she has vices for which British society in the 1950s is to blame. Although *Excellent Women* was written in the 1950s, Allegra Gray is a modern woman. She has no moral code: her friendships with other women, such as Winifred Malory and Mildred, are intended to create suitable allies in the search for a husband. Her imminent marriage to Julian Malory is based on material considerations rather than love (1989: 120–121). By contrast with the 'Excellent Women' of the earlier novels, Pym's main protagonists in *Quartet in Autumn* and *The Sweet Dove Died* reveal their lack of 'excellence' in various ways. For example, they cannot come to terms with their spinsterhood. This is because the heroines are ageing women within a totally corrupt and disintegrating patriarchal society (Pym, 1980b:21). The perspective of the central protagonists is used by Pym as a vehicle for probing patriarchal attitudes. The main protagonists' negative attitude towards

their own state is an internalized version of the way society at large responds to them.

Letty and Marcia in *Quartet in Autumn* display their lack of social spirituality in a number of ways. They work in an office with two men, Norman and Edwin, but do not attempt to show any interest in them as individuals (Pym, 1980b:6). They seem afraid to interact with them, and this appears to be because their society does not foster a caring attitude between people. Pym shows that Edwin and Norman are just as self-absorbed and unwilling to befriend Letty and Marcia as the women are. The social worker, Janice Brabner, who visits Marcia, also has a negative and unsympathetic attitude towards people in Marcia's situation: '[p]eople like that don't seem to want to be helped' (1980b:41). Marcia perpetuates the cycle of unfriendliness, by refusing to communicate with the social worker (1980b:49-56).

Patriarchy has the capacity to destroy friendships between women, as is evident in the friendship between Marcia and Letty, in *Quartet in Autumn*. Each manifests a lack of sympathy towards the other, by using animal imagery to describe her counterpart. Letty thinks that Marcia is unapproachable. She describes her as a kind of tree-climbing animal, like a lemur. Marcia in turn views Letty as an old sheep (Pym, 1980b:12). Pym's use of animal terminology to describe Letty's and Marcia's perceptions of one another is intended to be comic. Her humour is effective as a strategy for social subversion. Pym's discourse presents Letty and Marcia as animals in a zoo. Each one is forced to interact with the other, since they are caged in a confined space. The author suggests by means of this trope that patriarchy cages women, and gives caricatures of them. Their characteristic traits are over-emphasized: Marcia's reticence is stressed by representing her as a strange, tree-climbing animal, who is separated from the earth-bound Letty. Letty's docile and rather simple nature is emphasized by likening her to a sheep. Pym uses animal imagery to show how patriarchal society tends to destroy connections between women. By fostering

hostility and suspicion amongst women, patriarchy prevents women from discovering the underlying cause of their unhappiness, which is the patriarchal system itself.

Pym portrays Letty as having two sides to her nature. She is to some extent redeemable, because she does feel some guilt at her indifference, and this reveals her humanity. On the other hand, many of her ponderings suggest a view of the world and human relationships as 'Nature red in tooth and claw' (Kermode and Hollander, 1973:1240). Pym depicts patriarchal society as at least being partly responsible for Letty's lack of response towards others. Letty is typical of her society.

The patriarchal system has created Letty in a number of ways. It produces conflict between women by giving more status to those who are married, and less to spinsters. Letty exemplifies this trend as she lives in the shadow of her friend's marital success. Letty's life is really the story of how her friend Marjorie searches for and finds husbands. Letty lives with a continual feeling of envy and a lack of status. She also lives vicariously: the saddest aspect of Letty's situation is that she is reduced to living through her friend's experiences instead of enjoying her own relationships (Pym, 1980b:25,37-39).

In the patriarchal system, women are associated with the private, domestic realm, where relationships are important, while men are associated with the public domain of achievement. As I mentioned in Chapter One, Poovey throws light on this division. For her, women's suppression is directly connected to the rise of the bourgeois work ethic in England during the seventeenth century. Women were separated from their means of production. Poovey traces this process in detail (1984:8-30). Women and the domestic sphere are devalued by their association with each other.¹ In Letty's case, the separation between the public and the private realms results in an irreconcilable chasm between her office job and her private

life. Whilst she is working, she has the definitive status of a working woman, but when she retires, she has no status in her society. This loss of status when she retires explains her search for something to keep her occupied.

Pym's humanist brand of feminism is evident in the way she portrays her heroines: they grapple with a form of middle-class consciousness which consists of an awareness of guilt, and suffering in their society. Leonora, for example, represses any middle-class morality which she possesses. Leonora Eyre in *The Sweet Dove Died* lacks even the guilty conscience which Letty has, because she does not reach out to others. Veach Sadler views her as perhaps Pym's least sympathetic character (1985:143). I agree with this assessment. Leonora makes a pretence of friendship towards those she considers suitable, and they are deceived, but her motive is self-advancement rather than friendship (Pym, 1980c:25). Leonora rejects any emotional warmth from other people, and she scorns her friend Meg's selfless devotion to a faithless homosexual friend, Colin (1980c:13-15).

By portraying Letty, Marcia and Leonora in this anti-social way, Pym is creating new roles for her central protagonists to replace the role of 'Excellent Woman'. Pym is convinced that the 'Excellent Woman' figure has become inappropriate and needs to be discarded, because it is a role which women adopted in order to attain status in a strongly traditional patriarchal society in Britain, in the period leading up to the Second World War, and in the ten years which followed the war. The patriarchal system created the role of 'Excellent Woman' in order to strengthen the cause of the war, and make its actions appear heroic. Women adopted this role because it allowed them to think of themselves as heroines on the home front. By the 1960s, women had seen the negative impact of the war on British social life. Family values were disintegrating, corruption in the Welfare State was rife, and all the ideals which British men and women had fought for had been shown to be illusory. The war had also destroyed the patriarchal belief that women should remain in

the domestic realm, and men in the public sphere. Women no longer had a traditional position in society. They sought new roles to define their changed position in British society of the 1960s and 1970s. Women's search for new roles, paradoxically, served the interests of patriarchy.² Men regarded women as a threat in the workplace. This had the result of strengthening gender bias amongst men, and creating a misogynistic attitude towards women. This trend is evident in Edwin's and Norman's attitude towards Marcia and Letty in their office environment. They analyze the two women in a defensive and critical manner (Pym, 1980b:7-11).

Patriarchy also creates conflict between women in the workplace, in order to distract them from improving themselves and from targeting the attitudes of men as the real source of their discomfort. Women's adoption of new roles allows them to believe that they are free from patriarchal inequalities, while, in fact, perpetuating the deeper structures of inequality. In ways typical of their society, Letty, Marcia and Leonora adopt the roles of 'Fallen Woman' and 'Formidable Woman'. Unlike their 'Excellent Woman' counterparts, Letty, Marcia and Leonora are not treated as drudges or confidantes because the women themselves do not create those possibilities. Instead, they keep others at a distance or deliberately confuse them.

I contend that Pym mourns the loss of the tolerant attitude which the 'Excellent Woman' showed towards other people. The 'Excellent Woman' role is no longer valid for Pym's artistic ends because a character whose portrayal serves the ends of social critique cannot be an 'Excellent Woman', a figure who uncritically embodies social expectations and norms. Pym uses the 'unlikely' later heroines as vehicles for social critique. This possibility is not open to Pym if she continues to use the 'Excellent Woman' role for her main protagonists. The earlier 'Excellent Women' figures are not suitable vehicles for social critique because they are satisfied to remain in traditional gender roles, and they

have a definite sense of direction in terms of set rules of conduct and a rigid value system. They are products of an upper middle-class background, in which the Anglican Church and domestic tranquillity feature strongly. Pym wishes to indicate that British society has lost its values and sense of direction; as a result, she needs to present her women in roles where they have no definitive values, or code of conduct. The 'Excellent Woman' figure is symptomatic of the 1940s and 1950s in Britain, but had lost its validity in the changed circumstances of the 1960s and 1970s.

Pym aims to evaluate British society of the 1960s and 1970s in her later works. In order to achieve this, she needs to make her women characters symptomatic of the period: they need to be modern women with cynical attitudes towards themselves and their society. The 'Excellent Woman' figure does not offer this possibility, since 'Excellent Women' are conditioned to uphold the rigid social and moral code of British patriarchal society without questioning its validity. Their attitude towards their society and other people is, in many ways, bright-eyed and naive.

Since the 'Excellent Woman' role is no longer valid, this leaves few options for Pym, as a self-styled chronicler of positions for women. She can present women as modern heroines: that is, as women who are highly successful in the public and private sphere, and who overcome gender inequalities to attain equality with men. However, she does not choose this option because it would not be typical of women in the 1960s and 1970s. Pym's art would lose its impact if her central protagonists were isolated examples of women, and did not typify women in her society. The other option, which Pym chooses, is, I believe, more honest. She places her central protagonists in roles which more authentically portray their

plight: they are 'Fallen Women' and 'Formidable Women' who are struggling to define their value systems and their status in their society, and to free themselves from the deep-seated influence of traditional female values, which still played a part in British society of the 1960s and 1970s.

Pym's deployment of a particular character role leads to negative qualities being foregrounded. The 'Fallen Women' and 'Formidable Women' ignore the plight of other men and women. The imperviousness which they show towards others' suffering is not a strength. Pym's own choice was to practise her own particular brand of social spirituality throughout her life. She had many friends who helped her (and vice versa) through the difficult times in her life, as is evident from diary entries in *A Very Private Eye*.³

The narrator of *The Sweet Dove Died* does not blame Leonora at all for her self-centredness. Pym presents her self-centredness entirely as an effect of patriarchal society. Leonora does not seek friendships with other women because patriarchy creates conflict between women in order to keep them apart. Leonora feels, correctly, that she has more status in patriarchal society if she keeps herself aloof from other women. This is a response to the creation of hostility between women in a patriarchal situation. Leonora justifies her aloofness by cultivating qualities which make her more valuable in a patriarchal society, such as wealth, an air of culture and learning, and beauty. Pym satirizes Leonora in order to target the patriarchal society which produces women like her. Leonora thinks that if she presents herself to other people as an example of a perfect woman, then this will result in admiration rather than pity or criticism. Ironically, other people like Meg, James and Ned do pity Leonora. They realize that underneath the facade of aloofness, Leonora is a lonely old woman. The narrator probably shares their sympathy, although not in an unqualified manner.

Leonora is narcissistic because it is a means of gaining status in a patriarchal society in which she has lost status because she has failed to marry, and she is now an ageing woman. In her portrayal of Leonora, Pym suggests an analogy between women's youth and currency in a kind of 'marriage market'. Leonora's advanced age represents debased coinage in the 'marriage market' of the time. She battles, as do all women who have lost their exchange value, to attract the same number of suitors who flocked around her in her youth. In fact, her only suitor is the ageing Humphrey Boyce.

Pym portrays the inhumanity of the British patriarchal society of the 1960s and 1970s through the behaviour of her central protagonists. They are 'Fallen Women', even monsters of inhumanity, perhaps, but their fall is symptomatic of the greater canker within their society. Examples of social ills are the uncaring attitude of the Welfare State towards old people, the way businesses use women and men throughout their working life, and then discard them when they are old, and the way society devalues women when they are no longer young and attractive. Jacobs attests to this. He argues that ageing and death run like a leitmotif through Pym's later novels, and in particular *The Sweet Dove Died* (1988:268). Jacobs puts forward a strong argument for progression in Pym's novels. Although he neglects to illuminate Pym's feminist strategies, he provides an incisive social perspective on her work. He shows how comedy, and later satire, may reveal social problems. For example, through comedy Pym portrays sterility in relationships as a widespread condition. It is not limited to Leonora Eyre. This produces the angst that Jacobs perceives in Pym's later novels. Leonora's selfishness, then, is more understandable since it is the product of her society.

In Pym's earlier novels, the Church (usually the Anglican Church), provides the 'Excellent Women' of these novels with a network of support and spiritual input. In the later *Quartet in Autumn*, Pym implies that even if Letty and Marcia attended Church, (which they do

not (Pym, 1980b:10),) they would not receive any social support from that sphere. The Church has become faithless and corrupt.⁴ This is revealed by the presentation of Edwin, a member of the parish church council. He has certain duties to perform, such as visiting old people who are on their own. Nevertheless, Edwin fails to visit Marcia, who is in need of help (1980b:40–41). In effect, the patriarchal system estranges Edwin from his friends Letty, Marcia and Norman.

In situations like the above, Pym implies that the Church is not able to apply its teachings to the modern context in which it finds itself. Edwin in *Quartet in Autumn* knows that the major problem for elderly people is loneliness, but he never thinks that he could help to solve this problem (Pym, 1980b:9). Pym's central protagonists have to endure multiple kinds of alienation, especially from each other. They compete for the little status that is left to them as old women. They feel that they still have some status as women if they can define themselves as being better-off than other women in similar situations. The main protagonists are alienated from younger couples with families, who do not understand them (1980b:42,54–55). They are also alienated from working colleagues because of rivalry for status in their jobs (1980b:11–12). Furthermore, they are estranged from the Welfare State in which they live. The patriarchal state of the 1960s and 1970s in Britain labels the heroines as 'pensioners'. These women are viewed by the state as the useless end-products of a lifetime of work for the state. The term 'pensioner' defines their loss of status. The central protagonists are also alienated from roles such as young woman, mother, housewife, middle-aged woman and working woman because of their age. They are left in an existential vacuum.

Marcia does not have access to the support of the Church and seeks an alternative. She elevates the surgeon, Dr Strong, to the position of God (Pym, 1980b:19). Marcia gains a false sense of security from the superficial attentions of Dr Strong. She cannot find a sense

of self as a woman in her belief in Dr Strong. She adheres to the patriarchal belief that men are all-powerful controllers of a woman's fate. She submerges her own sense of self beneath the stifling cloak of Dr Strong's patriarchal domination. This leads to illness, disintegration of the mind, and finally death. Ironically, whilst Marcia is rebelling against convention (represented by the 'Excellent Woman' figure), she is in fact submitting to the most conventional feature of patriarchal society – the psychological and physical domination of men over women.

Letty, Marcia and Leonora do not attend Church. In biblical terms they have sinned, by replacing God with the worship of idols.⁵ The patriarchal society of the 1960s and 1970s sees idolatry as a sin but paradoxically it forces the heroines into this position. There is irony in the fact that the Church condemns idolatry and yet, paradoxically, almost forces women to worship secular things, since it does not provide sufficient support. For example, Letty rejects religion in favour of hobbies such as shopping and reading. Leonora worships beautiful objects and Marcia idolizes Dr Strong. By portraying Letty, Marcia and Leonora as sheep who have strayed from their flock (the Anglican Church), Pym is using the decay of the Church as a justification for the central protagonists' loss of faith and social spirituality (Pym, 1980b:55–57).

I make a connection in Chapter Two between the 'Excellent Woman' and the mother-figure. Motherly behaviour gives those earlier central protagonists a degree of power in their society. Mildred Lathbury's motherly behaviour gives her a degree of power over other women, such as Allegra Gray and Helena Napier. These women regard her as a wise mother-figure and seek her advice. Similarly, Wilmet's motherly behaviour in *A Glass of Blessings* gains her the respect and admiration of men such as Rodney and Piers and of women such as Sybil and Mary.

Letty, Marcia and Leonora, by contrast with the earlier protagonists, are not mother-figures. Their lack of motherly behaviour means that these central protagonists lose some power in their society. Men and women in their society associate their lack of motherly behaviour with a lack of status. This is why Ned openly attacks Leonora about her relationship with James. He realizes that she is vulnerable because of her lack of status. His attitude towards her implies that she is an old woman who does not even possess maternal qualities (Pym, 1980c:130–133). Ned's comments imply that patriarchal society's basic requirement for women is that they should either mother their own children or display motherly, nurturing behaviour towards others in their society. Another example is the fact that the social worker, Janice Brabner, does not want to visit Marcia. She feels that it is hardly worthwhile to visit someone with as little status as Marcia. The absence of motherly behaviour on the part of Marcia would mean that Janice would gain no maternal comfort or praise for her efforts. Janice's status would be diminished in the eyes of her society. It appears that disempowered women in their patriarchal society interact willingly with women who possess more status and power in order to gain some status from these empowered women. Correspondingly, they prefer to ignore women with less status.

Leonora Eyre in *The Sweet Dove Died* deludes James into thinking that she is a mother-figure, whom he can confide in (Pym, 1980c:9). James thinks that Leonora likes him for himself, but she treats him as a work of art that she can possess. In a similar way, Gilbert Osmond in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* deludes Isabel Archer into marrying him. Isabel thinks that Osmond collects works of art because he is a man of great sensitivity and culture, and a true aesthete. Once she has married him she discovers that he is a vulgar art collector, who accumulates art works for appearance's sake only.⁶ He has married her because to him she is a beautiful work of art which he can display to society: '[h]is ideal was a conception of high prosperity and propriety, of the aristocratic life, which she now saw that he deemed himself always, in essence at least, to have led'

(James, 1987:418). Pym blames the materialistic British patriarchal society in the 1960s and 1970s for Leonora's accumulation of beautiful objects, for the sake of status which is denied to women of her age.

Patriarchal society gives status and power to those people who can afford to surround themselves with beautiful objects. Leonora has more status than other women, like Miss Foxe and Phoebe, because she has a house filled with beautiful objects, and because of her association with the young and good-looking James Boyce (Pym, 1980c:19). Evidence of how beautiful objects bring power to Leonora is found in her reluctance to let Phoebe have a fruitwood mirror (1980c:79,103-114). This mirror reinforces her status as a beautiful, ageless woman because she appears youthful in its reflection. It is as if the power and status which the mirror brings her prevents her from seeing her true self in its depths. Leonora's conflict with Miss Foxe is also an aspect of a broader power struggle. Leonora tries to force Miss Foxe, who boards with her, to leave her prized Victoriana behind when she leaves (1980c:84-85,99-103). A power struggle ensues, but Miss Foxe retains some status by taking her Victoriana with her. The real issue is not the object, but the status that it represents and of which Leonora feels deprived.

Leonora is a 'Fallen Woman' living out the vices of her society. In order to gain status in her society, she overlooks the aesthetic beauty of objects and collects them merely for material gain. She sees James's youth and external beauty, but is unable to appreciate his inner beauty. She is unable to find beauty in natural things, such as the unplanned love between Phoebe and James. Leonora lacks feelings and is therefore limited, like Gilbert Osmond. She is a product of her society, 'of high prosperity and propriety' (James, 1987:418).

Letty in *Quartet in Autumn* prefers to think of herself as an attractive older woman, rather than a mother – figure (Pym, 1980b:94). The role of femme fatale appeals to her, but it is in fact her friend Marjorie who lives out this role (1980b:35–39,46–47). Letty acts out this role in her imagination. Letty's vicarious experience of relationships may be connected to the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy. According to Bruno, '[f]antasy is also one of the classical defence mechanisms identified by psychoanalysis. The process of imagination can be used to distort reality and artificially enhance one's self-esteem' (1986:83). In a manner similar to the mechanism described by Bruno, Letty feels threatened by the lack of status which she has in her society. Fantasy is a defence mechanism to shelter her battered ego (Pym, 1980b:24–26).

The use of fantasy as a defence mechanism is also a characteristic of the 'Excellent Women' in Pym's earlier novels. Letty and the earlier 'Excellent Women' experience their sexuality in the realm of fantasy: they imagine marriage to a chosen man, who may still feature in their lives (Pym, 1980b:24–26;1979:11). Letty uses her experience of sexuality to gain status in her society (1980b:62–63). The 'Excellent Women' in the earlier novels also enhance their self-esteem by living out their sexuality vicariously. The earlier heroines also repress those aspects of their lives which contribute to their lack of self-esteem. Baddeley avers that '[t]he psychoanalytic view of forgetting is that it is a symptom of repression, a mechanism we use to exclude unacceptable thoughts and recollections from consciousness' (1982:65). Mildred in *Excellent Women* and Wilmet in *A Glass of Blessings* concentrate on the roles of married woman and 'Excellent Woman' in order to forget incidents associated with pain and anxiety. Marcia in *Quartet in Autumn* also experiences her sexuality vicariously, by observing Norman closely and following him around (supposedly without his knowledge) (Pym, 1980b:22–23). Dulcie, the 'Excellent Woman' in *No Fond Return of Love*, uses investigative techniques to find out more about Aylwin Forbes (Pym, 1992:50–52). The difference between the two types of investigation is that

Dulcie seeks to marry Aylwin, whereas Marcia wants to employ fantasy as a recourse to her sexuality rather than risking a full involvement (Pym, 1980b:31,33,112–113).

One of the positive qualities of the 'Excellent Woman' figure is that she effectively controls her domestic space. Marleen S. Barr explores this aspect of patriarchal oppression in *Feminist Fabulation*. Barr's feminist interpretation has a geographical aspect: women's counter-ideology emerges in their ability to conquer and appropriate their own space. Barr makes the following point in relation to those one might call 'Non-Excellent Women', who are victims of patriarchal assumptions: '[these] women often passively fill instead of creat[ing] space' (1992:112). This is the case with Letty, Marcia and Leonora. By being passive, they fail to use their domestic space to empower themselves. The earlier 'Excellent Women', such as Belinda and Harriet Bede in *Some Tame Gazelle*, gain status because they have complete control over their domestic space. In this space, they are free from sexism, and from the social and economic discrimination in the public sphere. They are not threatened by disempowering experiences which occur in public places because they are able to return to the safety of the home. Belinda, who faces a life of subjection to the Bishop of Mbawawa if she accepts his offer of marriage, retreats instead to the domestic sphere, where she controls her own life: cooking, cleaning, reading and entertaining on her own terms (Pym, 1978:11,17,189).

By contrast, Letty in *Quartet in Autumn* is not empowered by her domestic space because she does not view it as a refuge from the gender discrimination which she faces in the workplace. The bed-sitter environment, which she lives in, is an extension of the economic and social discrimination which she experiences in the public sphere (Pym, 1980b:65). She feels that her domestic space is not her own, since it is too small for her to cook proper meals, to entertain friends, or to decorate properly (1980b:24). This domestic sphere negates any control which Letty has over her life. Consequently, she tries to escape from

this environment as often as possible by going to work, by visiting the library and her friend. These attempts do not succeed because she cannot attain status in these places either, as patriarchy is even more invasive in the public than the private sphere (1980b:8–11).

Marcia's home is linked to a nightmare. She remains largely confined to her rambling house. In Freudian terms, the open spaces in the house represent female body openings. Marcia is surrounded by empty milkbottles and tinned foods, which she hoards (Pym, 1980b:27–29). These hoarded and buried objects are phallic symbols which represent Marcia's repressed sexuality. By endowing Marcia's home with nightmarish qualities, Pym is using elements of the Gothic novel in a new way, as Brontë does in *Villette*. In *Villette*, the heroine of the novel, Lucy Snowe, is faced with the recurring nightmare of the buried nun who haunts her. It is only when she comes to terms with her repressed sexuality that the nightmare ends.⁷ In the Gothic novel, the nightmare which the heroine faces is engendered by an authoritative male figure. The nightmare ends when the heroine submits to this figure. In *Villette*, the nightmare ends when the heroine takes charge of her life and comes to terms with her sexuality. Her domestic sphere is then a place of empowerment, and it loses its nightmarish qualities. Brontë uses elements of the Gothic novel to undermine the patriarchal overtones in these novels, and make a feminist statement.⁸

Unlike Lucy Snowe, Marcia is unable to come to terms with her sexuality. She continues to repress it by repeatedly and obsessively hoarding objects (Pym, 1980b:88,121). Her nightmare does not end. It worsens as she loses control of her life totally, and descends into madness (Pym, 1980b:126–128). Marcia's loss of control of her domestic space, as portrayed through her hoarding impulse, entails losing any empowerment which she might have received if her domestic space had been a haven for her, rather than a place of continued patriarchal repression. Unlike Lucy Snowe in *Villette*, Marcia never realizes that

patriarchy can only imprison women if they allow it to. The fetters which imprison Marcia are a product of the patriarchal society which has shaped her mindset. The fact that she moves away from rationality into madness means that patriarchy gains an even more powerful hold over her mind towards the end of her life. Pym suggests through her decline into insanity that patriarchy itself is insane.

Marcia's actions in *Quartet in Autumn* are redolent of surrender to irrational unconscious forces, which take over her psyche. Pym does not condone such surrender because it reinforces the patriarchal idea that women, by their very natures, are irrational creatures who are ruled by their emotions. Pym supports rational behaviour from her central protagonists because this allows them to see through the imprisoning ideology which the patriarchal system perpetrates, and to overcome it.

Leonora thinks that she has control over her domestic space, and that she is therefore personally empowered. She believes that having control over her domestic space means accumulating beautiful objects, and, as Meg defines it: '[j]ust living in your perfect house, leading a gracious and elegant life' (Pym, 1980c:51–52). In fact, Leonora is just as imprisoned by patriarchal assumptions as other people. She does not have control over her domestic sphere. The patriarchal system dictates the appropriateness of the elegant life she lives. The décor of her house, and the social activities which occur within it, are all streamlined by the regulations of patriarchal society.

Belinda and Harriet Bede's house in *Some Tame Gazelle* is described as a place of warmth and homeliness (Pym, 1978:16–17). Leonora's house in *The Sweet Dove Died*, by contrast, is like a too-perfect work of art: sterile and cold (Pym, 1980c:51). This is because Belinda's and Harriet's personalities lend warmth to their house, whereas Leonora allows

society to dictate her behaviour in her house. Although she does not realize it, she is a prisoner in her domestic space.

Sexual repression is a link between all Pym's main protagonists. The earlier heroines, like Belinda in *Some Tame Gazelle* and Dulcie in *No Fond Return of Love*, initially repress their sexuality, but do come to terms with it at the ends of their respective novels. Belinda, who has buried her feelings for the Archdeacon, allows these feelings to re-emerge thirty years later. She suddenly realizes that she does not want to be married to the Archdeacon, and is happy living with her sister. Dulcie allows her sexuality to re-emerge as her relationship with Aylwin Forbes develops. These 'Excellent Women' come to terms with their sexuality, but usually choose to remain 'Excellent Women,' serving others rather than entering into sexually active relationships. (Pym, 1978:251;1992:251–254).

The later heroines in *Quartet in Autumn* and *The Sweet Dove Died* repress their sexuality throughout these novels. Marcia metaphorically buries her sexuality in the cupboards of her house, and Letty lives out her sexuality vicariously in the observation of Marjorie (Pym, 1980b:35–36;54–55). Leonora has a phobic reaction to sex. This is revealed by her reaction to a totem pole when she goes into the country with Humphrey Boyce. Her fear of a sexual relationship with Humphrey is displaced onto the totem pole. She thinks '[w]hat a hideous phallic symbol' (1980c:35).

Leonora uses James's confused sexuality to create a relationship with him which she knows will involve no sexual contact (Pym, 1980c:58–59). Jacobs argues, in connection with Leonora, that 'her sexual frigidity is symptomatic of an almost obsessive need to keep a safe distance between herself and her environment' (1988:262). I agree with Jacobs's sentiments. Leonora's frigidity is one of the ways in which she keeps people at a distance.

This is a form of empowerment, because it allows her to see herself as a perfect work of art with more status than those around her. Her house, wherein she collects beautiful objects, is also symptomatic of her sexual frigidity: it resembles an ivory tower in both the literal and the figurative sense.

James's relationship with Phoebe (Pym, 1980c:39–41) throws light on Leonora's sexuality. There are Freudian overtones here.⁹ Leonora is a mother-figure to James. She is jealous of his attachment to Phoebe (1980c:106–107). Phoebe is a sexually active character (1980c:38–39). She is a projection of Leonora's repressed sexuality. Leonora would like a sexual relationship with James, but is afraid that this will destroy her role as an emotionally aloof and 'Formidable Woman'. Possibly unconsciously, James desires Leonora, but represses these feelings, and chooses Phoebe instead. He recognizes the link between the two women: '[i]t gave him an uneasy feeling, as if the two women in his life were merging together in some curious way' (1980c:54).

Leonora does not want a committed relationship with any man. She is a 'Formidable Woman' who wishes to be entirely in control. Her behaviour has echoes of Nietzsche's will-to-power.¹⁰ She wishes to gain status by controlling the lives of other people, such as James, Meg, Miss Foxe and Phoebe (Pym, 1980c:103–104,116–117). James escapes from Leonora because Ned has stronger will-to-power than she does (1980c:132–133). In the end, Leonora only has power over the objects in her house, and over Humphrey Boyce, to a limited extent (1980c:181,188). Nietzsche sees the will-to-power as a universal feature of human nature.¹¹ Pym portrays the appearance of the will-to-power amongst women as a side-effect of patriarchal domination which is the response to and counterpart of a male will-to-power. Although men may have oppressed women first, women have not been blameless and have adopted male strategies and pathologies as well. Leonora believes that if she asserts her will over others, she will achieve more power in her society. In fact, she

loses power by attempting to force her will on James when he leaves her entirely. Pym implicitly asks the reader to adopt a balanced, unbiased view of Leonora. Patriarchy deludes women like Leonora into a false sense of status and power. In Leonora's case, the delusion provides such a strong (but false) sense of power that she never escapes from it.

I contend that there is a conflict in the psyches of Letty, Marcia and Leonora, between the predominance of the 'Excellent Woman' figure and the 'Fallen Woman'. I think that the 'Fallen Woman' figure dominates within these later protagonists' psyches. I disagree with Jacobs's views on this issue: he asserts that the later central protagonists are still 'Excellent Women', but shoddier versions of their earlier counterparts:

There is no question that Pym's last excellent women are not as eloquent as her first ones, perhaps because social conditions have grown so overwhelmingly that they are deprived even of the words to articulate their plight.

(1988:244)

In particular, Jacobs views Letty in *Quartet in Autumn* as that novel's 'Excellent Woman'. I disagree with this argument. I argue, in contrast, that Pym totally rejects the role of 'Excellent Woman' for these later central protagonists. By doing this, she avoids using the term 'Excellent Woman' in a condescending and ironic fashion. Jacobs suggests that Pym still uses the 'language of patriarchy' (1988:23) to define her later heroines. I contend that Pym uses a new feminist language to portray these characters. Jacobs argues that the 'Excellent Woman' is one who has not satisfied the social imperatives of attracting and holding a husband (1988:23). Wilmet, in *A Glass of Blessings*, is a counter-example to Jacobs's argument that 'Excellent Women' are necessarily unmarried. Pym avoids the negative connotations of the label 'Excellent Woman', by denying its relevance for her later protagonists.

In my reading, Letty, Marcia and Leonora are 'Formidable Women' rather than 'Excellent Women'. They possess qualities which are usually associated with men. The 'Formidable Woman', according to Wilkinson Whitney, is strong-minded, self-sufficient and usually independent enough not to care about any pressure from the community to conform to 'Excellent Womanhood' or wifhood (1989:75). The portrayal of Leonora supports this argument. She does not submit her will to that of any other person. She adheres to her principles throughout *The Sweet Dove Died*. She is determined to make her life a success, even without James. His loss does not break her spirit, or destroy her. If anything, it makes her stronger (Pym, 1980c:183-188). In addition, Leonora uses her beauty to her advantage. She does not allow men to manipulate her for their own selfish ends. Instead, she plays a kind of power game in which she manipulates them (1980c:16,34-35,47). Pym uses Leonora to experiment with reversing the usual power dispensation between men and women, where men manipulate and control women. In the final analysis, Pym still portrays Leonora as being controlled by the larger patriarchal system which makes men and women focus on power struggles between themselves, rather than on the patriarchal society which engenders such power struggles.

Pearson and Pope argue that '[m]any literary works show how women use stereotypically feminine behaviour as a survival tactic' (1981:50). This argument is relevant to Pym's portrayal of her earlier 'Excellent Women'. I argue, with regard to the later 'Formidable Women', that Pym's women characters use stereotypically male behaviour as a survival tactic. Marcia in *Quartet in Autumn* is a 'Formidable Woman'. She does not care what patriarchal society thinks about her appearance or behaviour (Pym, 1980b:120-121). Similarly, Letty acts as an individual when she jettisons aspects of her life that do not please her. This happens with her library research, her friendship with Marjorie, and the home she lives in (Pym, 1980b:175-176). Even independence does not make Letty, Marcia or Leonora happy. I believe that the unhappiness of Pym's later protagonists gives them

their force as victims and critics of their society.

Pym's achievements lie in representing her women characters in two such varying roles as that of the 'Excellent Woman' (discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation), and the 'Formidable Woman', as examined in this chapter. Wilkinson Whitney argues that:

No doubt the world has always known terrifying, formidable, and excellent women, and no doubt it will always know them. But in only one time and place did these women simultaneously appear in huge numbers, numbers that dramatically affected relations between sexes. Barbara Pym knew what it was like to live in that time and place.

(1989:82)

In the presentation of her women characters, Pym gives an authentic account of the roles which women assumed in Britain from approximately 1945 to 1970 and the deteriorating quality of their lives under the patriarchal system.

Another factor to be discussed in this chapter is spinsterhood. Jacobs argues that the spinster heroine serves an ameliorative function in Pym's novels, in that she is indispensable as a constructive voice of reason. In fact, she is a model of survival, who diligently cultivates her garden in a chaotic world (1988:207). Veach Sadler argues, in a similar manner, that the role of spinster allows Pym's heroines greater control over their own and other people's lives: '[c]learly, some of Pym's spinsters not only willfully choose their spinsterhood but use it deliberately to set their lives and the lives of others as they wish them to be' (1985:143). These arguments may be usefully applied to Pym's earlier novels.

I contend that neither Jacobs's nor Veach Sadler's views are valid in relation to Pym's later novels. Pym's later central protagonists possess a propensity to highlight chaos and

rebellion, rather than order or rational decision-making. I feel that this is because, as Burke comments:

The 1970s were transitional years for Pym, where a shifting economy, changing social fabric, and changing national character prevailed in England, making the task of defining the self and adapting to the world more difficult to achieve.

(Burke, 1989:264).

The rational approach of Pym's earlier women characters contrasts with her later heroines. The earlier women characters were young enough and benevolent enough to qualify for the pragmatic role of 'Excellent Woman'. Ezell provides a sound socio-historical analysis of Pym's novels. Her feminist interpretation focuses on the spinster figure in Pym's fiction. She argues that, '[Excellent Women] were the women described as "destined" not to marry, women whose "heart[s] overflow with all benevolent emotions".... these were the natural spinsters for whom society had natural roles' (1984:452). I find Ezell's argument relevant to early heroines such as Belinda Bede in *Some Tame Gazelle* and Mildred Lathbury in *Excellent Women*. These heroines approach the role of spinster in a rational way, because they feel that it is a useful and acceptable role (Pym, 1989:12-13;1978:7-21). Their patriarchal society views it as a 'natural role' for women, since the onset of the Second World War made society realize that women could be useful in other capacities than that of wife and mother: '... service and support roles were the most "appropriate" employments for such women' (Ezell, 1984:453).

At the onset of the 1960s and 1970s, spinsterhood was redefined in a negative way by a society which had forgotten the utility of spinsters during the Second World War (Wilson, 1980:94). I contend that Wilson's point is especially applicable to Pym's later heroines, who are old women in the 1970s, but were middle-aged in the 1950s (Pym, 1980b:24-25).

The characters in Pym's earlier novels typify women in early middle age, in the relatively stable environment of the 1950s in Britain, who feel positive about the role of spinster.

Although Pym herself adjusted to the 'occupation' of spinsterhood, and steeled herself against society's negative portrayal of unmarried women (Jacobs, 1988:209), Marcia, Letty and Leonora, because of their contexts, view this 'occupation' negatively (Pym, 1980b:10–13,25;1980c:19). Wilkinson Whitney attests to the negative perceptions of society: '[i]n spite of the fact that spinsters make up a good percentage of the community, the single woman is still viewed as an anomaly' (1989:73). I agree with Wilkinson Whitney's argument, but I think that the ostracism is even more deep-rooted than simply defining spinsters as different from other people. Ezell argues that 'Pym's satiric approach to middle-class English social rituals makes her a penetrating commentator on a specific issue ... "What shall we do with our Old Maids"' (1984:450). Ezell's argument incisively reveals the latent hostility which the patriarchal system in the 1960s and 1970s manifests towards spinsters, giving a more far-reaching analysis than Wilkinson Whitney's comments.

Leonora's attitude to being a spinster in *The Sweet Dove Died* is strikingly different from Pym's own. Pym enjoyed the freedom which this role gave her (Pym, 1984:67–68). Leonora reveals negative feelings about spinsterhood because she is continually searching for a perfect relationship. Initially, she thinks that she has achieved such a relationship with James, but finds that she is mistaken (Pym, 1980c:42–43,182). But she would rather remain a spinster than marry Humphrey Boyce. This is because he, as an older man, would remind her of her encroaching old age, and this would make her feel even more vulnerable than she does as a spinster. Pym does not express criticism of Leonora's position. She portrays Leonora with pathos (Pym, 1980c:63,182), as the devalued product of a hostile society: '... for a woman to be living alone was not only the path to loneliness,

bitterness and frumpishness, but was likely to be the lot of women who were selfish and egocentric' (Wilson, 1980:94). Wilson's argument perfectly describes Leonora's predicament. Leonora's society expects her to be selfish and egocentric, and so she develops the very qualities which her society hates as an old spinster.

Most of Leonora's insecurities arise from the fact that she is an ageing spinster and feels inadequate in this role (Pym, 1980c:63). Thus she places great emphasis on her beauty and attractiveness to men, in a similar way to Prudence in *Jane and Prudence*. Friedan believes that women (especially old women) should express their rebellion towards patriarchy in a vocal and expressive manner, by entering the political arena (1994:48). Friedan's description of an ageing woman is applicable to Letty, Marcia and Leonora:

Her life was culminating in a stiff, cold environment that had no knowledge or respect regarding who she had been, and, moreover, had no time to care. She was disconnected from her past. Her future had been presumed to be non-existent and her present was relegated to a limbo.... by a culture ... profiting usuriously from the infirmity of its elders.

(1994:492)

Friedan's argument throws light on the alienation and isolation which Letty, Marcia and Leonora experience. Her diagnosis of the situation of the ageing spinster resonates with Pym's perception that society is to blame for the condition of old people (Pym, 1980b:20-21). Friedan suggests that older people may 'arm' themselves by '[dealing] with the political arena as critical players, not just objects' (1994:48). Tragically, Letty and Marcia fail to arm themselves in this way. They remain passive objects in the political arena of the day (Pym, 1980b:142-144). By contrast, Leonora is a critical player in her society (Pym, 1980c:133). She escapes being an object or pawn. However, the manner in which she takes control of her environment is negative. Friedan argues, in her book

entitled *The Fountain of Age*, that critical players should draw empowerment from the 'fountain of age' (1994:614). Friedan describes the 'fountain of age' in the following way:

The adventure continues and will continue as long as the energy flows, and as one continues being involved in the changing interests of the community, the energy flows from new sources Without change, the whole organism dies.

(1994:614)

Leonora achieves a mirage of happiness, and a dried-up well of power (Pym, 1980c: 182–188). Letty suffers from a lack of energy flow in all aspects of her life. She has an inferiority complex because she is still a spinster. She views it as a personal inadequacy (Pym, 1980b:47):

Like most girls of her generation and upbringing she had expected to marry, and when the war came there were great opportunities for girls to get a man or form an attachment, even with a married man, but Marjorie had been the one to marry, leaving Letty in her usual position of trailing behind her friend.

(Pym, 1980b:25).

Letty is presented as a woman who has been indoctrinated by the ideology which operates in her society. This ideology impresses upon her the idea that women are not whole beings if they do not marry. Patriarchal ideology is so powerful that while it first entered Letty's unconscious in the years of the Second World War, it continues to influence her behaviour patterns in the 1970s. Throughout her life Letty remains 'in her usual position of trailing behind her friend' (Pym, 1980b:25). Letty is the product of a society which promotes socialization through the internalization of patriarchal values, in order to manipulate women into assuming traditional roles.

Marcia and Letty are presented by Pym as spinsters who have rejected their sisterhood in favour of isolation (Pym, 1980b:11–12). Bywaters argues that, like Austen, 'Pym centres her fiction on the dynamics of the sister relationship which shaped her life and her art' (1989:23). I agree with this argument because it applies to Pym's early and later novels. In the early novel, *Some Tame Gazelle*, the spinster sisters are inseparable (Pym, 1978:251). They support each other in the role of spinster. In *A Glass of Blessings*, the fictional sisters Wilmet and Mary form a strong bond which unites them against patriarchal ideology (Pym, 1991:205–206). In the later *Quartet in Autumn*, however, there is no sisterly bond between Letty and Marcia. With no support from each other, they struggle to find a purpose in the role of spinster.

Leonora's textual sister is Marjorie. In my reading, a 'textual sister' is a female protagonist who forms a sisterly association with another female protagonist in the same novel. There is a bond of suffering between the two protagonists which draws them closer together, even though one protagonist may try to ignore this bond. Both Leonora and Marjorie are spinsters. Only Marjorie realizes the value of sisterly support between old women who face a hostile patriarchal society. Leonora ignores the fact that Marjorie is her 'sister' (Pym, 1980c:16–17,182–183). She isolates herself from a support system. She becomes what patriarchal society has said all along that spinsters are: 'selfish and egocentric' (Wilson, 1980:94).

The central protagonists in these novels, Letty, Marcia and Leonora, view the spinster role negatively. This is because they are ageing women in a patriarchal society which believes that single women are only valuable if they are young and beautiful. Pym portrays Letty, Marcia and Leonora as lacking the skills to cope with their ageing, particularly in the hostile welfare society in which they live, which lacks support structures. They react in ways which are typical of women in their position. All three attempt to combat the onset

of old age. Letty tries to dress attractively and Marcia colours her hair (Pym, 1980b:5,65). Similarly, Leonora hides all mirrors which show her reflection in an unflattering way (Pym, 1980c: 79,133).

In conclusion, I have demonstrated how Pym abandons the role of 'Excellent Woman' for her central protagonists in *Quartet in Autumn* and *The Sweet Dove Died*. She adopts a wider range of roles, more in keeping with the older and more complex women whom she is striving to portray. Pym's presentation of these women gives valuable insights into the way older women were treated by British patriarchal society in the 1970s.

In the first instance, Pym depicts her later central protagonists as 'Formidable Women'. This allows her to present them in stereotypically male roles, rather than traditional female roles, such as that of 'Excellent Woman'. I define stereotypically male behaviour as the creation of relationships where the person concerned is socialized to believe that he or she is superior to those who assume female gender roles. This person's behaviour is self-centred and involves an awareness of his or her position in society. Women, as well as men, are susceptible to power-politics. They may attempt to obtain power and status by dominating other people, and being aggressive.

Pym's use of the 'Formidable Woman' figure allows her to break new ground and show how women are still discriminated against, even when they assume stereotypically male roles. Pym shows how the role of 'Formidable Woman' involves a struggle for power and status amongst women. Both men and women are controlled by the patriarchal system because of their struggle for status. The 'Formidable Woman' lacks social spirituality, and fails to consider the needs of others. On the other hand, the 'Excellent Woman' concentrates too strongly on the needs of others. This tends to be at the expense of her personal growth. Taken as a whole, Pym's fiction implies that women need a degree of balance between

altruism and enlightened self-care.

Pym also portrays her central protagonists as 'Fallen Women'. The qualities which I see as dominating the psyche of the 'Fallen Woman' are apathy towards social activities, the complete absence of social spirituality, isolation of the self, narcissism and deep-seated apathy towards crises in their society. They accept corruption and cruelty towards others as aspects of their society. Pym portrays her central protagonists in this way so as to reveal the serious shortcomings of patriarchal society (Pym, 1980b:7-11,18,152). She makes it clear that her central protagonists are products of their society. Their actions represent a typical response of women in the 1970s to their society. Pym's later novels are interesting documents of social change because they are social novels, which deal with the typical behaviour of women trapped in such societies. Pym's response to the quality of 'fallenness' manifested by her central protagonists is to adopt a complex, multivalent position in which she simultaneously understands, criticizes and condones their behaviour. This multi-faceted response allows Pym to satirize the British patriarchal society of the 1970s, and to make it the main target of her criticism. It also allows her to justify her heroines' behaviour to a certain extent, whilst revealing their faults.

Like the 'Excellent Woman', the 'Fallen Woman' represses her sexuality. There are similarities between these women's psyches and Jung's understanding of the human tendency to repress aspects of ourselves that we do not like or cannot face. Jung argues that '[l]ike all archetypes, the self has a paradoxical, antinomial character. It is male and female, old man and child, powerful and helpless, large and small' (1968:225). Letty, Marcia and Leonora are a mixture of male and female, powerful and helpless, and large and small. Leonora is at times feminine and seductive, and at other times she is cold, hard and ruthless. Definitions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are not absolute values, but, Pym suggests, are dependent on the values of society. Leonora represses her coldness and

helplessness, as she does not like these aspects of herself. Letty, Marcia and Leonora are at times 'Formidable Women'; at others they are helpless old women at the mercy of their society (Pym, 1980b:5-6,46-47,148;1980c:7-9,150). Jung views the self as a true 'complexio oppositorum' (1968:225). Pym presents the selves of her heroines in a similar way. In her earlier novels the heroines are 'Excellent Women', but have other aspects to their natures. They fantasize that they are sexually active, and that they are 'Fallen Women' who rebel openly against the patriarchal system. In her later novels, Pym explores intra-psychic contradiction, which she depicted embryonically in the earlier works.

Jung relates the paradox of the self to the effect of both the conscious mind and the unconscious mind on the whole self (1968:225). Pym shows that unconsciously the 'Excellent Woman' figure possesses aspects of a 'demon-monster', or siren, who tempts men, even while consciously, she follows the straight and narrow path of patriarchal dictates. In a similar way, the 'Fallen Woman' consciously rebels against patriarchal oppression. Unconsciously, this figure possesses aspects of the 'Excellent Woman'. Jung also suggests that:

Where there is an undervaluation of sexuality the self is symbolized as a phallus. Undervaluation can consist in an ordinary repression or in overt devaluation. In certain differentiated persons a purely biological interpretation and evaluation of sexuality can also have this effect. Any such conception overlooks the spiritual and mystical implications of the sexual instinct. These have existed from time immemorial as psychic facts, but are devalued and repressed on rationalistic and philosophical grounds. In all such cases one can expect an unconscious phallicism by way of compensation.

(1968:226).

Letty, Marcia and Leonora evaluate sexuality according to a social interpretation. Sex is women's bargaining tool to gain economic stability in marriage. It has no spiritual or mystical implications. Leonora's unconscious phallicism is symbolized by the totem pole she visits whilst sight-seeing with Humphrey Boyce. She turns away in distaste because it reveals her sexual instinct, which she prefers to forget (Pym, 1980c:35).

Pym further depicts Letty, Marcia and Leonora as ageing spinsters who battle to come to terms with both their loss of beauty and their spinsterhood. Pym reveals the demoralizing aspects of the patriarchal system, which tend to dismiss older women as worthless burdens on society. Letty, Marcia and Norman discuss various instances of people who have fallen through the net of the Welfare State (Pym, 1980b:21). Also, Pym shows how women may view their spinsterhood as the basis for being judged and labelled negatively by patriarchy. Pym reinforces this by allowing the main protagonists' negative view of this aspect of themselves to coincide with society's negative view of their spinsterhood. Letty associates her plight with that of an old woman' [whom] she had seen slumped on the seat on the Underground platform that morning' (1980b:24).

I have explored ways in which, in her later novels, Pym grapples with finding an ideal role for her central protagonists. I believe that the restlessness which has an influence on her later protagonists mirrors her own restlessness at the ageing process, and her adaptation to the changed society of the late sixties, extending into the seventies.

Pym's many-faceted portrayal of possible roles for women is complex. Pym wishes to reveal the complexity of women's psyches and show that they cannot be placed in stereotypical roles by the patriarchal system. Laclau and Mouffe, in their study which furthers 'radical democratic politics', argue that in a revolutionary process:

[W]hat is at stake is not merely the complexity and diversity inherent in a dispersion of struggles ...but also the constitution of the *unity* of the revolutionary subject on the basis of this complexity and diversity.

(1985:10)

Pym achieves unity between her later heroines paradoxically because of their differences. Each heroine is complex and psychologically at variance with herself, and pursues her struggle against patriarchy differently, but her individual approach to patriarchy unites her with the other heroines in a common struggle. Laclau and Mouffe use the term 'subject-positions', and go on to describe these as sites of struggle. They define 'subject-positions' as 'the points of antagonism and the forms of struggle' (1985:11). These 'subject-positions' are similar to the points where Pym's heroines adopt complex roles. The complex roles which they assume are forms of struggle.

Laclau and Mouffe argue further that the Left should '[expand] the chains of equivalents between the different struggles against oppression' (1985:176). Similarly, Pym's heroines adopt complex roles which initially differ vastly from each other. Their struggles also seem different. As the novels progress, Pym expands 'the chains of equivalents between the different struggles' and shows that there are points of similarity between them. All the heroines are lonely old spinsters who are fighting patriarchal oppression in different ways. Pym provides the pre-conditions for a feminist transformation of society, in that she allows for 'the multiplication of political spaces and the preventing of the concentration of power in one point' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:178). This she achieves through the complex presentation of her heroines. This feminist transformation does not occur in these novels, because the heroines do not perceive the unity between their struggles, and remain isolated old women. The tragic dimension of the novels consists in that patriarchy succeeds in

preventing their differences from becoming 'an absolute system of differences' (1985:182).

The origins of Pym's complex portrayal of women lie partly in her own life. She assumed various roles at different times. She was young 'Sandra' or 'vamp' at university, a spinster figure when Henry Harvey married, an 'Excellent Woman' during the war years, a 'Formidable Woman' when she became sub-editor of the Anthropological society, a 'Fallen Woman' during the wilderness years and finally an old sick woman (Pym, 1984: 17-18, 26, 67, 96, 180, 215-237, 323-334). Pym acknowledges as a final statement, through the presentation of her main protagonists, the indefinability of life - its brevity and brutality, and the presence of joy which constitutes a paradox.

In a letter to Robert Liddell in Helsingfors in early 1938, Pym defines the two extreme types of roles which her women characters might assume:

'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'.

(Pym, 1984:80).

In this passage Pym elucidates the patriarchal view of the main roles for women as being either marriage or death, and her juxtaposition creates an equivalence between the two states. This equation offers a number of possibilities to the reader. Pym may be suggesting that neither state will banish gender inequalities, because a loss of self occurs when women die or marry: women submit to men in marriage, and to the grim reaper when they die. There is a connection, metaphorically, between men and the figure of death. 'Death' may be a woman's husband beyond the grave. I contend that Pym seems to support death as a more positive alternative for her heroines in the later novels, since the

grim reaper may be viewed ambivalently. This figure may be seen as a woman, as Wordsworth suggests: 'Yon solitary Highland Lass!/Reaping and singing by herself' (Kermode and Hollander, 1973:184). Pym may be alluding to the possibility that women reign supreme in the next world. Nevertheless, she refutes this equivalence between marriage and death in most of her novels by highlighting the spinster figure. Possibly, by the time of writing her later novels, Pym had revised this attempt to categorize her own and other women's lives, and proceeded to depict them in their complexity. Pym uses the complex roles which women assume as sites for her feminist struggle. She shows that in a period of instability, such as the 1970s in Britain, women's consciousness becomes active and practical: 'each mobilization represents the revolutionary process as a whole' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:11). Pym demonstrates that there are 'chains of equivalents' between the different struggles by women against oppression (1985:176). To attain a non-monolithic, pluralistic hegemony women must have separate struggles. She advocates that women should create as many political spaces as possible, and their power should be dispersed over a wide area. Pym's vision of feminist struggle for the future is, however, not upheld by the presentation of her heroines. Their struggle remains fragmentary, and limited by patriarchy.

Notes

1. This situation dates back to the eighteenth century in Britain. Poovey argues that 'separation between the home and workplace became the middle-class rule rather than the exception' (1984:8).
2. Burke suggests that '[l]ack of cohesion in the educational system and in the post-war society that sustained it, combined with the absence of a consistent philosophy for dealing with chaos propels characters into introspective isolation, where, from the depths of self, solutions must emerge' (1989:226).
3. See Pym (1984:124-129). In this passage she describes her unrequited love for Gordon Glover. The fact that her love was unreciprocated made her very depressed. Her good friend Honor (the ex-wife of Gordon) encouraged her to talk about Gordon, and realize that his feelings for her were less serious than her own. See also Pym (1984:46-52). Here her friend Jackie helped her to come to terms with Henry's rejection of her love.
4. I agree with Stanley's point that Pym 'traces the decline of the Anglican church and the rise of the Welfare State' (1990:7).
5. In Genesis, Eve disregards the teachings of God in favour of improving her self-image: she is tempted to eat of the tree of knowledge, and moves from an innocent to a fallen state of existence. Letty, Marcia and Leonora, as products of a corrupt society, also move away from the teachings of God, and adopt themselves as idols: narcissism and complete selfishness inform their lives. In this sense they are 'Fallen Women'. (Genesis 3:14-21, *The Good News Bible*).
6. James (1987:253-254,329,357,413-420).
7. Brontë writes at the novel's dénouement, 'It seemed as if the presence of a nature so restless, chafing, thorny as that of M. Paul absorbed all feverish and unsettling influences like a magnet, and left me none but such as were placid and harmonious' (1985:417).
8. Gilbert and Gubar argue that Austen uses 'the conventions of the gothic even as she transforms them into a subversive critique of patriarchy' (1979:135). I consider Gilbert and Gubar's remarks equally pertinent to Brontë.
9. Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex, which involves a boy's secret desire for his mother, throws light on Leonora's relationship with James (Freud, 1947:40-45). The Oedipus Complex is a psychoanalytic concept designating the sexual desire of the male child (in this case the youthful James) for a mother figure (Leonora), and the corresponding hostility toward his father substitute (Humphrey Boyce) (Small, 1977:93). James resolves the Oedipus Complex by developing homosexual tendencies, which emerge later in his relationship with Ned. As it is taboo for James to marry Leonora he directs his sexual desire toward Phoebe (as a replacement for Leonora), and then Ned, when he finds Phoebe inadequate. His homosexuality is a product of the frustration he feels at being unable to marry Leonora.

10. Nietzsche argues that 'wherever life is, there is also will to power' (1965:294). He further contends that 'all growth of power [is] pleasure, and all feeling of not being able to withstand and become master is pain' (1965:295). This contention applies to Leonora. She feels pleasure at controlling other people's destinies. She experiences pain when she fails to master Ned's or James's lives. For Nietzsche, life is 'always at the expense of other lives' (1965:296). Similarly, Leonora achieves her success at the expense of other people. Nietzsche also argues that '[life] is... a struggle for power, for something more and better' (1965:297). This struggle is evident in Leonora's rejection of Humphrey for James, who is a bigger prize. It is also evident in Ned's rejection of James, in favour of a new, more polished lover. Nietzsche also contends that 'life functions with a view to self-aggrandisement' (1965:297). I believe that this is one of Leonora's aims, and that it complements her narcissism.
11. See Nietzsche (1965:294).

CONCLUSION

My dissertation aims to counter accusations that Pym's fiction is 'slight' or 'trivial'¹ by drawing out its feminist allegiances and its strategies for subverting and criticizing patriarchy.

One of these strategies is Pym's emphasis on her heroines' home life. Pym explores this dimension frequently: an example is the depths of sisterly affection in the home in *Some Tame Gazelle*. Belinda's and Harriet's relationship functions as a form of non-sexual marriage (Pym, 1978:1–11). There are other sisterly relationships in her novels: Jane and Prudence in *Jane and Prudence* enrich their friendship in the domestic realm (Pym, 1979:7, 47, 121–122). The central protagonists come into contact with the repressed aspects of their psyches in the domestic sphere. Many of the heroines have so-called 'doubles' who represent their repressed sexuality. There is an association between Mildred and Allegra (who stands for Mildred's repressed sexuality in *Excellent Women*) (Pym, 1989:116–121), Wilmet and Prudence in *A Glass of Blessings* (Pym, 1991:249–250), Belinda and Harriet in *Some Tame Gazelle* (Pym, 1989:7, 12) and Emma and Claudia in *A Few Green Leaves* (Pym, 1980a:126–129).

Pym uses the domestic sphere as the site for her central protagonists to allude to literary works. Intertextuality connects the various women in Pym's novels in the domestic sphere. Belinda in *Some Tame Gazelle* is associated with Jane in *Jane and Prudence* through their common appreciation of the seventeenth-century love poets. These poets are invoked when the heroines are experiencing personal problems at home. Belinda thinks of their writings when she feels useless. The allusions help her to kindle her creative spark in the domestic sphere (Pym, 1978:17). Jane also uses allusions to remind herself of her creative ability in the private sphere (Pym, 1979:48, 83, 115–117).

Since women are usually relegated to the home, Pym reverses the conventional ideology that sees domestic life as women's preserve and therefore not worth considering. She shows the central importance of the domestic realm, not only for women but also for men. Pym highlights the shortcomings of patriarchal institutions in the public sphere, such as anthropological institutions, the Anglican Church, government offices and research institutes (Pym, 1978:1–21; 1979:30–40; 1993:1–17). Nothing interesting or significant takes place in these institutions. Men and women vent their anger on one another due to boredom and because they are caged in, like animals in a zoo. This behaviour is found in Pym's presentation of Letty, Marcia, Norman and Edwin in *Quartet in Autumn* (Pym, 1980b:8–9, 11–12, 88–89). In *Jane and Prudence*, Prudence's relationship with the other people in her office is formal, yet in her pretty little flat she is totally at ease (Pym, 1979:35–39). Pym uses mock-heroism to undermine men's feats in the public sphere, such as the Archdeacon giving his sermon in *Some Tame Gazelle* and Professor Mainwaring's anthropological bumbblings in *Less Than Angels* (Pym, 1993:8–17).

By contrast, domestic life is filled with interesting problems, significant happenings and comedy in Pym's novels. Pym's heroines experience empowerment through the epiphany: events which seem to allude to a negative outcome, such as the caterpillar in Miss Prior's food in *Some Tame Gazelle*, turn out better than expected (Pym, 1978:50–53). Similarly, Belinda is forgiven for her transgression and is grateful for the simple joys of domestic life. Also, Catherine in *Less than Angels* composes her short stories in the domestic sphere (Pym, 1993: 25–26). It is a place of creativity as opposed to the stagnation in the public sphere.

Men, such as the Archdeacon in *Some Tame Gazelle*, also feel more at ease in the domestic sphere (Pym, 1978:29–30, 63–65). By contrast, he behaves foolishly and egotistically in the Church. John Challow, in *An Unsuitable Attachment*, who is out of place in the library

(public sphere), is at ease in his own home (Pym, 1986a:46–49, 64–68, 89–118). The public sphere enhances John's worst attributes, such as his self-pity. Pym shows that the public sphere makes men behave in a discriminatory and misogynistic fashion, as they feel threatened by women. Men such as Arthur Grampian, Henry Hoccleve, Mervyn Cantrell, Mark and Digby, Graham Pettifer and Alan Grimstone behave in this way (Pym, 1979:36–40; 1978:8, 21; 1986a:26–27; 1993:20–23; 1980a:30–34, 149; 1986b:2–13).

This type of rivalry in the public sphere is also true of Pym's women. Agatha and Belinda's rivalry in *Some Tame Gazelle* is dissipated in the private sphere (of the garden party) and reduced to the level of comedy (Pym, 1978:19–20, 22–28, 33–36). Allegra's and Mildred's rivalry in *Excellent Women* also seems less significant when Mildred returns home after a confrontation in the public sphere (Pym, 1989:122–123). Pym's conclusion is that the public sphere causes rivalry between the sexes and among women. The domestic sphere is a place where men and women can recover their sanity because patriarchy drives people to commit indiscretions, and even, in Marcia's case, into madness (Pym, 1980b:126–129).

Some critics target Pym's timid approach to patriarchy. They suggest that this means she is not a feminist writer.² By contrast, I argue that Pym, as a middle-class British woman who was raised with an Edwardian value system, could not have taken a more direct approach to patriarchy. In the first place, she was implicated in middle-class ideology herself. Pym chose subversive methods because she was a member of the upper middle-class in Britain.³ Her childhood was influenced by stalwart values from the Edwardian period. Stability, an idyllic childhood, the Anglican Church and Oxford university were familiar features of her life. Women of her class were expected to be demure and 'feminine' (not rebellious or outspoken) in the eyes of patriarchal society, if they were to make some progress in their society. On the surface, this entailed submitting

to patriarchy. Pym may have felt unable to reveal her rebellion towards patriarchy in a confrontational manner. In consequence, she developed a subtle and complex form of rebellion towards patriarchy, as expressed in her novels.

Pym's socialization through middle-class ideology influences the way she depicts her heroines. They read poetry and good novels. Wilmet in *A Glass of Blessings* reads Walter de la Mare and Virginia Woolf (Pym, 1991: 77–78, 83). Ianthe in *An Unsuitable Attachment* reads Tennyson (Pym, 1986a:88–89). The heroines always act in a polite and cultured manner in public (Pym, 1989:120). They express their anger in a non-violent and ironic manner (1989:120–127).

In the second place, Pym's subtle and discursive approach to undermining gender ideology is, in some respects, more effective than any more overt kind of political activism, such as the Suffragettes engaged in (*The World Book Encyclopaedia*, 1992:389–390). One of the high points of Pym's novels is her exploration of the many possible roles which women may assume, given the limitations of their contexts. The assumption of various roles by the heroines is connected to the social climate which Pym writes about. Pym presents her heroines in a heterogeneous way. She also uses a varied discourse to emphasize the instability in women's lives after the Second World War in Britain. Pym's tone adds depth to her art, as does her representation of heroines who narrate in both the first and third person. This vacillation between surface and depth in her texts, as well as between ironic versus naive narrator positions, suggests that one cannot interpret Pym's novels in a simplistic or superficial way.

Pym's strategies have changed from the use of comedy in the early novels to the use of tragedy and satire in the later novels. I have shown how this development from comedy to satire and tragedy occurs in Pym's work.

One of Pym's strategies for undermining gender ideology is her ambivalent depiction of the 'Angel in the House'.⁴ Her attitude towards this figure is partly approving and partly critical. She is critical of this figure because of its association with patriarchy. In many ways it is a product of patriarchy and has contributed to women's second-class status in the domestic sphere. Pym presents the similarities between the 'Angel in the House' and the 'Excellent Woman' figure as the following: both are patriarchal constructs, and as such are viewed critically. Pym traces the rise of the 'Excellent Woman' figure as a product of patriarchy and a successor to the 'Angel in the House'. Her attitude to this figure is partly approving: she traces this figure's severance from the yoke of patriarchy, its role as 'a voice of feminism', and the final demise of this figure in her later novels of the 1970s.

I have demonstrated how Pym's fiction makes the most of her available options. A reading of Pym in the light of her social context would perceive that she had limited options for attacking patriarchy and would find her work, far from being 'trivial', to be a subtle and complex attack on gender/power relations.

Notes

1. Ackroyd (1984:861) contends that Pym is a superficial writer who allows the role of frustrated spinster, which she assumed, to influence her writing.
2. See Kakutani, who argues that Pym's novels 'hardly indicate any feminist ideology on [her] part. She is, really, concerned with rather more old-fashioned matters' (1983: 22); Glendinning, who believes that Pym's art and originality lie in 'the experience of not having' (1978:8); and Cotsell, who contends that Pym 'confines her fictional world to English social comedy' (1989:19).
3. See Pym (1984:1-33).
4. See Woolf (1942:152-153).

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- Pym, Barbara. 1978. *Some Tame Gazelle*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Pym, Barbara. 1979. *Jane and Prudence*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Pym, Barbara. 1980a. *A Few Green Leaves*. London: Macmillan.
- Pym, Barbara. 1980b. *Quartet in Autumn*. London: Grafton.
- Pym, Barbara. 1980c. *The Sweet Dove Died*. London: Grafton.
- Pym, Barbara. 1984. *A Very Private Eye: An Autobiography in Letters and Diaries*. London: Macmillan.
- Pym, Barbara. 1985. *Crampton Hodnet*. London: Macmillan.
- Pym, Barbara. 1986a. *An Unsuitable Attachment*. London: Macmillan.
- Pym, Barbara. 1986b. *An Academic Question*. London: Macmillan.
- Pym, Barbara. 1989. *Excellent Women*. London: Pan Books.
- Pym, Barbara. 1990. *Civil to Strangers and Other Writings*. London: Grafton.
- Pym, Barbara. 1991. *A Glass of Blessings*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Pym, Barbara. 1992. *No Fond Return of Love*. London: Plume.
- Pym, Barbara. 1993. *Less Than Angels*. London: Pan Books.

Secondary Sources

- Abrams, M.H. 1957. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Rinehart and Winston Inc.
- Ackley, K.A. 1989. *The Novels of Barbara Pym*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc.
- Ackroyd, P. 1984. 'Manufacturing Miss Pym'. *The Times Literary Supplement*, (3 August), 861.
- Aristotle, 1953. Trans. Twining, T. *Poetics and Rhetoric*. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd.
- Austen, J. 1947. *Emma*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Avery, C.B. (ed.) 1972. *The New Century Handbook of Greek Mythology and Legend*. New York: Meredith Corporation.

- Baddeley, A. 1982. *Your Memory: A User's Guide*. Johannesburg: Flower Press.
- Bakhtin, M.M. 1968. Trans. Iswolsky, H. *Rabelais and His World*. N.L.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Barr, M.S. 1992. *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Benet, D. 1986. *Something to Love: Barbara Pym's Novels*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press.
- Bowman, B. 1988. 'Barbara Pym's Subversive Subtext: Private Irony and Shared Detachment'. In Rossen J. (ed.), *Independent Women*. New York: St. Martins, 92-108.
- Bradham, M.C. 1987. 'Barbara Pym's Women'. *World Literature Today*, 61:1 (Winter), 31-37.
- Brontë, C. 1953. *Jane Eyre*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Inc.
- Brontë, C. 1985. *Villette*. London: Penguin Books.
- Bruno, F.J. (ed.) 1986. *Dictionary of Key Words in Psychology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Burke, K.M. 1989. *The Oxford Novel as Bildungsroman: An Analysis of the Works of Six Writers*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. N.L.: University of Maryland College Park.
- Burkhart, C. 1983 'Barbara Pym and the Africans'. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 29:1 (Spring), 45-53.
- Bywaters, B.L. 1989. 'Re-Reading Jane': *Jane Austen's Legacy to Twentieth Century Women Writers*. Unpublished Ph.D thesis. N.L.: Bowling Green State University.
- Cecil, D. and Larkin, P. 1977. 'Reputations Revisited'. *The Times Literary Supplement*, (21 January), 66-8.
- Chaucer, G. 1986. 'The Nun's Priest's Tale'. In Robinson F. (ed.), *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 199-206.
- Clark, W.G. and Wright W.A. (eds) 1989. *The Unabridged William Shakespeare*. Philadelphia: Running Press.
- Coghill, N. and Tolkien, C. (eds) 1959. *Chaucer: The Nun's Priest's Tale*. London: Nelson.
- Cotsell, M. 1989. *Modern Novelists*. London: Macmillan.
- Dickens, C. 1966. *David Copperfield*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

- Dickens, C. 1985a. *Dombey and Son*. London: Penguin Books.
- Dickens, C. 1985b. *Little Dorrit*. London: Penguin Books.
- Dickens, C. 1986. *Our Mutual Friend*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Eliot, G. 1988. *Middlemarch*. London: Penguin Books.
- Ezell, M. 1984. 'What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?'. *International Journal of Women's Studies*, 7:5 (November–December), 450–465.
- Fenton, J. 1984. 'The Passionate Spinster Who found Humour'. *The Times*, (19 July), 10.
- Fenton, J. 1985. 'A Team of Those Old Oxford Blues'. *The Times*, (20 June), 11.
- Firestone, S. 1970. *The Dialectic of Sex*. New York: Morrow.
- Forster, E.M. 1967. *A Passage to India*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Foucault, M. 1977. Trans. Sheridan, A. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. London: Penguin Books.
- Freud, S. 1947. Trans. Strachey, J. *The Ego and the Id*. London: The Hogarth Press.
- Friedan, B. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Friedan, B. 1994. *The Fountain of Age*. London: Vintage.
- Gilbert, S. and Gubar, S. 1979. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Glendinning, V. 1978. 'The Best High Comedy'. *New York Times Book Review*, (24 December), 8.
- Griffin, B. 1992. 'Private Space and Self-Definition in Barbara Pym's Excellent Women'. *Essays in Literature*, 19, (Spring 1992), 132–43.
- Hall, C. 1992. *White, Male and Middle Class*. New York: Polity Press.
- Hardy, T. 1985. *Jude the Obscure*. London: Penguin Books.
- Holt, H. 1990. *A Lot To Ask: A Life of Barbara Pym*. London: Macmillan.
- Homer, 1946. Trans. Rieu, E.V. *The Odyssey*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Jacobs, B.R. 1988. *Elements of Satire in the Novels of Barabara Pym*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. N.L.: Fordham University.

- James, H. 1987. *The Portrait of a Lady*. London: Marshall Cavendish Ltd.
- Johnstone, R. 1982. *The Will to Believe: Novelists of the Nineteen-thirties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Joyce, J. 1944. *Stephen Hero*. New York: New Directions.
- Jung, C.G. 1968. Trans. Hull, R.F.C. *AION: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Kakutani, M. 1983. 'Review of *Some Tame Gazelle*'. *New York Times*, (5 August), 22.
- Kaufman, A. 1986. 'The Short Fiction of Barbara Pym'. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 32 (Spring), 50-77.
- Keener, F. 1985. 'Barbara Pym Herself and Jane Austen'. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 31:1 (Spring), 89-110.
- Kermode, F. and Hollander, J. (eds) 1973. *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature: Volume Two*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Klein, V. 1946. *The Feminine Character: History of an Ideology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.
- Le Guin, U. 1993. *Earthsea Revisioned*. Cambridge: Children's Literature.
- Liddell, R. 1989. *A Mind at Ease: Barbara Pym and her Novels*. London: Peter Owen Publishers.
- Macbeth, G. (ed.) 1987. *Victorian Verse*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- McDonald, M.A. 1991. *Alone Together: Gender and Alienation*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan.
- Miles, R. 1988. *The Female Form: Women Writers and the Conquest of the Novel*. New York: Routledge and Kegan.
- Millett, K. 1969. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Moi, T. 1985. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Nietzsche, F. 1965. 'The Will to Power'. In Jaspers K., *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of his Philosophical Activity*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 294-297.
- Pearson, C. and Pope, K. 1981. *The Female Hero: In American and British Literature*. New York: R.R. Bowker Company.
- Poovey, M. 1984. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Jane Austen*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

- Rossen, J. 1986. *The World of Barbara Pym*. London: Macmillan.
- Rubenstein, J. 1990. 'Comedy and Consolation in the Novels of Barbara Pym'. *Renascence*, 42 (Spring), 173–83.
- Salwak, D. (ed.) 1987. *The Life and Work of Barbara Pym*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Showalter, E. (ed.) 1989. *Speaking of Gender*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.
- Sinfield, A. (ed.) 1983. *The Context of English Literature: Society and Literature – 1945–1970*. London: Methuen.
- Small, A. (ed.) 1977. *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Psychology and Psychiatry*. New York: Franklin Watts.
- Sochen, J. (ed.) 1991. *Women's Comic Visions*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Stanley, I.A.B. 1990. *The Anglican Clergy in the Novels of Barabara Pym*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. N.L.: University of Tennessee.
- The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1988. Vol. 12. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc.
- Van Aswegen, E. S. 1987. *Excellent Women: The Novels of Barbara Pym and Anita Brookner*. Unpublished D. Litt thesis. Potchefstroom: University of Potchefstroom.
- Veach Sadler, L. 1985. 'Spinsters, Non-Spinsters and Men in the World of Barbara Pym.' *Critique*, 26 (Spring), 141–54.
- Wehr, D.S. 1987. *Jung and Feminism: Liberating Archetypes*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Wilkinson Whitney, C. 1989. 'Women Are so Terrifying These Days: Fear Between the Sexes in the World of Barbara Pym'. *Essays in Literature*, 16:1 (Winter), 71–84.
- Williams, R. 1977. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, E. 1980. *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain–1945–1968*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Woody, R.H. and Woody, J.D. 1973. *Sexual, Marital and Familial Relations*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas.
- Woolf, V. 1942. *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Woolf, V. 1955. *To the Lighthouse*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Woolf, V. 1976. 'Moments of Being': *Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- World Book Inc. 1992. *The World Book Encyclopaedia*. Vol. 18, London: World Book Inc.

Yaeger, P. 1988. *Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing*.
New York: Columbia University Press.